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Combating the resurrection of nazi ideology

Report
Political Affairs Committee
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Summary

The report recalls that Nazism, its policies and actions were irrevocably condemned by the Nurnberg tribunal. Modern Europe has been conceived as a total rejection of nazi ideas and principles.

The Parliamentary Assembly expresses concern that public awareness of the danger of nazi ideology and its rejection by society are weakening, and that some phenomena of a nazi, racist and xenophobic nature have been dangerously developing across Europe.

The report reminds us that it is urgent to step up co-ordinated action to combat efforts aimed at revitalising nazi ideology and calls for a major international conference in order to study the recurrence of, and develop a common response to, nazi, racist and xenophobic trends in European societies.

I. Draft resolution

1. In May 1945, the Allied Powers defeated the nazi German regime and put an end to Hitler's "national-socialism", the most cruel and barbaric regime that Europe had ever known.

2. More than just a defeat of the nazi armies, the Victory of the Allies was a triumph over the nazi xenophobic doctrine of "natural inequality" of races according to which persons of "German blood" were a "master race" with a special, heroic destiny and were accordingly entitled, in the quest for "living space", to subjugate, dominate or exterminate other "races" and peoples.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly pays special tribute to the glory of all those who fought in the ranks of the anti-Hitler coalition and saved humanity from the nazi "new order". Grateful Europeans will never forget their courage and sacrifices which delivered Europe from the nazi rule. It opened the path to developing a community of free, sovereign and peaceful nations in Western Europe after the end of the Second World War. Many parts of Europe had to suffer further oppression under Communist rule. The changes in Eastern Europe opened up the chance for them to join the community of states based on democracy and the rule of law.

4. The Assembly mourns the loss of millions of innocent victims of the nazi aggression and racial policies. The horrors of *Shoah* and the nazi plans and policies of physical extermination or enslavement of entire nations must never be forgotten.

5. The Assembly regrets the death and suffering of millions of humans, civilian and military, in nazi Germany and in its satellite countries, hostages of criminal acts and policies of their leaders.

6. The criminal nature of the nazi policies and actions was overwhelmingly substantiated and irrevocably condemned by the Nurnberg International Military Tribunal in 1945-46. Key figures of the nazi party and State apparatus were found guilty of massive crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The main components of the nazi machinery of mass murder, such as the leadership corps of the nazi party, Gestapo, SD and SS, were declared criminal organisations.

7. The rulings of the Nurnberg Tribunal remain of great historical importance. The principles recognized at the Nurnberg Tribunal form a cornerstone of modern international law, and led to the drafting of major international legal instruments such as the UN Genocide Convention (1948), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Abolition of the Statute of Limitations on War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity (1968), the Geneva Convention on the Laws and Customs of War (1949) and its supplementary protocols (1977) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1949), as well as to the creation of institutions for the effective implementation and adjudication of these rights, i.e. the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the European Court of Human Rights, the Special Criminal Tribunals and the International Criminal Court.

8. Modern Europe has been conceived as a total rejection of the nazi ideas and principles, with the aim to exclude that such horrendous crimes as those committed by the nazi regime in the name of "racial superiority" may ever be repeated. The Council of Europe, as the oldest European political organisation aimed at protecting and furthering democracy, human rights and the rule of law, has a special responsibility in preventing the resurgence of the nazi ideology.

9. Against this background, the Assembly is extremely worried over some developments which indicate that the public awareness of the danger of the nazi ideology and its rejection by society are weakening.

10. The Assembly is particularly concerned as regards:

10.1. cases of desecration of memorials and graves of soldiers of the anti-Hitler coalition;

10.2. attempts to rehabilitate, justify and even glorify those who participated in the war on the nazi side, especially in the ranks of groupings found to be criminal organisations at the Nurnberg Tribunal;

10.3. the use of nazi symbols such as the fascist "swastika", flag, uniform, etc., and others with clear indication to them;

10.4. denial or minimizing the significance of the crimes committed by the nazi regime, in particular of the *Shoah*.

11. Furthermore, the Assembly is worried by political and social phenomena which, while making no direct reference to the nazi regime, should be seen in the light of its ideology, such as:

11.1 the growing number of manifestations of racial, ethnic and religious intolerance in daily life, including, inter alia, desecration of Jewish cemeteries and attacks on religious sites;

11.2. attempts to create, through the media, a negative perception of some ethnic or religious groups;

11.3. growing support for political parties and movements with a xenophobic agenda.

