

RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA

An overview of research and
examples of good practice
in the EU Member States, 1995-2000

on behalf of the

European Monitoring Centre
on Racism and Xenophobia, Vienna
(EUMC)

by

European Research Centre
on Migration and Ethnic Relations
(ERCOMER)

Edited by Jessika ter Wal

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PREFACE

The research interest in analysing the way mass media report on ethnic issues has increased in the Member States over the last decades. And for this reason the EUMC decided to bring together the major research reports and their findings over the last five years in this report "RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA - an overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU Member States, 1995-2000".

The project has been carried out by Dr Jessika ter Wal, at Ercomer, Utrecht University, the Netherlands. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to her for her excellent work. The report underlines the importance of media research in the area of racism and diversity.

The mass media, and especially the news media, have an unequivocal position in society when it comes to establishing and disseminating common cultural references. The mass media have an influence on people's attitudes as well as our common knowledge, but not always in the expected and desired ways.

The active democratic role of the mass media in society can be influenced by a number of factors. The way the mass media represent, focus and give voice to different actors and incidents in society could have the unintentional result of strengthening a racist discourse instead of fighting against it. Mass media reporting is especially sensitive when it comes to ethnic, cultural and religious relations in our society.

The mass media organisations in the Member States take different initiatives to promote cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, such as developing codes of conduct, recruiting broadcasters from the migrant and minority communities and training the personnel from multiethnic societies.

The report has already attracted a lot of interest from researchers, from journalists as well as from media organisations. I hope that the report will be of practical use to all those interested in the fight against racism and especially those working in the media.

Beate Winkler

Director of the EUMC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	11
	by Jessika ter Wal	
1.1	Aims of the study	11
1.2	How the study was conducted	12
1.3	Existing international initiatives to promote good practice .	19
1.4	Problems related to the comparability of data	10
1.5	Overview	23
	Table 1. Dimensions, specific media practices, factors and related types of data	26
2	CONCLUSIONS	31
	by Jessika ter Wal	
2.1	AN INVENTORY OF THE EXISTING RESEARCH	32
2.1.1	Disparities in available research	32
2.1.2	Type of research and approach	33
2.1.3	Ideological differences	34
2.1.4	Coding Methods in Quantitative Research - problems of reliability	35
2.1.5	Limits of quantitative analyses and coding	35
2.2	NEGATIVE NEWS MAKING-RELATED MECHANISMS	36
2.2.1	Media panics and fixed repertoires	36
2.2.2	Media and politics	37
2.2.3	Different newspaper types	39
2.2.4	News genres selection	40
2.2.5	Problem of reliable information	40
2.2.6	Quotation/Source use	40
2.3	COMMON TRENDS IN PORTRAYAL	42
2.3.1	Crime themes	43
2.3.2	Description of problems related to ethnic relations	45
2.3.3	Description of problems related to immigration and asylum	46
2.3.4	Portrayal and perspective	47
2.3.5	Focus on special groups and boundary markers	48
2.3.6	Labelling	50
2.4	DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN MORE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INSTANCES	52
2.4.1	Variation depending on media type and genre	52
2.4.2	Subtle and blatant racism	53
2.4.3	Different groups	54

2.4.4	Headlines	54
2.5	POSITIONS TOWARDS RACISM AND ANTI-RACISM	55
2.5.1	Right-wing extremism and populism	57
2.5.2	Racist crimes (violence and harassment)	58
2.5.3	Anti-racism	59
2.6	TRACING DEVELOPMENTS	61
2.6.1	Subtle/new racism	62
2.6.2	Negative developments	63
2.6.3	Positive developments in thematic change or media sensitivity	63
2.6.4	Parallel developments over longer periods of time	66
2.6.5	Development in reporting on specific cases or groups	67
2.7	MEDIA EFFECTS	68
2.8	POSITIVE ACTIONS TO COMBAT RACISM AND PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY	71
2.8.1	Codex of conduct	71
3	RECOMMENDATIONS by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia	75
3.1	GENERAL REMARKS.....	75
3.2	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND MONITORING	78
3.3	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS	79
3.3.1	Source use	79
3.3.2	Sources and participation	80
3.3.3	Formats and genres	81
3.3.4	Groups - Portrayal	83
3.4	POLICIES FOR PROMOTING DIVERSITY	84
3.5	VIGILANCE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA	86
3.6	REFERENCES	87
4	MEMBER STATE REPORTS	89
4.1	BELGIUM (BE)	90
	by Frieda Saeys and Tomas Coppens	
4.1.1	Introduction	90
4.1.2	Representation of Ethnic Minorities in the media	91
4.1.3	Media discourse analysis - 'Debating Diversity'	97
4.1.4	Actions to combat racism and discrimination in the media .	99
4.1.5	Conclusions	101
4.1.6	References	102
4.1.7	Contact addresses	104

