

Press release - 908(2009)

Statement by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on the ban of the construction of minarets in Switzerland

Strasbourg, 01.12.2009 - The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) wishes to express its deep concern about the results of the Swiss popular initiative which approved the inclusion, in the Federal Constitution, of a new provision banning the construction of minarets.

In its report on Switzerland published on 15 September 2009, ECRI clearly regretted that "an initiative that infringes human rights can be put to vote". ECRI added that it "very much hoped that it would be rejected".

The figure of 57,5% in favour of the ban, and the fact that the Federal Council's and other key Swiss stakeholders' call to vote against went unheeded, are difficult to reconcile with the efforts made to combat prejudice and discrimination in the country over the last years. This vote will result in discrimination against Muslims and infringe their freedom of religion. As ECRI has warned in its report, this risks creating further stigmatisation and racist prejudice against persons belonging to the Muslim community.

ECRI calls on the Swiss authorities to study carefully the consequences of this vote and do their utmost to find solutions that are in keeping with international human rights law. In the meantime, ECRI emphasises the urgent need for the Swiss authorities to follow-up on its recommendation "to pursue their efforts and dialogue with Muslim representatives".

ECRI is a Council of Europe independent human rights body that monitors problems of racism and intolerance by preparing country specific reports, and issues recommendations to member states.

More information on: www.coe.int/ecri

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