

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RECOMMENDATION No. R (97) 21

OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES ON THE MEDIA AND THE PROMOTION OF A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 October 1997
at the 607th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress;

Stressing its commitment to guarantee the equal dignity of all individuals and the enjoyment of rights and freedoms without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status;

Recalling that the heads of state and government of the member states of the Council of Europe expressed their conviction, at the Vienna Summit conference (October 1993), that the principle of tolerance is the guarantee of the maintenance in Europe of an open society respecting cultural diversity;

Resolved to intensify action against intolerance, taking as a basis the Plan of Action adopted at the Vienna Summit conference;

Welcoming the initiatives of international organisations, governments and various sectors of society to promote a culture of tolerance, and especially those taken by media professionals, and noting that the latter are in a particularly good position to promote these initiatives and ensure their general acceptance in all media sectors;

Noting that the media can make a positive contribution to the fight against intolerance, especially where they foster a culture of understanding between different ethnic, cultural and religious groups in society;

Stressing in line with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights the independence and the autonomy of media professionals and media organisations, and the need to avoid measures which interfere with these principles;

Considering that media professionals might usefully be invited to reflect further on the problem of intolerance in the increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic composition of the member states and on the measures which they might take to promote tolerance and understanding;

Believing that such measures might be implemented at a number of levels, including schools of journalism and media organisations as well as in the context of the exercise of the media professions;

Believing also that the success of such measures depends to a large extent on the degree of involvement of the different categories of professional in the media sectors, in particular media proprietors, managers, editors, writers, programme makers, journalists and advertisers;

Having regard to Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1277 (1995) on migrants, ethnic minorities and media,

Recommends that the governments of the member states:

1. make the following target groups aware of the means of action set out in the appendix to this recommendation:
 - press, radio and television enterprises, as well as the new communications and advertising sectors;
 - the representative bodies of media professionals in these sectors;
 - regulatory and self-regulatory bodies in these sectors;
 - schools of journalism and media training institutes;
2. examine in a positive spirit any requests for support for initiatives undertaken in pursuance of the objectives of this recommendation.

Appendix to Recommendation No. R (97) 21

Scope

The means of action set out hereafter aim to highlight non-exhaustive examples of professional practices conducive to the promotion of a culture of tolerance which merit more general application in the various media sectors mentioned above.

Professional practices conducive to the promotion of a culture of tolerance

1. Training

Initial training

Schools of journalism and media training institutes, in so far as they have not yet done so, might usefully introduce specialist courses in their core curricula with a view to developing a sense of professionalism which is attentive to:

- the involvement of the media in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies;
- the contribution which the media can make to a better understanding between different ethnic, cultural and religious communities.

Further training

Media enterprises might usefully provide in-house training or opportunities for outside training for their media professionals at all levels, on professional standards on tolerance and intolerance.

2. Media enterprises

The problem of intolerance calls for reflection by both the public and within the media. Experience in professional media circles has shown that media enterprises might usefully reflect on the following:

- reporting factually and accurately on acts of racism and intolerance;
- reporting in a sensitive manner on situations of tension between communities;
- avoiding derogatory stereotypical depiction of members of cultural, ethnic or religious communities in publications and programme services;
- treating individual behaviour without linking it to a person's membership of such communities where this is irrelevant;
- depicting cultural, ethnic and religious communities in a balanced and objective manner and in a way which also reflects these communities' own perspectives and outlook;

- alerting public opinion to the evils of intolerance;
- deepening public understanding and appreciation of difference;
- challenging the assumptions underlying intolerant remarks made by speakers in the course of interviews, reports, discussion programmes, etc ;
- considering the influence of the source of information on reporting;
- the diversity of the workforce in the media enterprises and the extent to which it corresponds to the multi-ethnic, multicultural character of its readers, listeners or viewers.

3. *Representative bodies of media professionals*

Representative bodies of the various categories of media professionals might usefully undertake action programmes or practical initiatives for the promotion of a culture of tolerance.

4. *Codes of conduct*

Such initiatives and actions could go hand in hand with professional codes of conduct drawn up within the different media sectors, which address the problems of discrimination and intolerance by encouraging media professionals to make a positive contribution towards the development of tolerance and mutual understanding between the different religious, ethnic and cultural groups in society.

5. *Broadcasting*

While public service broadcasters have a special commitment to promote a culture of tolerance and understanding, the broadcasting media as a whole are a potent force for creating an atmosphere in which intolerance can be challenged. They might find inspiration from broadcasters who, for example,:

- make adequate provision for programme services, also at popular viewing times, which help promote the integration of all individuals, groups and communities as well as proportionate amounts of airtime for the various ethnic, religious and other communities;
- develop a multicultural approach to programme content so as to avoid programmes which present society in mono-cultural and mono-linguistic terms;
- promote a multicultural approach in programmes which are specifically geared to children and young people so as to enable them to grow up with the understanding that cultural, religious and ethnic difference is a natural and positive element of society;
- develop arrangements for sharing, at the regional, national or European level, programme material which has proven its value in mobilising public opinion against the evils of intolerance or in contributing towards promoting community relations in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies.

6. *Advertising*

Although the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of consumer society is already reflected in certain commercial advertisements and although certain advertisers make an effort to prepare advertising in a way which reflects a positive image of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, practices such as those set out hereafter could be developed by the professional circles concerned.

In certain countries, codes of conduct have been drawn up within the advertising sector which prohibit discrimination on grounds such as race, colour, national origin, etc.

There are media enterprises which refuse to carry advertising messages which portray cultural, religious or ethnic difference in a negative manner, for example by reinforcing stereotypes.

Certain public and private organisations develop advertising campaigns designed to promote tolerance. The media could be invited to co-operate actively in the dissemination of such advertisements.