
Coronavirus Covid-19: human rights, the Council of Europe gives the alert. Too many breaches and omissions in responding to the pandemic

“Right now, the attention, resources and efforts of the States are rightly spent into repressing the Covid-19 pandemic and protecting the health and lives of millions of people in Europe. But, when the pandemic is under control, the States will have to double their efforts to solve some age-old deficiencies in terms of jurisprudence, practice and narrative that are detrimental to human dignity and human rights”. It is the human rights commissioner of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, who states that, in the light of her Activity Report 2019, issued today: 42 pages, in which she tells what she has seen in her travels and meetings through the lens of human rights. “The image I get from my work is that of a Europe that goes round in circles, uncertain about the direction it should go and the obligations in terms of human rights that the member States deliberately agreed on”, the commissioner states. Five are the topics that have come up as particularly tricky: a rising political and social acceptance of racism; the breaches of migrants’ and refugees’ human rights; the threats to women’s rights; the repression of dissent: and the erosion of judicial independence. Add to these the unregulated uses of digital technology and artificial intelligence that often result in the infringement of privacy, equality and freedom of expression and assembly. In all this, the pandemic “is exacerbating long-standing problems and emphasising the weaknesses of the European system for the protection of human rights”.

Valentina Bombelli