

I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

133RD COR PLENARY SESSION, 6.2.2019-7.2.2019

Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions on Combatting Hate Speech and Hate Crime

(2019/C 168/01)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

- being profoundly shocked and saddened by the murder of the Mayor of Gdańsk and CoR member Paweł Adamowicz, a true European promoting and defending the values of freedom, solidarity, democracy, social inclusion and dignity;
- having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights;
- having regard to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- having regard to its opinion of 6 February 2019 on 'Tackling online disinformation: a European approach';
- having regard to its opinion of 15 June 2016 on 'Combatting radicalisation and violent extremism: prevention mechanisms at local and regional level';
- having regard to the European Parliament debate of 30 January 2019 on 'Combatting the climate of hatred and physical violence against democratically elected mandate holders';
- having regard to the work of the EU High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance;
- having regard to the need to deepen the dialogue with the people, including in view of the ongoing and future elections at the local, regional, national and European level;

1. is deeply concerned by the increase in hate speech and hate crime and the degeneration of public discourse which is generating all kinds of violence, extremism, propaganda and intolerance in the European Union (EU) and challenging the very foundation of the European project. It is worrying that elected representatives in different countries are exposed to undue influence when exercising their democratic mandate. Populism and undemocratic forces pose a challenge for democracy and may ultimately weaken the way it functions;

2. points out that the EU is founded on a common set of fundamental values, which includes human dignity and non-discrimination, as stipulated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, as well as freedom of expression as stipulated in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and in Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU;

3. expects European, national, regional and local levels of governance, the media, civil society organisations, economic actors and individual citizens to respect these values, as they form the basis for mutual trust and understanding and are a cornerstone of open and democratic societies;

4. points out that hateful rhetoric divides our society, induces fear and radicalisation, it defames and dehumanises individuals and can result in grievous acts. It destroys the goal we all share – a strong Europe, united in diversity, peace and common values;

5. calls on all levels of governance to adopt measures to prevent and protect citizens from violence, harassment, hate speech and hate crime; in addition, demands that all political parties, as foundations for effective democracy, refrain from using hate speech and propaganda as a method to gain political advantage;

6. points out that as they are close to citizens, regional and local politicians, especially mayors and local councillors, are more often the victims of hatred and physical violence;

7. points out that together with numerous local and regional initiatives and civil society players, they are on the frontline in the fight against intolerance and at the same time they have an obligation as well as a responsibility to combat violent behaviour and hateful speech;

8. calls on all EU Member States and all levels of government to invest in education and to raise awareness among citizens regarding the need for mutual respect and the serious risks arising from hate speech and hate crime for individuals, society and democracy;

9. calls to promote responsible internet usage and media literacy, in order to equip citizens, especially our young people, with the knowledge and ability to identify hate speech and hate crime and counteract it online and offline;

10. calls on all social media and internet platforms to take collective responsibility to promote and facilitate freedom of expression, but at the same time to tackle hate speech and hate crime in line with the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online, agreed by Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and YouTube with the European Commission in May 2016, calls also for effective instruments to end anonymity and stop fake accounts as well as to monitor the dark web, which is often used as a means of disseminating radical content;

11. takes note of the fourth evaluation on the EU Code of Conduct on Countering illegal hate speech online presented by the European Commission on 4 February 2019. Notes that in 72 % of the cases, the participating IT companies did respond to hate speech notifications by deleting content. Regrets at the same time that the feedback rate to users has dropped to 65,4 %. Advocates therefore considering complementing the voluntary approach of the Code with regulatory action at EU level;

12. encourages better cooperation and collaborative communication between all levels of governance, police, prosecution and judicial authorities as well as civil society organisations so as to identify hate speech and hate crime at an early stage, implement appropriate measures to prevent and combat it and ensure proper investigation, prosecution, conviction and sentencing;

13. considers it essential for an alert system to be set up in each Member State, in cooperation with the EU, and regional and local authorities, for support and guidance, so that acquaintances or family can quickly and easily seek help if a person starts showing an inclination towards violent extremism and hate crime;

14. calls for support for and solidarity with all victims and witnesses of hate speech and hate crime and encourage them to report such behaviour to the relevant authorities, which must ensure that victims and witnesses are protected; calls for measures and mechanisms to be put in place to facilitate criminal justice authorities to liaise more effectively with victims, civil society and community based organisations in tackling this issue;

15. points out that the existing instruments have not secured full protection of human rights and human dignity and therefore calls on the Member States to work together with local and regional authorities as well as with the EU to develop effective legislation and instruments to fight the dissemination of hate speech and incitement to hate crime, in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality⁽¹⁾;

16. instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the President of the European Council, the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU and political families of the EU.

Brussels, 7 February 2019.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ

⁽¹⁾ In line with the guidelines of the EU High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance.