

"Living together": Council of Europe Eminent Persons' report

Istanbul, 11.05.2011 - On behalf of the Council of Europe [Group of Eminent Persons](#), Javier Solana Madariaga presented the report "[Living Together](#)": *Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe* to the [Committee of Ministers session](#) meeting in Istanbul. Taking stock of the challenges arising from the resurgence of intolerance and discrimination in Europe, the report analyses "the threat" and proposes "the response" for "living together" in open European societies.

Referring to the principles of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#), the Group highlights eight specific risks to traditional Council of Europe values: widespread intolerance; growing discrimination (especially against Roma and immigrants); rising support for xenophobic and populist parties; parallel societies; Islamic extremism; loss of democratic freedoms; presence of a population without rights; and potential clash between "religious freedom" and freedom of expression.

The report underlines some of the reasons behind "the threat": insecurity deriving from the Old Continent's financial crisis and sense of relative decline; distorted perceptions of large-scale immigration; detrimental stereotypes of minorities in the media and public opinion; and a clear leadership deficit in shaping Europe's present and future.

"The response" envisages 59 "proposals for action", the first 17 of which are labelled "strategic recommendations" to European Institutions and their Member States. The Group identifies the main actors for change in public attitudes: educators, mass media, employers and trade unions, civil society, churches and religious groups, celebrities and "role models", towns and cities, member states, European and international organisations.

Amongst its 17 guiding principles, the Group insists on the fact that provided they obey the law, immigrants should not be "expected to renounce their faith, culture or identity".

"Diversity is here to stay - said the Council of Europe's Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland-. We have to learn to live with it, manage it, and benefit from it. I am confident there will be a political follow-up to this report, including possibly an action plan to further pursue the challenges addressed by the Group".

The Group of Eminent Persons is headed by the former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. Other members: Emma Bonino (Italy), Timothy Garton Ash (United Kingdom), Martin Hirsch (France), Danuta Hübner (Poland), Ayşe Kadioğlu (Turkey), Sonja Licht (Serbia), Vladimir Lukin (Russian Federation) and Javier Solana Madariaga (Spain). The rapporteur is Edward Mortimer (United Kingdom).

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