

# Press Release

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## Council of Europe: Reports on racism in Cyprus, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg and the Russian Federation

Strasbourg, 16.05.2006 – The Council of Europe's expert body on combating racism, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), today released five new reports examining racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance in Cyprus, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg and the Russian Federation. ECRI recognises that positive developments have occurred in all five of these Council of Europe member countries. At the same time, however, the reports detail continuing grounds for concern for the Commission:

In **Cyprus**, the legal and institutional framework against racial discrimination has been considerably strengthened. However, the continuing lack of a comprehensive immigration and integration policy has resulted in a particular vulnerability of immigrants to human rights violations, exploitation and discrimination. New opportunities for actively promoting dialogue and reconciliation between the members of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities still remain to be seized.

**Denmark** adopted an Act on Ethnic Equal Treatment and created a Complaints Committee for Ethnic Equal Treatment, whose mandate is to examine complaints of discrimination in all areas, including employment. However, the Nationality Act, the Integration Act and the Aliens' Act have been further modified in a manner which disproportionately restricts the ability of members of minority groups to acquire Danish citizenship, to benefit from spousal and family reunification and to have access to social protection on par with the rest of society.

In **Italy**, the authorities have established a specialised body to combat racial discrimination, which assists victims and raise awareness of this phenomenon among the general public. However, immigration legislation has made the situation of many non-EU citizens more precarious, and its implementation, notably in respect of immigrants without legal status, has resulted in the exposure of these persons to a higher risk of human rights violations.

**Luxembourg** has adopted a new law easing the requirements for foreigners' participation in local elections. However, housing conditions for asylum seekers and refugees still leave much to be desired, and no policy has been introduced to integrate communities from an immigrant background in matters such as employment and housing.

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.

In the **Russian Federation**, the criminal law provisions aimed at combating racism, racial discrimination and extremism have been reinforced and there have been some prosecutions of hate speech. However, there needs to be greater urgency at both local and national level in tackling the problem. The existing provisions are not adequately implemented particularly because the racist motive of an offence is not taken sufficiently into account. Visible minorities and members of minority religious groups are the main targets of racially motivated attacks.

These new reports form part of a third monitoring cycle of Council of Europe member states' laws, policies and practices aimed at combating racism. ECRI's country-specific reports are available in English, French and the national language of the country concerned at <http://www.coe.int/ecri>. They cover all member states on an equal footing, from the perspective of protecting human rights. They examine whether ECRI's main recommendations from previous reports have been followed and, if so, to what degree of success and effectiveness.