



EUROPEAN UNION  
Delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe

## **Weekly Media Report of developments related to the Council of Europe**

29 February 2- 4 March 2016

The Weekly Media Report gives an overview of recent news in international media. Please note that the Report does not constitute a formal communication, does not represent the official position of the Delegation and does not commit the European Union in any way.

Ce rapport donne un aperçu de nouvelles récentes dans les médias internationaux. Ce rapport n'est pas une communication formelle, ne représente pas la position officielle de la Délégation et n'engage en aucun cas l'Union Européenne.

### **Secretary General / Poland**

#### **[Council of Europe chief warns of 'misuse' of Poland report](#)**

*02/03/2016 – EUOBSERVER / International*

Council of Europe secretary general Thorbjorn Jagland said Wednesday it was "unfortunate" that a draft report on the rule of law in Poland was leaked last week, prompting fury by the Polish government. He urged to wait for the final opinion "and to avoid any misuse of it politically".

### **Venice Commission / Poland**

#### **[Poland's changes to court system 'endanger democracy'](#)**

*29/02 - The Guardian / UK*

Changes to Poland's supreme court endanger the rule of law, democracy and human rights, according to a draft opinion from Europe's leading constitutional experts. The draft from the Venice Commission, legal experts who advise the Council of Europe, called on the Polish



government to strike out provisions of a law reforming the country's highest court. Last year Poland's staunchly conservative Law and Justice party attempted to install five judges of its own choosing on the 15-member constitutional tribunal shortly after coming to power. This was followed by a hastily passed law in December overhauling court procedures, making it harder to pass rulings. In a draft report that was leaked to Polish media, the Venice Commission said the tribunal's effectiveness could be crippled, thereby damaging human rights as access to justice was denied.

### **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance**

#### **[Hate Speech 'Commonplace' in France: Council of Europe Report](#)**

*01/03 - Newsweek / USA*

The Council of Europe has expressed concern at the prevalence of hate speech in France, saying that it has "become commonplace" in the country. France has introduced a state of emergency following a series of militant Islamist attacks in the country, most notably the November 2015 shooting and suicide bomber attacks in Paris, which killed 130. Human rights groups have claimed that this new crackdown by law enforcement has resulted in anti-Muslim police abuse. Council of Europe figures in early 2015 had already estimated a rise in both anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic offences in France. The body's secretary general, Thorbjorn Jagland, called on "political leaders in particular to refrain from making comments which stigmatize already vulnerable groups and fuel tensions in French society."

#### **[European rights body says worried by hate speech in Georgia](#)**

*01/03 - Reuters/ UK*

The Council of Europe told Georgia on Tuesday to improve its anti-discrimination policies and legislation, saying it was worried by an increase in cases of hate speech and violence against religious and sexual minority groups. The criticism from the pan-European human rights body comes at a sensitive time for Georgia as it seeks to move closer to NATO and the European Union following Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. "Despite certain progress achieved by Georgia on anti-discrimination policies and legislation, hate speech and violence against some ethnic and religious minorities, as well as LGBT persons have increased over the past years, and the authorities' response has not been sufficient," Christian Ahlund of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance said in a report. The ECRI welcomed positive developments such as amendments to the criminal code making racist motivation an aggravating circumstance, the passage of a law on eliminating all forms of discrimination and the adoption of a national human rights strategy.



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## **European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

### **[Anti-torture committee warns Greece on over-crowded prisons, police violence](#)**

*01/03 - Reuters/ UK*

The Council of Europe, which safeguards human rights and the rule of law across the region, has criticized Greece for police violence and poor conditions in its over-crowded prisons, urging Athens to overhaul a system reaching "breaking point". "Vulnerable prisoners are not being cared for and, in some cases, are being allowed to die," the Council's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment said in a report based on a 2015 visit to Greece. "The main problems of overcrowding and chronic shortage of staff persist," it said, acknowledging that Athens had taken steps to reduce the number of inmates, many of whom had to face widespread violence among prisoners and intimidation. "Further efforts need to be made to promote alternatives to imprisonment and to move away from the current situation whereby prisons in Greece are merely acting as warehouses," it said.

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