4.2	DENMARK (DA)	107
	by Mustafa Hussain	
4.2.1	Introduction	107
4.2.2	Portrayal in the mass media	107
4.2.3	Recognition of the problem and good practice	117
4.2.4	Concluding remarks	121
4.2.5	References	122
4.3	GERMANY (DE)	125
	by Joachim Trebbe and Tobias Köhler	
4.3.1	Introduction	125
4.3.2	General media practices	127
4.3.3	The reproduction of ethnic and racist prejudice	136
4.3.4	Initiatives to promote cultural diversity and combat racism	138
4.3.5	Concluding remarks	143
4.3.6	References	144
4.3.7	Internet addresses	148
4.4	GREECE (EL)	149
	by Anna Triandafyllidou	
4.4.1	A brief introduction to Greece and its minorities	150
4.4.2	Media practices in reporting on ethnic issues	152
4.4.3	The reproduction of ethnic and racial stereotypes	159
4.4.4	Media initiatives to combat racism	164
4.4.5	Conclusions	165
4.4.6	References	166
4.4.7	Contact addresses	170
4.5	SPAIN (ES)	173
	by Antonio Miguel Bañon Hernandez	
4.5.1	Researchers and research groups	174
4.5.2	Research by associations and NGO'S	183
4.5.3	Initiatives of the media	191
4.5.4	Government and trade unions	194
4.5.5	Conclusions	198
4.5.6	References	199
4.6	FRANCE (FR)	203
	by Alec G. Hargreaves	
4.6.1	Introduction	203
4.6.2	Media representations	203
4.6.3	Media effects	209

4.6.4	Actions to promote cultural diversity and combat racism ...	211
4.6.5	Conclusions	214
4.6.6	References	215
4.6.7	Contact addresses	218
4.7	IRELAND (IR)	221
	by Gary Quinn and Ciarán Ó Mailán	
4.7.1	A diverse Ireland	221
4.7.2	Legislative framework for racism and the media	224
4.7.3	Defining ethnic minorities in the news	226
4.7.4	Common trends	229
4.7.5	Credible sources	232
4.7.6	Journalism constraints and guidelines	233
4.7.7	Monitoring	235
4.7.8	Conclusions	237
4.7.9	References	237
4.7.10	Contact addresses	238
4.8	ITALY (IT)	239
	by Jessika ter Wal	
4.8.1	General media practices	240
4.8.2	Main themes and portrayal	241
4.8.3	Initiatives to combat racism and promote cultural diversity	259
4.8.4	Concluding remarks	262
4.8.5	References	264
4.8.6	Contact addresses	270
4.9	LUXEMBOURG (LU)	273
	by Nénad Dubajic	
4.9.1	Introduction	273
4.9.2	General information on media	274
4.9.3	Media representations	276
4.9.4	Initiatives to combat racism and promote cultural diversity	278
4.9.5	Concluding remarks	282
4.9.6	References	284
4.9.7	Contact addresses	286
4.10	THE NETHERLANDS (NE)	287
	by Ineke van der Valk	
4.10.1	Introduction	287
4.10.2	Research overview until 1997	288
4.10.3	Portrayal of ethnic minorities	290

