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Implementation of human rights standards remains unsatisfactory in Europe

Strasbourg, 13.04.2011 – “Progress in implementing human rights is too slow and the agreed standards are not consistently enforced. The implementation gap is wide”, stated the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg when presenting today his [annual report](#). “What I have seen and heard during my activities in 2010 has made me deeply impatient.”

The report identifies fields in which stronger political action is required. In particular, the Commissioner underlines that little improvement has been achieved in the living conditions of Roma people, not least in access to education, housing, health and employment. “We must aim at deepening Roma inclusion in society, widening their political representation and establishing broader opportunities for them to actively participate in community life.”

Another concern is the rise in xenophobic and racist tendencies. “Nationalist and extremist groups have exploited these feelings for electoral purposes and too little has been done to oppose these extremist tendencies. I have been disappointed that leading politicians have not stood up more strongly for human rights principles in public discourse.”

Too many political leaders have failed to counter Islamophobic stereotypes. They have not made clear that Muslims are an integral part of our multicultural Europe and that they have been contributing a great deal to Europe’s development over the centuries. “It is high time that political leaders publicly recognised this fact and took more resolute action against hate crimes and discrimination. If multiculturalism has failed it is because it has not been given a real chance.”

Xenophobic tendencies have also influenced policies on migration, including the reception of refugees and asylum-seekers. “More is needed to establish humane migration management. As illustrated by the current crisis in North Africa, we need a new common European policy on migration and asylum which also distributes the responsibility for reception more evenly and fairly among member states.”

As concerns media freedom, the Commissioner observes shortcomings in several European states. “Some governments take action to prevent even modest and peaceful criticism in the media. Public service broadcasting is made dependent on government guidance and frequencies for radio and television have been allocated on political criteria. Media pluralism is also threatened by monopolistic tendencies and oligarch ownership of media outlets.”

Commissioner Hammarberg is also concerned by widespread impunity in criminal cases. “Impunity denies the very scope of the rule of law that we promote. This has been the case in regard to a number of notorious assassinations of journalists and human rights defenders. In some of these cases the contract killer has been identified but not the forces behind them and the investigations have not always been sufficiently professional and well supported.”

The Commissioner further notes the increase in inequalities in Europe. “Austerity budgets tend to have a more negative impact on the most vulnerable groups of people, including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. The right to a decent job is undermined by high unemployment rates – which in turn may become a threat to social cohesion and stability in society.”

Finally, he stresses that it is crucial to pay closer attention to the situation of women. "Domestic violence, discrimination in the labour market, and poor political and managerial representations are some of the problems which prevent women from playing an equal role in our societies. This is shameful and inexcusable and has lasted for too long."

Today, the Commissioner also released his book "[Human Rights in Europe: no grounds for complacency](#) " which addresses the implementation gap regarding major human rights issues, including the situation of the Roma, counter-terrorism measures, media freedom, police behaviour, socio- economic rights, discrimination and migration.

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The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent, non-judicial institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in the 47 member states of the Organisation.

Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, took up his function on 1 April 2006