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Council of Europe's Anti-Racism Commission publishes new report on Armenia

Strasbourg, 08.02.2011 – The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) today published a new report on Armenia. ECRI's Chair, Nils Muiznieks, said that, while there have been improvements, there are still some concerns in the areas, for example, of religious freedom and refugees' social rights.

There is no hostility vis-à-vis ethnic minorities and non-nationals. By the same token, there is little or no evidence of anti-Muslim feeling. The authorities refrain from taking sides in disputes concerning identity, notably the one between Yezidis and Kurds. Individuals wishing to complain of discrimination can turn to the Human Rights Defender. Finally, there is new legislation on asylum and those who used to enjoy temporary protection have now been recognised as refugees.

However, there are obvious dangers of intolerance in the field of religious freedom. The involvement of the National Security Service in this area is difficult to justify. The alternative service is too long. Plans to make the law on freedom of conscience and religious organisations more restrictive should be abandoned. The anti-discrimination legislation needs strengthening and the budget of the Human Rights Defender's Office is insufficient. There should be an independent mechanism for dealing with complaints against the police.

Ethnic minorities are given support to preserve their language, culture and heritage. However, the system for the distribution of grants does not reflect their real needs. Additional measures should be taken to provide them with better education opportunities. The UNHCR bears most of the brunt of caring for refugees and asylum-seekers, who should be better informed about their rights. Although progress has been made to provide them with proper accommodation, some families still live in inadequate conditions.

In its report, ECRI makes a number of recommendations, among which the following three will be revisited in two years' time:

- Reduce the length of alternative service by six months;
- Change the system for the distribution of grants to ethnic minorities;
- Re-house all refugee families living in non-renovated accommodation in the Nor-Nork centre.

The report, including Government observations, is available [here](#). It was prepared following ECRI's contact visit to Armenia in March 2010 [[Press Release – 30.03.2010](#)] and takes account of developments up to June 2010.

ECRI is a human rights body of the Council of Europe, composed of independent experts, which monitors problems of racism, discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, citizenship, religion and language, as well as xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance, prepares reports and issues recommendations to member States.

For more information on ECRI: www.coe.int/ecri

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