23 November 2020

**Submission of the Secretariat of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) to the thematic report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief on Anti-Muslim hatred/Islamophobia**

The work of ECRI on anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia is long-standing. Its [General Policy Recommendation (GPR) No. 5 on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims](https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-5-on-combating-intolerance-and-d/16808b5a76) (hereafter GPR No. 5) was adopted in 2000. This important instrument is structured around three pillars under which anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination are presented as a multifaceted problem of restricted religious freedom - to manifest their religion in public in particular - religious (and intersectional) discrimination and social exclusion. It offers guidance on a wide range of measures to be taken in several areas and requires member States of the Council of Europe to intervene in both the realm of general policy and the role of core institutions, including in the fields of employment, education and the media. It stresses particular importance on these core structures to encourage diversity and not to perpetuate prejudice against Muslims.

Although common ground has remained the same in certain aspects of the phenomenon of anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice, a pressing need has emerged in conceptualising new challenges, especially against the backdrop of violent attacks perpetrated by extremist Islamist groups, such as the tragic events of September 11 in 2001 and attacks perpetrated by Islamist "lone wolves” or groups over the years. The recent waves of migration from mostly Muslim-populated countries into Europe, as well as the strengthening of xenophobic, anti-immigrant right-wing populist parties and movements has also posed new challenges. These trends have led to a significant upsurge of both rhetoric and violent and non-violent acts, which have become more mainstream. Anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice are now often prevalent in society, across institutional, social, political and economic life. It has also been clear to ECRI, through the findings in its country monitoring across member States, that new forms of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims have occurred. Furthermore, whilst acts of anti-Muslim hatred in Europe have been, and continue to be criticised by governments, an unequivocal, strong and well-coordinated response with a view to combating it in a structured and sustainable way has been lacking on national and European levels.

Against this background, ECRI has decided[[1]](#footnote-1) to update its GPR No. 5 drawing on the results of its country monitoring,[[2]](#footnote-2) the main trends it described in its annual reports[[3]](#footnote-3) and good practices. When carrying out this work, ECRI intends to pay particular attention to cross-cutting issues where the intersection of religion, national or ethnic origin, gender, language and migration status can lead to further discrimination and the development of counter-narratives since they can play an effective preventive role, foster dialogue and humanise the abstract principle of equality.

The revision of GPR No. 5 is pursued by a Working Group set up by ECRI to this effect. The Working Group started its work in 2020. Consultations with stakeholders on a draft revised text are expected to take place in the second half of 2021.

1. ECRI`s [Roadmap](https://rm.coe.int/ecri-roadmap-final-version-/168097e13d) to Effective Equality adopted at its 25th anniversary conference in September 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The findings of ECRI on anti-Muslim hate crimes and various forms of discrimination against Muslims and its ensuing recommendations covering its current and last two monitoring cycles are presented as an annex to this letter. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ECRI Annual Reports are available [here](https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/annual-reports). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)