

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

10 March 2021

English only

Following an increase of structural Islamophobia across Europe, including instances of open violence, **the Advisory Council on Youth expresses its distress and concern over this development.**

Recent—but by no means new—public manifestations of Islamophobia count, among others:

- targeting universities and academic research for "damaging" social science theories, thereby threatening to infringe academic freedom;
- the instrumentalisation of Muslim communities as scapegoats for creating an artificial Us vs. Them by public and political figures from across the political spectrum, prominently ahead of elections, feeding into narratives of a "culture war" and publicly fueling discrimination against religious minorities;
- slenderising youth, students, and civil society organisations by criminalising those who engage to demask and fight Islamophobia, thereby obstructing the right of young people to assemble, associate, and express themselves freely and creating barriers for young people's democratic participation;
- unethical reporting by media outlets aiming at scandalisation that disregards human dignity and fuels discrimination in pursuit of clicks, thereby abusing media's role as fourth power in democratic polities.

The Advisory Council is particularly anxious about targeting of young Muslims, especially those who are politically and socially active and whose work focuses on tackling Islamophobia through education, engagement, and awareness-raising. The instances mentioned above run counter to the democracy-building and human rights-fostering commitment of the Council of Europe and its member states. These are clear manifestations of a shrinking space for civil society in Europe that is often perpetuated by those whose role is to serve all their citizens regardless of their ethnic and religious background.

In view of the standards adopted by the Council of Europe, not least Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 on young people's access to rights, Recommendation Rec(2006)14 on citizenship and participation of young people in public life and Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, we call on member states to urgently:

- address the discriminatory practices faced by many young people, particularly when these are perpetuated by public authorities, political actors, public figures, and the media;
- support rather than hinder minority youth organisations that work to promote democratic citizenship by allocating funds for non-formal and formal democratic citizenship education and invest in spaces that facilitate encounters, dialogue, and intercultural learning;
- seek dialogue with minority youth, facilitate their opportunities to participate in public debates on issues that concern them by giving them visibility and backing.

The Advisory Council on Youth remains vigilant and committed to addressing issues in young people's best interest.

The opinions expressed in this statement are those of the Advisory Council on Youth and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or its member states.