

Moving Forward: Increasing ECRI's Impact



Nils Muižnieks

25
1994 - 2019

European Commission
against Racism and Intolerance

ECRI
Commission européenne
contre le racisme et l'intolérance

70
1949 . 2019

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Moving Forward: Increasing ECRI's Impact

Nils Muižnieks

Council of Europe

The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

All requests concerning the reproduction or translation of all or part of this document should be addressed to the Directorate of Communication (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int). All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI).

Cover and layout: Documents and Publications
Production Department (SPDP), Council of Europe
Photo: Shutterstock

This publication has not been copy-edited by the SPDP Editorial Unit to correct typographical and grammatical errors.

© Council of Europe, September 2019
Printed at the Council of Europe

Contents

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	5
ECRI, MEDIA ATTENTION AND COMMUNICATIONS	7
ECRI AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES	11
ECRI AND ITS GPRS	15
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: RAISING AWARENESS AMONG RIGHTS HOLDERS	17

Introduction and Background

1. The work of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is more relevant than ever before in its twenty-five year history. The ubiquity of hate speech on the Internet and in the wider digital world, the severity and prevalence of hate crimes across Europe, the steady erosion of taboos with regard to expressing intolerance in political discourse, the continued prevalence of discrimination – all point to the ongoing need for an expert, principled voice such as ECRI's. While a number of previously specialised bodies at regional and national level have folded their work for equality into a wider human rights remit, ECRI has retained its clear focus, while adapting to the ever-changing manifestations of racism and intolerance in Europe. In the end, one of ECRI's main points of added value may be that it has kept the imperative of combating racism and intolerance on the European agenda.
2. In the last ten years, ECRI has successfully adapted to a very fluid environment. It has taken on board monitoring homophobia and transphobia in its country work, thereby meeting a pressing social need and filling a serious gap in the Council of Europe's architecture. ECRI has intensified its dialogue with member states by introducing an interim follow-up procedure. At the same time, it has sought to engage on country-specific situations between monitoring cycles by adopting extraordinary statements. To maintain the relevance of its early thematic work, ECRI has revisited several General Policy Recommendations and updated them to account for new developments. It has intensified its cooperation with other monitoring mechanisms, in particular the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Finally, ECRI's country findings and standards have increasingly affected international jurisprudence, particularly that of the European Court of Human Rights.
3. As ECRI marks its 25th anniversary, it faces an increasingly challenging context. Thus, it is appropriate to reflect not only on what has worked best and why, but also on ways to maintain or even enhance its impact in the future. The following thoughts and recommendations for increasing ECRI's impact derive from the author's analysis of ECRI documents, previous external studies, the evaluation of ECRI conducted by the Directorate of Internal Oversight of 2012, and the Impact Study carried out in view of ECRI's 25th anniversary. However, the analysis also rests on the author's experience as an ECRI member from 2005 until 2012, as ECRI's chair from 2010 until 2012, and as Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights from 2012 until 2018.

4. The options outlined below should be seen as suggestive, rather than definitive and exhaustive. While the author has tried to be realistic in proposing options for enhancing ECRI's effectiveness, some of the suggestions may require additional human and budgetary resources. However, the author believes that, looking forward, ECRI should be ambitious, consider all possible options for increasing its impact, and assess whether some initiatives might be implemented through voluntary contributions.

5. The analysis below will not discuss a common past criticism of ECRI's work – that the reports are too long and that there are too many vague recommendations. A perusal of reports published in 2018 suggests that this is no longer a serious concern, as the reports have become more concise and the recommendations fewer and more specific. The body of the analysis has been kept to between about 13 pages (San Marino) to about 25 pages (Sweden, Spain), while the number of recommendations varies from a low of 12 (Liechtenstein) to a high of 22 (Republic of Moldova). This is eminently reasonable and ECRI can be lauded for the progress.

6. In preparation for its 25th anniversary, ECRI commissioned an impact study focussing on action taken by national authorities in several areas: implementation of interim follow-up recommendations, legislative changes at national level, establishment of equality bodies, press coverage, and citation of ECRI by the European Court of Human Rights and other relevant international bodies. The study¹ acknowledges the difficulty of establishing causality between ECRI's work and changes in these areas and does not explore in any detail the mechanisms and modalities through which ECRI can exert influence.