4.10.4	Studies on media effects	296
4.10.5	Initiatives to promote diversity and balanced reporting	298
4.10.6	Concluding remarks	302
4.10.7	References	304
4.10.8	Contact addresses	308
4.11	AUSTRIA (OE)	311
	by Alexander Joskowicz	
4.11.1	Introduction	311
4.11.2	The media market and its regulations on reporting	312
4.11.3	Ethnic and racial stereotypes in the media	314
4.11.4	Initiatives to promote cultural diversity and combat racism	322
4.11.5	References	324
4.12	PORTUGAL (PO)	327
	by Anabela Franqueira	
4.12.1	Introduction	327
4.12.2	The representation of immigrants and ethnic minorities ...	335
4.12.3	Positive actions to promote cultural diversity and combat racism	340
4.12.4	Concluding remarks	347
4.12.5	References	348
4.13	FINLAND (SU)	351
	by Karina Horsti	
4.13.1	Introduction: Cultural diversity in Finland	351
4.13.2	Establishing the field of ethnic studies	352
4.13.3	The reproduction of ethnic stereotypes in the media	354
4.13.4	The role of journalistic practises and routines	364
4.13.5	Media use by immigrants	366
4.13.6	Initiatives for more balanced reporting	367
4.13.7	References	369
4.14	SWEDEN (SV)	373
	by Ylva Brune	
4.14.1	General findings on news coverage	373
4.14.2	News media depictions of racism and Xenophobia	381
4.14.3	Initiatives to promote cultural diversity in the media and to improve news reporting	387
4.14.4	Education and vocational training	390
4.14.5	Conclusions	390
4.14.6	References	391

4.15	UNITED KINGDOM (UK)	395
	by Paul Statham	
4.15.1	Introduction - research context in Britain	395
4.15.2	Coverage, topics and sources	399
4.15.3	Themes, framing and labelling	406
4.15.4	Media initiatives to promote cultural diversity	411
4.15.5	The need for politically relevant research	416
4.15.6	References	418
5	APPENDIX	421
5.1	CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	421
	by Jessika ter Wal	
5.1.1	The concept of racism	334
5.2	Media and racism	423
5.2.1	Studying media treatment of racism	423
5.2.2	Racism, denial and anti-racism	424
5.2.3	Prejudiced attitudes and social representations	425
5.3	MAIN THEORETICAL APPROACHES	426
5.3.1	Minorities and the media' approach.....	427
5.3.2	News-making approach	429
5.3.3	Social constructionist approach	432
5.3.4	Discourse analytical approach.....	434
5.3.5	News and public attitudes approach	436
5.3.6	Other approaches	440
5.3.7	Summary	441
5.4	METHODS FOR ANALYSIS	441
5.4.1	Extensive analysis and case studies	442
5.4.2	Content analysis	444
5.4.3	News-making related questions.....	447
5.4.4	Social construction	447
5.4.5	Discourse analysis.....	448
5.4.6	Public attitudes.....	453
5.5	REFERENCES	454
5.6	LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS – AUTHORS' ADDRESSES	458

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)

3.1 GENERAL REMARKS

The EUMC makes recommendations based on the findings in the study conducted on Racism and Cultural Diversity in the Mass Media in the EU. The preceding summary of the main results of the study allows for a number of key factors to be identified that may determine improvement and deserve further attention in the future. Further improvement will require: the recognition of the need for a multicultural media, training for journalists, and a daily awareness of ways in which the multiple forces and constraints that shape media production can be used without being disadvantageous to the position of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities. This also depend on effective support to minority groups to facilitate their access to the media, as news sources and as media professionals, as the various examples of good practice reported in the study also show.

These recommendations are based on reported instances of negative practice as well as available examples of good practice (reported in the Member State reports), that show how cultural diversity can effectively be promoted in the media. The results of this report clearly indicate that media professionals, media organisations, advisory bodies, political organisations and ethnic minority organisations should work together towards achieving the following:

- more visibility, voice and better access for migrant and ethnic minority groups, especially in mainstream media and routine news making, and in all news genres
- more possibilities for background and investigative reporting and introduce more positive news frames or formats, instead of the predominant 'problem' format
- Increased awareness of the necessity to check information

from official sources and of the impact of the language of political and official actors; and recognition of the need to comment upon or balance these when appropriate (not following the official perspective only)

