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European Muslim communities confronted with extremism

Committee Opinion

Committee on Culture, Science and Education

Rapporteur: Mr Mehmet TEKELİOĞLU, Turkey, Group of the European People's Party

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Culture, Science and Education broadly supports the report by Mr Mota Amaral, Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee. In this context it wishes to recall its own reports and Assembly recommendations on related subjects in the last few years.
2. Emphasis should in our view be placed on the importance of education, both for democratic citizenship, human rights education, education about religions and education to overcome perceived differences (for instance, on the history of others).
3. In our view, in order to avoid extremism directed against Muslim communities living in Europe, these communities should be encouraged to integrate with the local societies. This would prevent Muslim communities from suffering from discrimination connected with social exclusion. However, this integration should not come at the expense of the cultural identity of these communities. Therefore, the cultural identity of these communities should be preserved.

B. Amendments

Amendments to the draft resolution proposed by the committee

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

Paragraph 1, replace: "Islamic fundamentalism" by "Islam".

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

After sub-paragraph 8.5.4 add the following new sub-paragraph:

"removing unnecessary legal or administrative obstacles to the construction of sufficient numbers of appropriate places of worship for the practice of Islam."

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

After sub-paragraph 8.5.4 add the following new sub-paragraph:

"ensuring that school textbooks do not portray Islam as hostile or threatening."



Amendments to the draft recommendation proposed by the committee

Amendment D (to the draft recommendation)

Paragraph 1, replace: “intercultural and inter-religious dialogue” with: “intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension”.

Amendment E (to the draft recommendation)

Paragraph 2: replace the words “conclusion of a memorandum of understanding” with “letter of intent concerning the co-operation”.

Amendment F (to the draft recommendation)

Paragraph 4.1, replace: “intercultural and inter-religious dialogue” with: “intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension”.

Amendment G (to the draft recommendation)

Paragraph 4.2, replace the words “support and actively implement the memorandum of understanding” with “further to the letter of intent”; and add at the end of the same paragraph the words “support the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding between the Council of Europe and the Alliance of Civilizations”

C. Explanatory memorandum, by Mr Mehmet Tekelioğlu

1. The Committee on Culture, Science and Education has been dealing with subjects closely related with the subject of this report for many years. In this context we should like to recall Assembly [Recommendations 1162 \(1991\)](#) on the contribution of the Islamic civilisation to European culture (rapporteur: Lluís Maria de Puig); [1202 \(1993\)](#) on religious tolerance in a democratic society (rapporteur: Leni Fischer); [1396 \(1999\)](#) on religion and democracy (rapporteur: Lluís Maria de Puig); [1687 \(2004\)](#) on combating terrorism through culture (rapporteur: Valeriy Sudarenkov); [1720 \(2005\)](#) on education and religion (rapporteur: André Schneider); [1804 \(2007\)](#) on state, religion, secularity and human rights (rapporteur: Lluís Maria de Puig); and [1805 \(2007\)](#) on blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion (rapporteur: Sinikka Hurskainen).
2. The rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee, Mr Mota Amaral, correctly points out the distinction between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. We wish to go further and point out the distinction between Islam as a religion and some unacceptable practices such as “honour killings”, female genital mutilation and lapidation, which are associated with it.
3. The fact that torture, mutilation and the death penalty can still be carried out by some countries with mostly Muslim populations should also not be directly linked to the religion itself. Clarification over these issues would certainly contribute to a better image of Islam. Even today, we witness the death penalty and allegations of torture in some of the most advanced democracies in the world. Therefore, association of these inhuman practices with one specific religion is not acceptable.
4. While agreeing with the Political Affairs Committee on the need to combat Islamophobia and recognising that freedom of expression is a fundamental right; your rapporteur points out that the abuse of freedom of expression to legitimise discriminatory and hate speech against Muslims should be avoided and the fine line between objective criticism and incitement to hatred or discrimination should be carefully monitored in order not to pressure Muslim communities in Europe into fundamentalism.
5. Stereotypes that present Islam as contradicting fundamental European values must be avoided. In fact, as the report acknowledges, several Council of Europe member states, including my own, have an Islamic tradition. In this context, a debate within the media and advertising professions should be encouraged to avoid prejudice and a biased image of Muslim communities.
6. Emphasis should in our view be placed on the importance of education. Education for democratic citizenship, human rights education – see [Recommendation 1346 \(1997\)](#) – education about religion – see [Recommendation 1720 \(2005\)](#) – and education to overcome perceived differences – see [Recommendation 1682 \(2004\)](#). A report on history teaching of recent conflict is being prepared by Ms Keaveney. Since Europe is the primary destination of many migrants with different backgrounds, a culture of tolerance should be

promoted in Europe through education. Therefore, school textbooks should not present distorted interpretation of religious and cultural history and should not base their portrayal of Islam on perceptions of hostility and menace.

7. It falls on society at all levels (from the school to the media) to avoid promotion of stereotypes and antagonisms.

8. The initiative taken by the Turkish department of religious affairs to commission a team of theologians at Ankara University to carry out a fundamental revision of the Hadith in order to prevent misinterpretations of Islam, should be welcomed and encouraged. Some of the more extremist positions attributed to Islam seem to be based on misinterpretation of texts, such as the view that suicide bombers can be regarded as martyrs and win special rewards in heaven.

9. As underlined in [Recommendation 1804 \(2007\)](#), we do not feel it is for the Council of Europe to interfere in religious dialogue. It should not therefore lay down what is taught in Islamic faith schools or encourage young European Muslims to become Imams.

10. We support the recommendation of the Political Affairs Committee to encourage the development of an intelligentsia which shares the values of the Council of Europe among European Muslim organisations, leaders and opinion makers.

11. The usual reference in Council of Europe documents is to “intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension”, not “intercultural and inter-religious dialogue”.

12. The Council of Europe should indeed increase cooperation in the field of intercultural dialogue with the European Union and other appropriate international organisations which share the same values.

13. Muslim communities living abroad should be encouraged to integrate with the local societies. However, integration of Muslim communities into society and prevention of these people from social exclusion is a bilateral process that requires efforts from the host countries as well.

14. Host countries should take the necessary measures to prevent discrimination of the Muslim communities as to the circumstances in which they organise and practice their religion since religion constitutes an integral part of the cultural identity of these communities. In this context, unnecessary legal or administrative obstacles to the construction of sufficient numbers of appropriate places of worship for the practice of Islam should be removed.

15. A code of conduct should be created to combat any religious discrimination in access to employment and at the workplace.

Reporting committee: Political Affairs Committee.

Committee for opinion: Committee on Culture, Science and Education.

Reference to committee: [Doc. 10705](#) and Reference No. 3145, 7 October 2005.

Opinion: approved by the committee on 14 April 2008. See 13th Sitting, 15 April 2008 (adoption of the draft resolution and draft recommendation, as amended); and [Resolution 1605](#) and [Recommendation 1831](#).