

ECRI

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
Commission européenne contre le racisme et l'intolérance

ECRI's Round Table in Latvia

Reval Hotel Latvija
Riga, 19 May 2008

EXPLANATORY NOTE

ECRI's Round Table in Latvia is part of a series of national round tables in the member States of the Council of Europe, which are organised by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in the framework of its Programme of action on relations with civil society.

These national round tables are regularly organised following the publication of ECRI's country monitoring reports, in which ECRI thoroughly analyses the situation as regards racism and intolerance in each country and makes suggestions and proposals as to how to tackle the problems identified.

The main aim of these round tables is to encourage reflection in the governmental and non-governmental circles concerned, by bringing together all the relevant national actors in this field, including government officials, representatives of national human rights institutions, representatives of local and regional authorities, parliamentarians, victims of discrimination, academics, NGOs etc. The objective is to develop together ideas as to how to solve the problems of racism in the country and to ensure the implementation of ECRI's specific recommendations.

The main themes of ECRI's Round Table in Latvia are: (1) ECRI's report on Latvia; (2) towards an integrated society in Latvia; (3) implementing anti-discrimination laws; and (4) responding to racist incidents in Latvia.

In its [third Report on Latvia](#), ECRI acknowledges that in recent years, Latvia has made progress in a number of the fields covered in this report. For example, legislation against racism and racial discrimination was reinforced. Furthermore, several important programmes have been put into place, including the National Programme "Integration of Society in Latvia", the National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance in Latvia (2005-2009) and the National Action Plan on Roma in Latvia (2007-2009). Finally, ECRI is satisfied that efforts have been made to increase the number of non-citizens being granted Latvian citizenship and that measures have been taken to encourage the learning of the State language by members of ethnic minorities.

At the same time, ECRI is concerned that the number of racially-motivated attacks targeting visible minorities has been increasing while the response to such attacks by the authorities cannot be deemed adequate. Also the use of racist discourse by some politicians and in the media targeting immigrants, as well as certain ethnic and religious minorities, remains a problem. In particular, antisemitic discourse seems to be

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increasing. Furthermore, the naturalisation process continues to be slow and there remain a number of problems as regards the full integration of the Russian-speaking population. Finally, ECRI is concerned that the Latvian Roma communities continue to suffer from racism and discrimination, particularly in access to employment and education

All of these issues will be discussed with representatives of the responsible governmental agencies and victims of discrimination in the light of the **existing legislative and institutional framework for combating racism and racial discrimination** in Latvia, taking into account the recent amendments made to the criminal and the labour code. A whole session will deal with the question as to how best to respond to **racist incidents**, with a special emphasis on the role of the criminal justice system in this regard. Finally, special attention will also be paid to identifying the main obstacles to building an **integrated society** in Latvia and to examining the success of initiatives such as the National Programme “Integration of Society in Latvia”.

ECRI hopes that an open debate among all relevant actors on these important issues will help to identify together effective ways of better implementing existing initiatives and will also provide the necessary impetus for further reform in Latvia.