- Support initiatives in training and programming areas to increase access, participation and improve representation of ethnic, cultural, religious minorities in the media
- Support cooperation and information exchange among media and minority organisations to promote ethnic, cultural, religious diversity in the media

In some Member States implementation of these recommendations are needed urgently, while in other Member States (or in particular media) they may have been partly acknowledged and even implemented. This applies in particular to countries with a longer history of immigration and with post-colonial minorities, where a participatorier model for ethnic, cultural and religious minorities is more widely accepted and adopted (though with major obstacles, and still only partially). In contrast, the marginalisation of migrant discourses in the media applies most strongly to the countries with a shorter history of immigration and a less institutionalised opposition to discrimination. Similarly, recommendations for the treatment of certain topics such as right-wing extremism or cultural integration still depend to a considerable extent on national issue contexts and (media and political) backgrounds.

The recommendations follow-up the positions put forward by the EUMC in previous documents and communications. They take into account:

- The selected results and recommendations from the European Media Conference organised and sponsored by the WDR and EUMC, held in Cologne, Germany, in May 1999 (Eckhardt, 1999).
- The recommendations for reporting contained in a report funded by the Freudenberg Stiftung, gathering findings of a team of German researchers, including psychoanalysts, and

6 Available at <http://www.eumc.eu.int>, and <http://www.ecri.coe.int/en/o7/03/27/01.htm>

media professionals, in particular based on knowledge of the German experience (Winkler, 2000).

- The EUMC Position Papers presented at the European Conference, held at Strasbourg, 11-13 October 2000, and contributing to the world conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, held at Strasbourg, 11-13 October 2000.⁶

As a premise, those working in and with the media should be aware of the positive and negative impact that media can have on public opinion in general, but especially in terms of:

- The increasing isolation and individualisation of (public) life spheres/perception that affect forms of social organisation, interaction and coexistence
- the space for dialogue among individuals and communities offered, for social and political discussion on migration, integration xenophobia, racism and cultural diversity
- the predominant availability of cues for the perception of violence, negativity, insecurity and threat, especially for children and young people, but also for the elderly and others with less contacts outside their own sphere of life
- the gradual replacement of 'real-life' exchange of opinions by news flow and the individual perception of reality constructed by the media, depriving people of learning to deal with the views and behaviours of others, and to solve problems and conflicts together
- the public acceptance of violence, by media that are validating or aggravating violence and hostility, e.g. in areas of instability and lacking social cohesion
- the possibility to validate negative beliefs, and attitudes, or, conversely, the possibility to dismantle fears, insecurities and prejudices
- the fostering of indifference towards migrants and minorities, or instead heighten public awareness for their situation
- the unintentional support given to racism, not only in extreme forms but in subtle prejudices as well

In other words, while acknowledging the possible negative effects of media on increasing xenophobia and racism, and the risk that media may fuel fears and polarise public opinion, the possibilities for media to dismantle these fears and prejudices towards 'others' and to heighten public awareness are recognised as well.

The following are suggestions, on the one hand, to combat the dissemination of hate speech and intolerance via the media, and, on the other hand, to promote diversity in and through the media.

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND MONITORING

It is recommended that common indicators and criteria for data comparison on European media are further developed, and that data availability is increased.

Research should not just denounce negative media contents, but should focus more on factors in production (including access and participation of ethnic minorities, journalists' training and professional codes/organisation) and audience reception of media messages. More should be known about the psychological effects of media framing on audience perception, and what factors influence this. It should also be asked to what extent such effects (for example of coverage on xenophobia and right-wing extremism) vary according to national issue contexts or can be generalised at the trans-national level. Also, research that analyses and theorises the relations between media and political agendas and their effects needs further development. Results from these strands of research can put pressure and introduce participatory forms of improvement. Not only print media (which is most often researched) but also TV and radio should be analysed more broadly.

Research that evaluates the effective implementation of existing recommendations is needed. More specifically, research should provide information on the implementation and impact of measures and initiatives to ensure cultural diversity in the media, so that these can be set out as examples of good practice, or can be adjust-

ed where necessary. To date, as this report shows, research dealing with effects of such measures hardly exists. Theories and research results on positive media effects are scarce, and existing (mostly quantitative) methodologies are often applied without common criteria across different regions and Member States.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

3.3.1 SOURCE USE AND LANGUAGE IN POLITICAL REPORTING

The viewpoints of politicians and official actors tend to appear most often and most prominently in the media, also in reports on ethnic issues. Indeed, often issues acquire news value just when political decision-making is involved. This observation is confirmed by the findings of the present report. It is therefore important to scrutinise the statements and language of politicians and be aware of the consequences for the thoughts communicated about ethnic minority groups and the management of ethnic relations. When authoritative actors use terms that are imbued with prejudice or may reinforce prejudice, journalists can avoid negative effects by commenting upon their statements and placing these into context by giving voice to actors with a different view. Explicit comment is much more effective than limiting oneself to implicit criticism with the use of irony.

Unfortunately, however, 'media often limit themselves to repeating the simple solutions advanced by politicians' and 'statements of politicians are often simply repeated without inquiring about the reasons, which validates them, and multiplies their impact' and (EUMC Position Paper, Strasbourg 2000). In order to see a certain solution legitimised or validated, problems are defined in a specific way, which if followed uncritically or without further comment may lead to one-sided or sensationalist reporting.

However, one should be aware that it is often not enough to routinely provide accounts, by giving voice to alternative views of rou-

tine sources for the sake of 'balancing' (e.g. also via fixed contacts with individuals at NGOs and minority organisations). Instead, the development of a vocabulary that is more open to real dialogue and change from all involved parties would require active participation of civil society (and ethnic minorities) in the definition of news and media agendas. Trends of positive development towards these directions exist and should be further stimulated.

3.3.2 SOURCES AND PARTICIPATION

Newsgathering and the selection of sources for news and interviews or other media productions affect the appearance and quotation of different actors and perspectives. The results of the study show the importance to avoid talking 'about' instead of talking 'with' ethnic, cultural, religious minorities, and also have programmes or news coverage produced by these groups. Hence the following recommendations:

- Enhance equal representation by giving voice to ethnic, cultural, religious minority sources, and by involving those affected by discrimination in the media.
- Reflect minority perspectives in the mainstream media, not only in coverage on issues that concern the ethnic minorities, but also in other general news genres.
- Convince media professionals of the necessity to integrate migrants' points of view in their productions, and not only in productions dealing with minority issues.
- Contribute to societal integration and cohesion, by reflecting diversity, and giving voice to groups which have something to say about issues which concern them and society as a whole (rather than using migrants' voices to illustrate the exceptional).
- A special policy for the integration of minorities in broadcasting companies

The integration of ethnic, cultural, religious minority sources and perspectives in the media is not a one-way process from the part of the media. It also requires enhancing possibilities for and emancipating ethnic minority groups to obtain better access to the news

media, both as sources and professionals. Therefore the recommendations above need to be facilitated by actions from the part of ethnic, cultural, religious minority organisations and/or those who support their integration:

- Support ethnic, cultural, religious minority groups to create a network of contact persons and experts able to liaise with the media and provide them with accurate information about their perspectives. The possibility to have access to and contact these groups more easily may increase their visibility and improve the image given of them in the media (examples of good practice in this sense exist, i.e. directories and on-line services provided by journalists' and anti-racist or minority organisations).
- Give support to ethnic, cultural and religious minority and migrant organisations (in particular smaller and more recently formed communities and organisations), so that they can organise themselves effectively for communication with the media and increase their accessibility for media producers.
- Enforce measures and support projects that encourage people from minority backgrounds to enter the profession of journalism and to recruit minority journalists in the mainstream media at all levels of the editorial process.

3.3.3 FORMATS AND GENRES

MORE ATTENTION TO BACKGROUNDS

The identification with and acceptance of ethnic, cultural, religious diversity can be facilitated by the attention to backgrounds and personal stories. Therefore, it is recommended that investigative journalism (informed background reporting or feature reporting), documentaries and full-length films are stimulated. . These formats can give information on the lives of migrants and ethnic, cultural, religious minorities through interviews and personal stories that can raise awareness and insight (instead of confirming prejudice). This selection of news formats does not depend so much on the

individual journalist. Rather, it means that initiatives need to be taken to convince media editors and owners of the necessity to allocate resources for investigative journalism (and other less usual genres) when reporting on ethnic issues.