12. Moreover, the Assembly is worried that such manifestations do not always receive enough attention and response on behalf of the political leaders and that public opinion seems now more receptive to racist, xenophobic and extremist ideas.

13. In this connection, the Assembly deems it necessary to recall that Hitler's ideas, outrageous as they look today, found sympathy and support in many European countries.

14. The Assembly believes that it is urgent to step up co-ordinated action in order to resist efforts aiming at revitalising nazi ideology, to fight xenophobia, intolerance and hatred based on racial and ethnic grounds, political and religious extremism and all forms of totalitarian action. The Council of Europe must play the leading role in this process.

15. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the relevant activities already conducted by various Council of Europe bodies, in particular by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), but believes that, in order to bring about concrete results, these activities need to be re-oriented to include a wider involvement of society.

16. The Assembly resolves to organise an international conference in order to carefully study the recurrence of racist and nationalist phenomena in European societies, exchange best experiences and develop common approaches in combating the resurrection of the nazi ideas.

II. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Margelov

1. Introduction

1. The year 2005 marks the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, which claimed more victims than any other war in human history. Over 60 states, accounting for some 80% of the world population of the time, were dragged into this global conflict, whose cost in human lives exceeded 55 million.

2. It was in Europe that the war, which broke out in 1939, took the heaviest toll. It was Europe that saw the emergence of the “National-Socialist” ideology by which the leaders of Nazi Germany sought to justify the territorial gains that were the origin of the war. It was also in Europe that the worst crimes against humanity were committed, such as the Shoah, in the name of the same Nazi ideology. It was here in Europe that the Allied powers won the victory over Nazi Germany that was decisive for the outcome of the Second World War.

3. Europe therefore has painful experience of Nazi doctrine and practice. Post-war Europe was built upon absolute rejection of the ideas and principles of Nazism, which were irrevocably condemned at the Nuremberg trials. This rejection may now be regarded as forming part of the European “genetic code”.

4. However, 60 years after the defeat of Nazism, we find increasingly that the roots of this poisonous and murderous ideology have not all been eradicated and that there are political and social forces, in a democratic Europe, which are prepared to use xenophobic, racist and even openly Nazi arguments once again for their own ends.

5. Is the antidote to Nazi ideas, which cost Europe millions of human lives and endless suffering and devastation, no longer working? Is our collective memory so short that it lends itself so easily to manipulation with short-term goals? Will modern society be able to resist the temptation to forget, or will it be as heedless as it was in the 1930s of the threat posed by the spread of Nazi ideas?

6. It was questions such as these which led me to table a motion for a resolution entitled “Condemnation of the admiration and justification of Nazism” in June 2004. I should point out that, speaking about “Nazism”, one must differentiate between the actual political regime which existed in Germany in 1933-1945, with its theory and practice, and the ideology of racial superiority upon which the regime was built. While the former was destroyed in 1945 and condemned by the Nuremberg Tribunal, the latter is alive and well and has its followers.

7. Unlike some of my colleagues in the Assembly, I do not believe that it is for responsible politicians to judge – or rejudge history, nor *a fortiori* to seek to rewrite it for political ends. But it is our duty to learn lessons from history to ensure that its darker episodes do not happen again.

8. It would have been tempting in this report to retrace the history of how Hitler came to power in Germany and to analyse how and why his racist ideology achieved dominance in a Germany crushed and humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles – and even to lay blame. But let us leave this debate to professional historians. Politicians should concentrate instead on the present and the future.

9. Neither do I claim to be in a position to set out in this report a careful and exhaustive list of all the Nazi or xenophobic phenomena or manifestations of sympathy with Nazism or glorifications of Nazism across Europe. Everyone can – and, in my view, should – make an honest analysis of these phenomena in their own country. I shall endeavour instead to describe some trends which I find very alarming.

10. Lastly, the scale and range of these phenomena call for collective thought and, above all, a collective response. Instead of setting out here a readymade catalogue of responses, I feel that it is much more important and urgent to sound the alarm so that the whole of society becomes aware of the danger and looks actively for ways of taking up this challenge.

2. Why talk about Nazism today?

11. There are several reasons why I feel it is both necessary and desirable to raise the issue of the resurrection of Nazism in the Assembly.

12. First of all, the year 2005 was marked by the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe and, just recently, the end of the Second World War. Thanks to the combined efforts of the Allies, humanity triumphed over the “plague of the 20th century” and Europe was given the opportunity to become what it stands for today.

13. The Nazi regime suffered not only a military defeat, but above all a political and ideological defeat. It seemed at the end of the war that the Nazi ideology founded on the concept of “natural inequality” and “racial superiority” and policies implemented by means of state terror and crimes against humanity would never see the light of day again.

14. The Assembly therefore has a duty to pay a solemn tribute to those who saved the world from Nazi domination and the Nazi “new order”, and to remember the millions of innocent victims of Nazism. It is my profound belief that respect for the memory of the soldiers of victory, whatever their country of origin, is a sacred duty of all Europeans who see themselves as heirs to that great victory.

15. It was for this reason that the attempts to take revenge and impose a revision of history, accompanied by indecent displays of Nazi sympathy, which we have been observing for a number of years, seemed particularly blatant and cynical in this anniversary year of the victory over Nazism. It was absolutely essential, therefore, that our Assembly should adopt a position on these developments.

3. What are these developments?

16. The scale and conspicuous nature of Nazi-influenced phenomena are extremely worrying. These phenomena – such as, for example, young people marching hand in hand with former SS officers in the streets of some European capitals, or the murder of an African in Moscow – are no longer isolated acts of a “sub-culture”. These events reflect the revival of an ideology. This ideology is capable of using history turned on its head as a practical policy instrument. The violence on Europe’s streets thus acquires a political motivation.

17. Neo-Nazi acts do not simply cause unfortunate damage to the reputation of our countries, that of a democratic and tolerant Europe. If that were the case, police action would have been sufficient without there being any need to involve the European institutions. The strength of the neo-Nazis lies not in their number but in the degree of irresponsibility of a society which allows them to take up with impunity the ideological weapons of the Second World War which we thought had been laid down once and for all.

18. Many European countries are experiencing a rise in electoral support for parties with openly xenophobic tendencies. Nationalist parties often say that they are distancing themselves from all violent action (this applies, for example, to the leaders of the German National Democratic Party, NPD). However, the fact that they often condone racial violence turns them, at the very least, into “involved observers”.

19. Modern neo-Nazism has new forms of organisation: “lone wolves” copy the network structures of international terrorism and co-ordinate their actions by means of anonymous e-mail addresses.

20. There are now hundreds of Nazi sites on the Internet – to my great dismay, there are also some in Russian language. On these sites one can find not only advertisements for and sales of Nazi memorabilia – flags, swastikas, uniforms, etc – or the text of “Mein Kampf” and other “works” of Nazi doctrine, but also details of how to make home-made bombs.

21. An increase in the number and membership of extremist and xenophobic groups has been observed in several European countries, such as Spain, Austria, Germany, Russia, the Czech Republic and many others.

22. In Russia, racial violence is the work of “skinheads”, whose number is estimated at 55,000 spread between 85 cities.

23. Law enforcement experts have recently noted increased transfrontier and international co-ordination of these activities. For example, German skinheads participate in actions in the Czech Republic; racist publications seized from Russian skinheads are printed in Finland, etc.

24. The penetration of extremist movements in countries with a traditionally high tolerance level is a source of particular concern. By way of example, mention should be made of the first racist murder in the history of Norway, which was committed in January 2005 in Oslo. Five Norwegian neo-Nazis have been arrested in the course of the investigation.

25. The authorities in most European countries do of course respond to such acts. What is particularly alarming is where neo-Nazi propaganda enjoys a “laissez-faire” attitude on the part of the public authorities, or even their consent. For example, former Waffen SS legionnaires organise a march in Riga on 16 March each year. This march is seen as reflecting a revival of national identity and an affirmation of the state.

26. It should be pointed out in this connection that the SS, like the Gestapo and the SD, were declared criminal organisations by the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal. This tribunal's underlying principles and basic decisions are the cornerstone of modern international law and some of its major instruments, such as the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. Mention should also be made of the adoption of the Convention on the Non-Application of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity in 1968.

27. I should also like to point out here that the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which is the basis for our Organisation's action in the field of human rights, represents the recognition of these fundamental principles at European level and refers explicitly to them.

28. The Nuremberg Tribunal and its decisions form a heritage and a point of reference which are indissociable from the fundamental values of a democratic Europe which the Council of Europe is supposed to protect and promote. This also applies to the rejection of Nazism and to the memory of those who defeated it. Whenever these principles are endangered, it is our whole value system which is under attack.

29. The Council of Europe cannot allow itself to remain indifferent to cases of profanation of the memorials and graves of soldiers of the anti-Hitler coalition, to attempts to rehabilitate, justify and even glorify the Nazis, to the rise of xenophobic political parties, to calls to rewrite history and deny the Shoah.

30. A Europe which seeks to promote its values must set an example where respect for those values is concerned. The resurgence of Nazi ideas or racist attitudes in Europe represents a challenge to those values from within. A tolerant attitude to this resurgence would mean rejection of the principles which form the European identity and the loss of the European model's attractiveness to the outside world, the loss of Europe's "soft power". People of all races and beliefs must be able to walk safely on the streets of European cities.

31. Europe is currently one of the bastions of the fight against international terrorism, and one of the terrorists' targets. Neo-Nazism with its racial hatred and religious intolerance is a direct accomplice of terrorism. The rise in xenophobic behaviour and Nazi ideas jeopardises Europe's moral stance against terrorism, and could even be exploited by the terrorists' propaganda to justify their acts.

32. Europe has gone a long way towards integration based on cultural pluralism. The manifestations of the neo-Nazi movement across Europe and the support enjoyed by political parties with xenophobic programmes reflect a dangerous tendency to reject integration, which runs counter to the European tradition. More and more Europeans support the view that the multicultural model is a thing of the past and favour a strengthening of the national element. In a large number of European countries, there has been a sharp decline in tolerance towards immigrants and an increase in support for the expulsion of legal migrants. Islamophobia has been on the rise since the terrorist acts in the United States, and especially after those in Madrid and London.

33. Hatred towards "others", towards "coloured people", is no longer hidden and is displayed in election campaigns and through the media. Press publications seeking to present certain ethnic or religious groups, or even whole peoples – Roma, Arabs, Muslims, Serbs, Russians, Chechens etc – systematically in a bad light are no longer isolated cases and are reminiscent of the Nazi propaganda machine's efforts to arouse hatred towards the Jews. We cannot pretend not to notice it, because we know all too well the terrible consequences to which that propaganda led.

34. I believe that these phenomena, which no doubt seem fairly disparate at first sight, in fact reflect a very alarming trend. Our societies are no longer sufficiently immune to the return of xenophobic and racist ideas. A situation of socio-economic crisis – and *a fortiori* the difficulties facing the populations in the transition countries – are highly favourable conditions for the spread of such ideas.

35. This is further exacerbated by the reduced vigilance of the public authorities and political leaders towards attempts to play down the crimes of Nazism and revive Nazi ideas.

4. The Council of Europe's response

36. This finding represents a challenge to us as national elected representatives, as politicians with responsibility for the future of our societies. More importantly, however, it concerns us as members of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly – the political organ of the organisation vested with responsibility for protecting democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

37. Of course, it cannot be said that we have remained passive. Reference should be made first of all to the work of the Assembly: Recommendation 1438 (2000) and Resolution 1344 (2003) on the *Threat posed to democracy by extremist parties and movements in Europe* drawn up by our own committee, and Resolution 1345 (2003) on *Racist, xenophobic and intolerant discourse in politics* prepared by our colleagues in the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

38. Emphasis should also be laid on the important work done by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), whose tasks are to review member states' legislation, policies and other measures to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance, and their effectiveness; to stimulate action in this field at local, national and European level; and to formulate general policy recommendations to member states. In this connection, attention should be drawn to the European Conference against Racism organised by ECRI in 2000 and the national round tables organised by ECRI in the Council of Europe member states to raise awareness in civil society of the fight against intolerance.

39. I would also point out that the Action Plan adopted at the Third Council of Europe Summit in Warsaw explicitly commits our Organisation to stepping up the fight against racism, discrimination and all forms of intolerance, as well as against attempts to vindicate nazism.

5. Conclusion: Need for more incisive action

40. But let us be perfectly honest: however accurate and clear-sighted they may be, are our texts and the recommendations of ECRI known beyond our Assembly and expert circles? Have they succeeded in launching a real public debate within society?

41. Unfortunately, I am certain of one thing: unless we mobilise society, and unless we engage political leaders and prominent public figures in a frank and open debate, we shall be left to "condemn" and "regret" the increase in the number of Nazi incidents and acts of xenophobia, while powerlessly observing the rise of Nazism in the form of various extremist parties. Can we be sure that the experience of Hitler's coming to power by democratic means will not be repeated in another country?

42. It is our duty as members of the Assembly to mobilise all our Organisation's resources and to reach out to democratic political forces and civil society in order to launch this debate before it is too late.

43. I therefore believe that it is time to pool our respective experiences, our analyses of the different manifestations of the revival of xenophobic and Nazi ideas, and to envisage joint action against this phenomenon at European level.

44. We must have the political courage to call things by their name. Repeated acts of racial hatred, the revival of xenophobic ideology and attempts to justify or glorify Nazism can no longer be regarded as isolated phenomena. They are manifestations of the same tendency which we must describe as the resurrection of Nazism. This represents a direct threat to the very foundations of modern Europe.

45. We must reaffirm the political condemnation of Nazism and its crimes, reject any attempt to deny them or justify them, and not allow Nazi ideas to take root in Europe again.

46. I therefore propose that the Assembly take the initiative of organising a major international conference under the slogan "Combating the resurgence of Nazism", attended by parliamentarians, government officials and experts, and researchers in political and social science, and with a major contribution from civil society.

Reporting Committee: Political Affairs Committee.

Reference to Committee: Doc. 10231, Ref. 2986 of 07.09.04

Draft Resolution unanimously adopted by the Committee on 14 December 2005

Members of the Committee : Mr Abdülkadir **Ateş** (Chairman), Mr Konstantion **Kosachev** (Vice-Chairman), Mr Zsolt **Németh** (Vice-Chairman), Mr Birgir Ármannsson, Mr Giuseppe Arzilli, Mr Claudio Azzolini, Mr Miroslav **Beneš**, Mr Radu-Mircea **Berceanu**, Mr Gerardo Bianco, Mr Giorgi Bokeria, Mrs Beáta Brestenká, Mr Doros Christodoulides, Mrs Anna Čurdová, Mr Noel Davern, Mr Michel Dreyfus-Schmidt, Mr Adri Duivesteijn, Mrs Josette Durrieu, Mr Mikko **Elo**, Mr Joan Albert Farré Santuré, Mr Per-Kristian **Foss**, Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto, Mr Charles Goerens, Mr Daniel **Goulet**, Mr Andreas **Gross**, Mr Klaus-Jürgen **Hedrich**, Mr Jean-Pol Henry, Mr Joachim Hörster, Mr Ivan Ivanovski (alternate: Mr Andrej **Zernovski**), Mr Tadeusz **Iwiński**, Mr Elmir Jahić, Mr Ljubiša **Jovašević**, Mr Ivan **Kalezić**, Mr Oleksandr Karpov, Mr Oskars **Kastēns**, Mr Petro Koçi, Mr Yuriy Kostenko, Mrs Darja **Lavtižar-Bebler**, Mr Göran **Lindblad**, Mr Younal **Loutfi**, Mr Mikhail Margelov (alternate: Mr Guennady **Ziuganov**), Mr Dick Marty, Mr Frano Matušić, Mr Evagelos **Meimarakis**, Mr Murat **Mercan**, Mr Jean-Claude Mignon, Mr Marko **Mihkelson**, Mrs Nadezhda **Mikhailova**, Mr João Bosco **Mota Amaral**, Mrs Natalia **Narochnitskaya**, Mrs Carina **Ohlsson**, Mr Boris Oliynyk (alternate: Mr Uryiy **Karmazin**), Mr Algirdas Paleckis (alternate: Mr Jonas **Čekuolis**), Mr Theodoros **Pangalos**, Mr Gordon Prentice (alternate: Mr John **Austin**), Mr Gabino **Puche**, Mr Lluís Maria de Puig, Mr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, Mr Umberto Ranieri (alternate: Mrs Tana **de Zulueta**), Mr Michael Roth, **Lord Russell-Johnston**, Mr Jan **Rzymek**, Mr Peter **Schieder**, Mrs Juana Serna (alternate: Mr Julio **Padilla**), Mr Adrian Severin, Mrs Hanne **Severinsen**, Mr Samad **Seyidov**, Mr Leonid **Slutsky**, Mr Michael Spindelegger, Mr Zoltán **Szabó**, Baroness **Taylor of Bolton**, Mr Mehmet **Tekelioğlu**, Mr Tigran **Torosyan**, Mrs Marianne Tritz (alternate: Mr Rudolf **Bindig**), Mr Vagif Vakilov (alternate: Mr Azim **Mollazade**), Mr Luc Van den Brande (alternate: Mr Stef **Goris**), Mr Varujan **Vosganian**, Mr Andrzej **Wielowieyski**, Mr David **Wilshire**, Mr Bart van Winsen, Mrs Renate Wohlwend, Mr Marco Zacchera,

Ex-officio: MM. Mátyás **Eörsi**, Mats Einarsson,

N.B. : The names of the members who took part in the meeting are printed in bold

Head of the Secretariat : Mr Perin

Secretaries to the Committee: Mrs Nachilo, Mr Chevtchenko, Mrs Sirtori-Milner