



Notes on the Agenda

RESTRICTED

Date: 17 May 1994
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Reference documents:
- CM/Del/Dec/Act(93)488/6a

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY
Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1202 (1993)

ITEM PREPARED BY A RAPPORTEUR GROUP

1. Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1202 (1993) on religious tolerance in a democratic society was adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on 2 February 1993 during the fourth part of the 44th Ordinary Session.

2. In paragraph 16 of the Recommendation, the Assembly recommends "that the Committee of Ministers call upon the governments of the member states, the European Community as well as the responsible authorities and organisations to:

Legal guarantees and their observance

i. guarantee religious freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of worship with specific reference to the rights indicated in Assembly Recommendation 1086 (1988) paragraph 10;

ii. allow for flexibility in the accommodation of different religious practices (for example in dress, eating and observance of holy days);

Education and exchanges

iii. ensure that studies on religions and ethics are part of the general school curriculum and work towards a differentiated and careful depiction of religions in school books (including history books) and in classroom teaching with a view to achieving a better and deeper understanding of the various religions;

iv. emphasise that a knowledge of one's own religion or ethical principles is a prerequisite for true tolerance and also might act as a safeguard against indifference or prejudice;



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v. establish a "religious history school book conference" consisting of a representative selection of theologians, historians and philosophers for the purpose of compiling basic texts, documents and commentaries for teaching in schools;

vi. make it possible to present to young people the ideas and deeds of living individuals of different religious beliefs as examples of religious tolerance in practice;

vii. facilitate, in the framework of existing exchange programmes for secondary school students, university students and other young people, encounter and dialogue with informed persons of differing beliefs;

viii. promote inter-religious encounters and organisations that serve the purpose of furthering mutual understanding between religions and thereby peace and respect for human rights;

ix. consider the provision of similar facilities for the religious schools of all recognised religions;

Information and sensibilisation

x. ensure that fundamental religious texts and related literature are translated and made available in public libraries;

xi. organise cultural projects on religious issues in the context of cultural promotion programmes;

Research

xii. facilitate the development of a network of research institutes in Europe which would:

- collect, analyse and evaluate literature on religious tolerance,
- provide an information service with a qualified selection of this literature,
- organise workshops and research conferences on religious tolerance,
- serve as a competent and authoritative source of public information;

xiii. stimulate academic work (seminars, degree courses, doctoral dissertations) in European universities on questions concerning religious tolerance."

3. It is recalled that, at their 488th meeting (February 1993, item 6a), the Deputies adopted an interim reply to this Recommendation and decided to communicate it to governments of the member States and to the Commission of the European Communities.

4. In the light in particular of the outcome of the Vienna Summit, the Deputies' Rapporteur Group on Human Rights, at its meeting of 25 April 1994, considered a draft supplementary reply to this Recommendation prepared by the Secretariat.

Action

The Deputies are invited to consider, with a view to its adoption, the following draft decision prepared by the Rapporteur Group on Human Rights.

DRAFT DECISION

3.2

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY
Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1202 (1993)
(CM/Del/Dec/Act(93)488/6a)

Decision

The Deputies adopted the following supplementary reply to Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1202 (1993) on religious tolerance in a democratic society:

- "1. The Committee of Ministers shares the Parliamentary Assembly's view that the universal importance of religious freedom. It recalls that this freedom is enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, has to be reaffirmed. It recalls that, at the 488th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (February 1993) it adopted an interim reply to this Recommendation in which it informed the Parliamentary Assembly that it had decided to communicate the Recommendation to governments of the member States and to the Commission of the European Communities.
2. With regard to paragraphs 16.i and ii, it is recalled that, in the Declaration on combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance adopted at the Vienna Summit (8-9 October 1993), the Heads of State and Government of the member States condemned, inter alia, all forms of religious discrimination, encouraged member States to continue efforts already undertaken to eliminate this phenomenon, committed themselves to strengthening national laws and international instruments, and undertook to combat any action or language likely to strengthen fears and tensions between groups from different religious backgrounds.
3. Furthermore, in the Plan of Action on the same subject, member States are invited "to reinforce guarantees against all forms of discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin or on religion, and to this end to:
 - reexamine without delay their legislation and regulations with a view to eliminating provisions likely to generate discrimination based on any of these reasons or likely to sustain prejudice;
 - assure effective implementation of legislation aimed at combating racism and discrimination;

- reinforce and implement preventive measures to combat racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance, giving special attention to awareness-raising and confidence-building measures."

The Parliamentary Assembly is represented on the Committee of Experts called for in the Plan of Action which held its first meeting in March 1994. The Committee of Ministers attaches great importance to the work of this Committee, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, which will, inter alia, review member States' legislation, policies and other measures to combat racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance, and their effectiveness, and formulate general policy recommendations to member States.

It should be added, moreover, that within the framework of the Seminar "Europe versus Intolerance", held in Strasbourg on 3-4 March 1994, a Workshop took place on "Moral and religious forces faced by rising fundamentalism".

4. As far as paragraph 16.iii to xiii is concerned, within the Council of Europe's Intergovernmental Programmes of Activities, a 3-year project on "Democracy, human rights, minorities: educational and cultural aspects" was launched at the beginning of 1993 by the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC). The project, through a multidisciplinary approach, will aim principally at strengthening the fundamental principles of democracy and respect for human rights by contributing to the promotion of practices and attitudes which respect democratic values.

Specifically, within the context of this project, an interdisciplinary seminar will take place in Klingenthal in June 1994 on "Specificities and universality: the problem of identities". This seminar will discuss questions relating to religious tolerance in the framework of a wider discussion on respect for diversity and minorities.

Furthermore, as part of the 1994 programme of European Teachers' seminars, a seminar will take place in October on the theme "Studying religions in social sciences at school". The aim of the seminar is to examine: how to approach the teaching of religions as social and cultural facts, the analysis of which is necessary for an understanding of the past and the present; and, how to provide teachers with the means and the elements for reflection which allow them to integrate the teaching of religions in various subject areas linked in particular with the humanities and the social sciences and to turn it into a "horizontal" theme.

5. Moreover, the Plan of Action foresees that work on reinforcing mutual understanding and confidence between people through the Council of Europe's co-operation and assistance programmes should focus, inter alia, on strengthening programmes aimed at eliminating prejudice in the teaching of history by emphasising positive mutual influence between different countries, religions and ideas in the historical development of Europe."