

Information Centre on the Council of Europe in Sofia

Print Releases 1999

Translations

- ECRI's country-by-country approach. Second report on Bulgaria adopted on 18 June 1999
- ECRI General Policy Recommendation N° 1: Combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance
- ECRI General Policy Recommendation N° 2: Specialized bodies to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance at national level
- ECRI General Policy Recommendation N° 3: Combating racism and intolerance against Roma/Gypsies
- ECRI General Policy Recommendation N° 4: National surveys on the experience and perception of discrimination and racism from the point of view of potential victims
- General Policy Recommendation No. 5: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims
- A visit by the CPT – What's it all about? 15 Questions and Answers for the Police
- Police Practice and Human Rights - A European Introduction. A Reference Brochure

Publications

- The Council of Europe - a general leaflet 1999
- Europe is more than you think: educational package for secondary school
- International Legal Acts Against Corruption

I. 50th Anniversary of the Council of Europe

1999 was an important year for the Council of Europe. During this year the Parliamentary Assembly elected a new Secretary General, Mr. Walter Schwimmer (Austria) to replace outgoing Mr. Daniel Tarschys (Sweden). An overhaul of the Secretariat General of the Council was carried out to allow it to better respond to new challenges and increased membership. Also, two key new legal instruments were introduced – the Penal and Civil Law Conventions against Corruption, as well as a monitoring mechanism known by its French acronym GRECO.

Above all, in May, events in Budapest, London and Strasbourg marked the 50th anniversary of this unique pan-European organization. Conscious of the contribution, which membership in the Council has made for Bulgaria's democratic development, the Information Centre initiated a celebration to commemorate the anniversary in Sofia. The event, organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was opened by a speech by the President of Bulgaria, Mr. Petar Stoyanov, followed by interventions by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Mr. Vesselin Metodiev, the Chairman of the Constitutional Court Prof. Zhivko Stalev, Deputy Foreign

Minister Konstantin Dimitrov and Ambassador Tamas Tick of Hungary, as Hungary was chairing the Committee of Ministers of the Council at the time of the celebrations.

Speeches were followed by a ceremony, chaired by Mr. Antoni Slavinski, President of the Committee of Posts and Telecommunications (CPT), of the official validation of a new post stamp "50th Anniversary of the Council of Europe" issued by the CPT. The event also included an exhibition of all translations and publications by the Information Centre in Sofia since its establishment.

II. Human Rights, Social Issues and Education

Cooperation with the Ministry of Education for the Europe in School initiative is already a tradition for the Information Centre in Sofia. At the end of May, the winners of the competition

were awarded more than 60 Council of Europe prizes provided by the Centre. The Centre also hosted an exhibition of some of the prize-winning works.

In 1999, the Information Centre was instrumental in the process of institutional coordination for the ratification of the European Social Charter. A coordination council was set up by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy including representatives of civil society organizations. During the initial period of formation of the council, the Centre was active in providing the participants with the background information necessary for their work. In February, the Information Centre hosted a consultation meeting on drafting the Council of Europe Manual on the Administrative Procedures for the Implementation of National Obligations according the Provisions of the European Social Charter. The meeting brought together European and Bulgarian social policy experts.



President Petar Stoyanov addresses the participants in the Council of Europe 50th anniversary meeting

As human rights are the main priority area in the activities of the Council of Europe, it also figures prominently in the agenda of the Information Centres. In September, the Centre co-organized with the Ministry of Justice a training session for judges and prosecutors on Articles 6, 8 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In December, an international conference "7 Years of Constitutional Court Practice: the Human Rights Perspective" was co-organized with the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the Bulgarian Centre for Human Rights.

III. Visits and Meetings

Shortly after he took office in September, the new Secretary General, Mr. Schwimmer, met with the Directors of the Council Information Centers. The meeting was attended by the Director of the Sofia Centre, Mr. Todorov. Mr. Schwimmer discussed his vision of the role of the Council of Europe as a pan-

European organization. He stressed the role of the Council as a preventive mechanism reducing the costs and casualties of potential conflicts on the continent. Strengthening of the monitoring of member states at intergovernmental level, presence at important political events and reinforcement of the organization's role in implementing the Stability Pact for SEE were emphasized as priorities by the Secretary General. It was pointed out that the Information Centres could be instrumental in ensuring an effective role of the Council in the region of Southeast Europe. Cooperation with the other key international organizations – the EU, OSCE and UN – were also discussed.

In November, during his visit to Bulgaria on the occasion of a conference on the parliamentary contribution to the implementation of the Stability Pact, held in Sofia, Mr. Schwimmer visited the Information Centre on the Council of Europe in Sofia.



Mr. Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe visited center hosted by CSD

Following the end of the Kosovo conflict, PACE President Lord Russell-Johnston arrived for a three day visit to Bulgaria at the invitation of Mr. Yordan Sokolov, Chairman of the National Assembly. The main purpose of his visit to Romania, Bulgaria and Albania, was to discuss the post-war reconstruction and development of the region. During his stay in Bulgaria, Lord Russell-Johnston visited the Information Centre in Sofia.

In 1999, Bulgaria was still under a monitoring procedure by the Committee on Honoring the Obligations by the member states of the Council of Europe, which monitors compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. After several years of monitoring, reports by the rapporteurs for Bulgaria - Mr. David Atkinson, British MP and Mr. Henning Gjelerod, Danish MP – generated considerable media interest. The Information Centre facilitated the input of non-governmental organizations to the report prepared by the rapporteurs of the Committee in 1999. It also hosted two meetings of the rapporteurs with Bulgarian non-governmental organizations during their visits in February and December.

In view of the major contribution to be provided by the Council of Europe to the implementation of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, a meeting of the Information Centres' Directors from the countries in the region was held in Skopje, Macedonia in August. The meeting, also attended by representatives of the Secretariat of the Council, coordinated the efforts of the Centres as facilitators of the organization's contribution. Several joint projects were proposed to be implemented in the course of 2000.

The Information Centre in Sofia was also active participant in the work of *Coalition 2000*. In addition to liaising between the initiative and the Council of Europe, the Centre compiled, translated and published an anti-corruption reader, "International Legal Acts Against Corruption" which included all international conventions and other legal instruments in this area relevant to Bulgaria.

Visits by the Secretary General and the PACE President indicate the growing importance the Council attaches to the activities of its Information Centres in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.