7. The analysis below seeks to complement the impact study and uses as its point of departure an important conclusion of the evaluation conducted by the Council of Europe's Directorate of Internal Oversight in 2012. According to a survey of ECRI's stakeholders that year, respondents thought that the top two supporting factors that can lead to implementation of ECRI's reports are **media attention** and **civil society activities**.² The external study published in 2009 likewise stresses that relations with civil society are "crucial to improving ECRI's impact."³

8. The analysis will begin by providing a preliminary assessment of ECRI's work and further options in these two areas, before turning to the issue of how to enhance the impact of ECRI's General Policy Recommendations and looking ahead to future challenges. One area for further analysis is ways to enhance ECRI's impact on the European Court of Human Rights, United Nations Treaty bodies and other relevant regional and international institutions.

1. Timothy Jacob-Owen, 25 Years of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance: Impact in the Field of Equality, Strasbourg: ECRI, August 2019, pp. 7 et seq.

2. Directorate of Internal Oversight, Council of Europe, Final Report, Evaluation of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance – ECRI, Evaluation (2012) 5, 16 April 2012, p. 17.

3. Lanna Hollo, The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) – Its first 15 years (Strasbourg : Council of Europe Publishing, 2009), p. 192.

ECRI, Media Attention and Communications

9. The author wholeheartedly agrees with the emphasis on the importance of media attention in general and communications activities in particular. Communications are an essential means to reach a number of inter-related goals: sustaining support for human rights (including for equality and non-discrimination), influencing change leaders and raising awareness among rights holders.⁴ In a sense, ECRI continues its constructive dialogue with the authorities through the media both directly (through reports, press releases and interviews which are picked up by the media and transmitted to the authorities) and indirectly (when others invoke ECRI's analysis and recommendations and this is reflected in the media).

10. The challenge of effectively communicating human rights in general has grown more difficult in recent years due to a range of factors, including: attacks on and distortions of human rights; the decline of mainstream media as a result of the economic crisis and the rise of Internet-based media; the fragmentation of media space into parallel "echo chambers"; encroachments on the independence and pluralism of public service media; and the rise of state-sponsored and other efforts to manipulate audiences through propaganda, trolls, political micro-targeting, and other means.

11. The challenge of effectively communicating an anti-racist message has grown particularly difficult due to a range of factors including: increasing attacks on so-called "political correctness" and the alleged existence of "taboo" topics involving minorities or migrants; the intersection of fears concerning migration, Islam and terrorism; the proliferation of hate speech on the Internet; the role of social media algorithms in facilitating radicalisation; the rise of a narrative of "threatened majorities"; and the growing strength of populist political forces with an anti-pluralist ethos.

12. There appears to be a general consensus that ECRI's country reports receive good media coverage at the time they are published and/or after the holding of national roundtables. This is confirmed by the Impact Study, which provides data on ECRI's press coverage from 2003 to 2018, which has increased markedly.⁵

13. However, the long cycle of ECRI's country-by-country work, in which countries are visited only once every five years, creates a fundamental challenge: **how can ECRI participate in national policy debates on issues under its mandate between country visits?**

4. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "How to Better Communicate Common Values, Fundamental Rights and Freedoms," Report of a high level expert meeting, Vienna, 31 May – 1 June 2017, p. 3, available at <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/how-better-communicate-common-values-fundamental-rights-and-freedoms-meeting-report>.

5. Jacob-Owens, 25 Years of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, p. 20.

14. In considering ways to enhance ECRI's media work in general and options for participating more actively in national policy debates in particular, a specific characteristic of ECRI should be kept in mind: ECRI is a collective body supported by civil servants with expert members in each of the 47 member states. The primary spokesperson for this collective body is the chair, who, if necessary, should be provided with relevant communications training by the Council of Europe and active support by the secretariat and members.

15. ECRI's active participation in national debates between monitoring cycles is contingent upon a shift in the role of national members. Due to its small size, the secretariat is incapable of following national debates in 47 member states. Thus, it is up to national members to do so and to inform the secretariat and the chair of emerging developments in their country and opportunities for communicating or otherwise engaging in the national conversation. This responsibility should be made clear to national members from the outset.

16. There appear to be several options for enhancing ECRI's media work which can be explored under the following headings: *ad hoc* media work at the national level, *ad hoc* media work at the European level, media work surrounding interim recommendations and conclusions, media work surrounding the annual report, and media work surrounding extraordinary statements.

17. **Ad hoc media work at the national level** would have the goal of inserting ECRI into national debates on issues under ECRI's mandate in a timely fashion, i.e., when relevant legislative or policy changes are being discussed, when particularly egregious instances of hate speech or hate crimes take place and the government response is inadequate, when the substance of a GPR is particularly topical for policy debates, etc. Such *ad hoc* media work at national level could take various forms, including an op-ed or interview by ECRI's chair recalling ECRI's analysis and recommendations, a joint op-ed by the chair of ECRI and head of the national equality body recalling ECRI's analysis and recommendations, or, in the case of intersecting priorities, a joint op-ed by ECRI's chair and the president of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

18. Such *ad hoc* media work could only take place under the following circumstances: the national member would have to alert the secretariat and the chair about the opportunity to communicate, and the secretariat would have to allocate human and other resources towards preparing the relevant communications. Another option which could be considered would be for the chair or the bureau to explicitly delegate the communication function to a national member, with assistance and/or guidance from the secretariat. In this case, the national member would have to be willing to associate him/herself very closely and very publicly with ECRI's stance.

19. **Ad hoc media work at the European or international level** can complement work at the national level, as occasionally, national media are not open to human rights-oriented messages and/or national elites may pay more attention to European or international media and its impact on the country's reputation. Here, the goal may be to place an op-ed by the chair, assisted by the secretariat, in the *International New York Times*, *Politico*, *The Huffington Post*, *Open Democracy*, and similar outlets or to get access to the BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty or similar outlets.

20. In addition to issuing joint statements once a year with partners from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency, ECRI may wish to consider publishing a joint op-ed between the chair of ECRI and the head of one of ECRI's partner organisations on an *ad hoc* basis.

21. While ECRI's web site appears to be well appreciated by stakeholders, ECRI's social media presence is very weak. The only social media used by ECRI is Twitter, but, at this writing, the account has attracted only around 640 followers since it was launched in November 2017. By means of comparison, it should be noted that FRA uses not only Twitter (45,000+ followers), but also Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube. ODIHR, in turn, has Twitter (13,000+ followers), as well as Facebook and LinkedIn accounts. **Any strategy for enhancing ECRI's media work must include developing social media work in general and Twitter in particular as a priority.**

22. The author's own experience in developing social media work as Commissioner for Human Rights was that it does not replace, but rather complements work with "traditional" media. One core benefit of social media is the rapidity with which one can react to events on the ground. One can build up a social media presence by cooperating with intergovernmental partners, others within the Council of Europe, as well as with the European network of equality bodies (Equinet), the European network of national human rights institutions (ENNHRI), networks of NGOs (e.g., the European Network against Racism or ENAR) and others. Here, ECRI has 47 national experts who can assist the secretariat in re-Tweeting news, providing input for a Twitter feed, etc. **ECRI should consider organising an awareness-raising seminar for members about the growing importance of social media in communications work and practical steps** for improving one's individual capacities.

23. Another way for ECRI to insert itself into national debates could be to enhance its communications work surrounding **interim recommendations and conclusions**. In addition to publishing such recommendations and conclusions on ECRI's web site, ECRI may consider supplementing this with another method – writing a letter to the authorities acknowledging progress and/or urging implementation, which could then be published with the response of the authorities. As Commissioner for Human Rights, the author found letters to be an effective communications tool in general. Moreover, on one issue (Roma evictions), the author wrote similar letters simultaneously to seven different national governments, which demonstrated the European scale of the problem and garnered significant media attention.

24. **Media work surrounding the adoption of the annual report** appears to have been relatively successful to date. However, the challenge is to make the annual report relevant to national audiences, who may not be particularly interested in Europe-wide trends. Thus, one approach may be to target one or several countries in which a phenomenon analysed in the annual report (e.g., hate-motivated violence, anti-migrant rhetoric, etc.) may be portrayed as being particularly relevant, as noted in a previous country report. Then, communications could highlight the national specificity while pointing out that the phenomenon is a Europe-wide problem as well. Again, the national member would have to signal to the chair and the secretariat

the particular relevance of the annual report to the national context and assist in crafting the relevant intervention.

25. An additional communications tool at ECRI's disposal is the **adoption of an extraordinary statement** on a national (or regional) situation falling under ECRI's mandate. Such statements have been fairly irregular: one in 2006, one in 2008, one in 2009, one in 2010, three in 2012, one in 2014, one in 2015, and two in 2016. ECRI adopted internal guidelines on extraordinary statements in December 2012 and there are reportedly regular discussions about the adoption of possible statements, but the process is reported to be slow, while others can react more quickly. However, the growing challenges in countering racism across Europe suggest that more regular statements may be warranted and that efforts to issue statements in a timely manner may be worth the trouble. In communications work, much can be made of the fact that such statements are rare and thus, deserve special attention. Again, the role of the national member is critical here, as s/he is best placed to assess the national situation and signal to the chair and secretariat about the need for and appropriate substance of an extraordinary statement.

ECRI and Civil Society Activities

26. The second area found by stakeholder respondents of the 2012 evaluation to be important for the implementation of ECRI's reports is **civil society activities**. Here, the core reference document is "ECRI's Programme of action on relations with civil society" adopted on 20 March 2002. It appears that this document, now more than 17 years old, is in urgent need of revision.

27. The Programme of action mentions several different activities and priority areas of work, each of which merit a brief analysis. The first is "**organisation of information sessions in member States**", which in essence is the organisation of round tables in member States. Along with participation of ECRI members or the chair in various events, the round tables are the primary way in which the annual reports portray ECRI's fulfilment of this important statutory pillar.

28. The external study published in 2004 noted that one of the primary benefits of national roundtables was that they "reinforced the effect of the country reports", but also that they provided "good opportunities for governments and NGOs to meet together on an equal footing."⁶ The external study published in 2009 suggested that organising roundtables "systematically" would be "useful for improving ECRI's impact" and even suggested the utility of organising "interim round tables."⁷ Given current human resource and financial constraints, this does not seem remotely realistic.

29. However, in recent years, the number of round tables organised has decreased for a variety of reasons, including unforeseen political developments in countries where such events had been planned, budgetary and human resource constraints. While the number in 2014 and 2015 was three each per year, in 2016 it was two and in 2017 and 2018 the number had declined to one.

30. The author strongly believes that aiming for the organisation of three roundtables per year is entirely realistic, even under resource constraints. This is the central and most public manner in which ECRI engages with civil society and thus, should be seen as a priority area. This is also an area in which ECRI may well find it possible to attract voluntary contributions.

6. Mark Kelly, ECRI 10 years of combating racism : A review of the work of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (Strasbourg : Council of Europe Publishing, 2004), p. 138.

7. Hollo, The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, p. 192.

31. Discussions with the bureau suggest that there is some dissatisfaction with the current design of the roundtables, which require considerable work to prepare, but do not always elicit high level government participation or significant media coverage. One possible way forward would be to invite government representatives, but to prioritise cooperation with equality bodies and NGOs, who might be better placed to identify the optimal format in the national context. One suggestion worthy of serious consideration is involving youth representatives more systematically in both the planning and implementation of roundtables. Given the decision to include education as a priority area of monitoring in the sixth round, enhanced youth involvement seems highly desirable. Another possibility is to combine a roundtable discussion on the country situation with a discussion on a new or particularly relevant GPR.

32. A second “priority area of work” mentioned in the programme of action is “**co-operation with NGOs**” through “**information exchange, meetings and hearings.**” From the author’s knowledge of ECRI’s working methods, “information exchange” takes place at the operational level on an on-going basis between ECRI’s secretariat and NGOs. In country-by-country work the ECRI secretariat contacts NGOs before visits and country delegations regularly meet with NGOs. However, other than *ad hoc* participation in seminars and conferences, the most recent annual reports do not mention any other “meetings or hearings”.

33. ECRI may wish to consider expanding the scope of its exchanges with civil society. One option of pursuing this goal would be to organise regional or thematic meetings with NGOs. There are several cost-efficient options in this realm: inviting selected NGO representatives to the annual seminars with equality bodies, organising a joint event for NGOs in cooperation with the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, organising an event on the side-lines of the World Forum for Democracy, or organising an event to coincide with an event planned by the Conference of INGOs.