Taken-for-granted news genres (such as emphasis on appearance or personal characteristics in the description of news actors, on the responsibility of single actors rather than complex causes and circumstance, or on official positions in news articles) may inadvertently produce - stereotypical representations of groups and individuals. When using such formats, awareness of these effects and caution is recommended.

Also on radio, not just short reports but longer in-depth broadcasts are needed in programmes to deal with the topic in more depth (good practice exists). Radio should further develop its broadcasting formats and adapt mass programmes to the fight against xenophobia..

INTRODUCE AND PROMOTE RECOGNITION OF ALTERNATIVE GENRES

Having noted the importance of background information, factual information alone is not enough to fight prejudice and xenophobia, because many people are not prepared to listen to sensible arguments. Opposition to prejudice is also promoted through combining factual information with alternative genres in media production, such as:

- Features, films, and personal stories that place greater emphasis on emotional aspects.
- Entertainment and humour. Entertainment is an important tool for shaping perceptions of the world in a playful way and can encourage social integration, especially when minorities are actively involved. Humour builds bridges, but naturally it should not be at the expense of other groups. It is most effective when the group itself expresses its own humour (examples exist).
- Radio entertainment (fiction, games, monologues, and sto-

ries) and music (e.g. pop or world music) is particularly suitable for helping to understand people from other cultures and overcome difference and prejudice.

- Normalisation through participation of minorities in other news genres than those related to problems and negativity, in non-stereotypical roles. I.e. pay attention to covering everyday, positive contexts, in addition to reporting current events. This means avoiding a focus on the exotic and extraordinary of minorities' lives.

Programme makers and editors should give more professional recognition to the genre of 'social issue reports', under which reporting on cultural minorities usually comes, especially on TV. Being involved with political topics usually brings journalists more recognition and professional success. Senior management of the various institutions should attempt to create a balance of priorities, and consider that 'social issues' are quite attractive to a large part of the public.

3.3.4 GROUPS - PORTRAYAL

Not to forget the victims does not mean reducing them solely to the role of victims. Portraying foreigners, asylum seekers or displaced persons as victims may have a demeaning effect on the public perception of these groups. Victims need a chance to speak out and express themselves about their situation.

Special attention should be paid to fair portrayal of Roma and Sinti, migrants or ethnic, cultural, religious minorities of Muslim origin, asylum seekers, and newcomers, as these are at present among the most heavily stereotyped groups in European media. In particular in cases of uncertainty (e.g. in countries of more recent immigration), it is necessary to be vigilant on precise categorisations for immigrants, asylum seeking groups, and ethnic, cultural, religious minority groups, that receive different juridical status and treatment.

The representation of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities in the media should reflect their actual representation among the population. Over- or under-representation of certain groups in certain gen-

res should be avoided because it can indirectly reinforce stereotypes, for example when certain groups are over-represented in entertainment and other groups in crime reporting. .

3.4 POLICIES FOR PROMOTION OF DIVERSITY

Active policies for equal treatment and representation of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities should be introduced, in and beyond the sphere of media representation and employment. To support this, it is recommended that access for minorities is increased by:

TRAINING

- Training programmes for minorities to facilitate entry in the media profession (examples of good practice exist)
- Offering students of ethnic, cultural, religious minority origin the possibility to work as trainees in broadcasting organisations (examples of good practice exist)
- Special training programmes to increase journalism students' and educators', journalists', editors', programme managers' and producers' awareness of racism, discrimination and cultural diversity, including an analysis of the manner in which the media disseminate prejudices and stereotypes. Such training initiatives can be enhanced by the establishment of networks between minority groups, journalists, NGOs and other interested parties (examples of good practice exist).
- Installing a mentor who monitors and promotes the careers of members of ethnic, cultural, religious minorities in the media (examples of good practice exist)
- Education and/or broad-based information about society for light entertainment producers, to effectively promote social integration of ethnic, cultural, religious minorities in this sector
- Training to journalists in (public service and other) media organisations involved in mainstream programmes in which the cultural background of the minorities living in their country is explained (examples of good practice exist)

- Training courses for managers, which enable them to take better account of the special situation of ethnic, cultural, religious minorities when selecting personnel
- Training programmes for non-journalists, such as NGO officers, communication officers and key representatives of minority groups, to work more effectively with the media in order to ensure that diversity is better reflected. For example, develop training programmes that enable them to gain better access to prime time programmes
- Aiming education and training initiatives at the public at large, both as a receiver and disseminator of content, including training in a critical approach to the new technologies including the Internet, video games and music.

PROGRAMMING

- Guarantee better broadcasting slots for multicultural programmes on the public service networks.
- Address minority issues in general and mainstream programmes especially. Avoid limiting multicultural. There is a danger that programmes especially targeted at different religious, cultural and ethnic minorities may lead to the segregation of minorities. Also the relative absence of minorities or issues of their concern in general programming reinforces this.
- Involving active participation of the minorities themselves in programmes production and contents

INFORMATION EXCHANGE, COOPERATION AND SELF-REGULATION - AT THE LEVEL OF MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

- Implement and exchange of good practices among all concerned parties (media, public authorities, NGOs, etc.), covering self-regulatory initiatives in traditional and new media, as a means to increase diversity within the media and to combat racism and intolerance.
- Network to deal with the interests of minorities in the media and monitor programmes to assess sufficient coverage of

concerns and interests of minorities (examples of good practice exist)

- Continuous monitoring, by media organisations, of enforcement of recommendations and guidelines that deal with the treatment of minorities in the media, following a synergetic approach, that is focussed on the combined enforcement of sets of recommendations, rather than of single recommendations in restricted areas. For instance, the promotion of (respect for) cultural diversity through entertainment is only effective when counter-balanced by correct current affairs and background news reporting.
- Collaboration and exchange among Europe's public service broadcasters at the level of programming in order to promote cultural diversity in the media (examples of good practice exist)
- Promotion of mobility of personnel between the areas of ethnic minority programmes and mainstream programmes, and of networking of majority and minority media and journalists from different communities. These and other efforts of cooperation and joint initiatives between different groups can enable the diversity of perspectives and voices to gain expression.

3.5 VIGILANCE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The EUMC believes that more studies are required to obtain a comprehensive picture of the uses of Internet sites for propagating racial hatred and hostility towards foreigners and ethnic, cultural, religious minorities. The studies should also examine the effectiveness of codes of conduct and monitoring mechanisms. These studies should be undertaken with a special focus on the behaviour of Internet service providers. The results of these studies should indicate whether self-regulation is effective and how legislative measures under criminal law and other forms of legal liability serve as an incentive for self-regulation and prevention. The studies should aim to adopt an interdisciplinary approach and explore good practice as well as identifying in more detail the actual use of the Internet to connect racist networks across countries, to finance and promote the activities of racist groups, as a recruitment tool for racist groups

and as a tool to coordinate activities and act as a catalyst for racist violence.

The EUMC regrets that racism is not addressed in the context of the draft Convention on Crime in Cyberspace being prepared by the Council of Europe along other content related offences such as child pornography. The EUMC welcomes the efforts to prepare a specific protocol to the Cybercrime Convention dealing with this matter.

The EUMC welcomes the proposal of the Commission for a framework decision aimed at approximation of the laws and regulations of the Member States regarding racist and xenophobic offences off- and online according to Article 34.2 (b) of the Treaty of European Union. The EUMC calls for specific consideration to be given in this context to the important issues of jurisdiction for online offences and of liability of internet service providers acting as hosts for failure to take down illegal content after notification. The EUMC also calls for the establishment of hotlines for the notification of web sites with racist content.

Special attention and monitoring efforts should also be paid to the general or casual public communication about ethnic, cultural, religious minorities and migrants on electronic media (Inter-net) (that this, by non-extremists, or those not declared to be extremists). For example, the present report shows that electronic newspapers etc. frequently have informal discussion sections or for a, which sometimes contain extreme manifestations of prejudice and racial hatred that are left uncensored, and may lead to trivialising or lowering thresholds for the expression of racist messages in mainstream (electronic) media.

3.6 REFERENCES

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