

Press Release

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Council of Europe: Reports on racism in Armenia, Georgia, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia

Strasbourg, 13.02.2007 – 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 Armenia, Georgia, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia. 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 **Armenia**, the authorities have amended the Constitution to provide for equality before the law for everyone under Armenian jurisdiction. But no comprehensive body of civil and administrative anti-discrimination provisions has been passed. The Yezidi minority continues to face problems with regard to land, water and grazing issues and some members of this community have still not acquired property titles for their land.

In **Georgia**, new criminal law provisions have been introduced to prohibit racial discrimination and incitement to racial hatred. But members of non-traditional religious minorities can still be exposed to physical attacks on them or their property. A number of shortcomings must be remedied in asylum law and practice. The authorities are insufficiently aware of the situation of some minority groups such as Roma and migrants, and do not monitor it sufficiently.

In **Iceland**, the State has assumed increasing responsibility and ownership in the field of meeting asylum seekers' reception needs. But the legal framework to combat racism and racial discrimination still remains to be strengthened and better implemented. The position of immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence continues to be a cause for concern to ECRI.

In **Portugal**, the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities has been restructured and strengthened (this institution actively works to facilitate the integration of immigrants and to combat racism and racial discrimination). But Roma/Gypsy communities still suffer from social exclusion. Access to education, to public services and to housing remains problematic for these communities.

In **Slovenia**, the legal framework against racial discrimination has been strengthened through the adoption of primary antidiscrimination legislation covering different areas of life. But the situation of those persons who were unlawfully erased from the register of permanent residents in February 1992 has not yet been solved. In the absence of an overall strategy to simultaneously address all areas where Roma experience disadvantage and discrimination, the members of this group are still in need of special support in order to enjoy equal opportunities with the rest of the Slovenian population.

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.

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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.