34. Another “priority area of work” mentioned in the programme of activities is “**development of a media strategy**”. As options for increasing ECRI’s effectiveness in the media and communications realm were explored above, here, the author will limit himself to mentioning an option that might complement the initiatives mentioned earlier. Given the growing challenges of communicating an anti-racist message and recent high quality work by Equinet in this area⁸, ECRI may consider devoting an equality body seminar to this issue to follow up on that held in 2009. A possible external partner may be the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency, which has devoted considerable resources to brainstorming about human rights communications.

35. Another “priority area of work” mentioned in the programme of activities is “**Information activities aimed at the political bodies of the Council of Europe.**” Here, recent annual reports suggest that ECRI has been quite active in participating in events organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CLRAE), as well as having representatives of these bodies present at ECRI plenary meetings. While

8. Equinet and PIRC, Framing Equality : Communication Handbook for Equality Bodies, 2017, available at http://www.equineteurope.org/IMG/pdf/framing_equality_-_equinet_pirc.pdf.

ECRI delegations often meet with parliamentarians and local and regional authorities during country visits, ECRI may wish to make meetings with national PACE and CLRAE delegations a standard part of any country visit.

36. ECRI may also consider approaching the secretariat of the Committee of Ministers (CM) to express its willingness to participate in CM thematic discussions related to issues under its mandate and to alert the CM secretariat about ECRI's willingness to cooperate with upcoming chairmanships.

37. The final activity mentioned under the programme of activities is **“contacts with the youth sector”**. The last several annual reports do not mention any specific activities in this regard. Youth were core actors in the “All different, all equal” campaigns, including the recent “No Hate Speech” campaign. In 2016 a new “No hate speech and cooperation unit” was established within the Council of Europe department in which ECRI is located. As mentioned above, forthcoming monitoring work in the area of education holds opportunities for engaging more actively with youth. ECRI may also consider discussing with the no hate speech unit options for intensifying its contacts with the youth sector, especially in light of recent social trends.

38. It was long believed that youth were more tolerant than older persons and that persons with more education are more tolerant than those with less education. However, it is probably youth who are the most active perpetrators and victims of hate crimes, but also the most active authors and distributors of online hate speech. Moreover, recent research suggests that younger persons may be more tolerant of racial diversity and LGBTI persons, but are becoming more intolerant of immigrants.⁹

9. Jan G. Janamaat, Avril Keating, « Are today's youth more tolerant ? Trends in tolerance among young people in Britain, » *Ethnicities*, 8 August 2017, available at http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1468796817723682#_i17.

ECRI and its GPRs

39. According to the evaluation of 2012, ECRI's General Policy Recommendations (GPRs) were less known than its reports because of the natural interest of national publics in information related directly to their own country and the linguistic barrier,¹⁰ as at the time, few GPRs were available in languages other than English and French. It appears that ECRI has put in considerable effort in recent years to promote the GPRs by consulting systematically with key stakeholders on the content, updating certain GPRs, translating them, and publishing abridged versions. The challenge is to promote the abridged versions, basing communications on simple language adapted to the relevant target audience.

40. Equinet's ownership of the documents appears to be particularly important, as national equality bodies are the ideal conduit for disseminating the GPRs, translating them, and demonstrating their relevance to the national context. Thus, **early and systematic consultation with Equinet** on future GPRs would seem to be advisable.

41. Insofar as one target audience for ECRI's work in general and the GPRs in particular is an academic one, one way to promote the GPRs may be to **send them regularly to academic journals** dealing with issues under ECRI's mandate (in psychology, social psychology, law, political science, sociology, human rights, etc.). The journals may not only publish reviews of the GPRs, but ideally, also special thematic issues related to the topic of the GPR. Given the academic background of many ECRI members, there appear to be many possibilities in this regard.

42. The availability of translations and abridged versions of the GPRs should facilitate their **targeted use during country visits**. ECRI may consider, on the occasion of a country visit, organising a seminar at national level together with a national equality body on a GPR. An alternative mentioned above would be to devote part of a national roundtable to discussion of a GPR. In any case, the country team can distribute copies of GPRs particularly relevant to the national context to interlocutors during country visits.

10. Directorate of Internal Oversight, p. 23.

Looking to the Future: Raising Awareness Among Rights Holders

43. ECRI and its inter-governmental partners have devoted great efforts towards promoting the adoption of legislation and policies to combat discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes, while advocating the creation and strengthening of national equality bodies to bring legislation and policies to life. While progress has been undeniable, recently published survey research results from the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency¹¹ give cause for serious reflection. While the results are from EU member states, they appear to have applicability for broader Europe as well.

44. The MIDIS II survey found that victims of discrimination report incidents very rarely in general: only 12% in 2017- down from 18% in 2008; and even more rarely to equality bodies – only 4%. 62% of respondents could not recognise the name of any equality body in their country, while 71% were not aware of any support organisations working in their countries.¹² Only 13 respondents out of 8709 victims of hate-motivated harassment reported the incident to an equality body, human rights institution or ombudsperson.¹³

45. For a country's anti-discrimination and hate crimes framework to be truly effective, the relevant laws need to be "user friendly" and capable of being applied in practice, there need to be adequately resourced equality bodies and support organisations with sufficient powers to assist victims, and victims of racism need to be aware of venues to seek redress and have sufficient trust in equality bodies and the court system to seek justice through them.

46. This suggests that ECRI should continue to work for the adoption or improvement of appropriate legislation and policies and the establishment or strengthening of equality bodies. But it also suggests that **there is an urgent need to raise awareness of the existence of anti-discrimination and hate crimes laws, support organisations for victims of racism, as well as equality bodies.** Without a significant boost in the awareness of victims, it will be difficult to point to real progress on the ground, as laws will remain on paper alone and NGOs and equality bodies will have not reached their core potential beneficiaries and been able to provide assistance.

47. Interestingly, the low level of public awareness is not universal in the countries surveyed. The survey found on average higher levels of awareness of support organisations among victims of discrimination in Sweden, the Netherlands and France. Regarding equality bodies, more than one half of respondents knew of the existence

11. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, EU-MIDIS II, Vienna, December 2017, available at <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/eumidis-ii-main-results>.

12. Ibid., p. 15.

13. Ibid., p. 17.

of such bodies in Ireland, Denmark and the United Kingdom.¹⁴ This suggests that much could be learned from the experience of NGOs and equality bodies in these countries in devising awareness raising strategies. Here, ECRI may consider reviving its work in promoting the sharing of best practices.

48. The challenge of raising awareness about anti-discrimination law and remedies for victims of hate speech and hate crimes is bound to be a daunting one in the coming years. The problems include, but are not limited to: systematic underfunding of equality bodies; populist attacks on the notions of equality, non-discrimination, hate-motivated crimes, as well as populist defence of allegedly “threatened majorities”; the continued deterioration of a media environment conducive to human rights; the shrinking space for civil society in many member States and more. All these trends conspire to make it ever more difficult for ECRI and like-minded bodies to maintain their current impact, let alone increase it.

49. In such a context, it is essential that ECRI is clear about who its primary “clients” are. While one aspect of ECRI’s added value is its access to and dialogue with governments and interaction with national liaison officers, the view of this author is that ECRI must in particular seek to be useful to equality bodies and NGOs working in the field of countering racism and intolerance. Both of these actors face a similar problem: the overwhelming majority of victims of racism do not know about them and use their assistance. Thus, one crucial pathway forward is more in-depth consultation with these two sets of partners on ways ECRI can assist them to raise awareness among victims of racism and in other ways.

50. Consultations with equality bodies seem particularly important. As ECRI develops its working methods to engage more actively in national debates between monitoring cycles, it can become a critical ally for equality bodies when they are under political or budgetary pressure, facing attacks by those working against the equality agenda, and advocating for changes in legislation or policy. Equality bodies need to become ECRI’s true partners, complementing the role of national members in signalling to the secretariat and chair the need for interventions and the form they should take. Equality bodies can also become essential partners in revitalising national roundtables and developing and promoting GPRs. ECRI and equality bodies will both have to master the challenge of communicating more effectively to remain relevant and effective in the years to come. If current trends provide any indication, these will be years in which their work and voice will be urgently needed.

14. Ibid., pp. 50-52.

ECRI is a human rights monitoring body of the Council of Europe, composed of independent experts, which specialises in the fight against racism, discrimination (on grounds of “race”, ethnic/national origin, colour, citizenship, religion, language, sexual orientation and gender identity), xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance; it prepares reports and issues recommendations to member states.

The Council of Europe is the continent’s leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

www.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE