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History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas

Reply¹ to Recommendation 1880 (2009)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has examined Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#) on “History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas”, and has noted the Assembly’s keen interest in this issue. It has brought the recommendation to the attention of the governments of member states to enable them to take it into account in formulating their history teaching policies. It has also communicated the recommendation to the competent committees and bodies for information and possible comments.²

2. The Committee of Ministers recognises the essential role of history teaching in strengthening understanding, tolerance and trust among individuals and peoples in Europe. It considers history teaching as an important means of meeting the challenges of the increasing multiculturalism in Europe, of globalisation in general, and more specifically in conflict or post-conflict situations. The role played by teachers and teacher training is also vitally important.

3. In this connection, the Committee of Ministers recalls the principles set out and the measures advocated in Recommendation Rec(2001)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe. This recommendation stresses that the main aim of history teaching is to help train autonomous citizens in the context of a democratic and multicultural society, citizens capable of conducting critical analysis and research and maintaining open dialogue in the framework of cultural diversity, vis-à-vis the different perceptions and conceptions of history.

4. Furthermore, in adopting Recommendation Rec(2001)15, the Committee of Ministers made specific recommendations on history teaching objectives, contents, methods and teacher training.

5. For a number of years now these principles have provided the basis for the activities implemented in the Council of Europe in the history teaching field. The Assembly will find appended to this reply information on the work conducted in this field by the competent committees.

6. On launching the Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue in May 2008, the Committee of Ministers recalled the terms of the recommendation and stressed the importance of history teaching for acquiring the key competences required for developing intercultural dialogue. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the interest paid by the Assembly in the implementation of the Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. It supports the widest possible dissemination and exploitation of the White Paper, within the Organisation and beyond.

7. The Committee of Ministers informs the Assembly that the recommendations set out in paragraph 22 of its [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#) are to a large extent taken into consideration through the activities carried out by the committees competent in this respect. It underlines, in particular, that the Steering Committee for

1. adopted at the 1080th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (24 March 2010)

2. Steering Committee for Education (CDED), Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), Steering Committee for Culture (CDCULT), Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre).



Education (CDED) has established and is maintaining co-operation with the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, as well as with Euroclio and other non-governmental organisations working in this field.

8. The sharing of good practices is important in helping countries which have experienced conflict. Among the activities being conducted in this field, the Committee of Ministers would highlight in particular the work of the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP) which has addressed the matter of history teaching in regions which have suffered recent political tensions, mainly within the framework of heritage education activities, resulting in the publication “Heritage Education for Europe” (see also Appendix 2 to this reply).

9. The activities referred to by the Assembly which are being implemented under the project “Intercultural Dialogue and the Image of the Other in History Teaching”, particularly at the levels of bilateral and regional co-operation, have also contributed to the information, assistance and confidence-rebuilding efforts. The following activities could be mentioned in this respect:

- the initiative on the history of the Black Sea, which has produced the first teaching pack on the history of the region with the participation of all the countries concerned (Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine);
- teacher training seminars in Northern and Southern Caucasus;
- teacher training seminars and publication of a first teaching pack in three languages (English, Greek and Turkish) on the use of sources in history teaching and learning in Cyprus, produced with the help of history teachers from all the communities involved;
- assistance in laying down guidelines for the drafting and assessment of history books adopted by all the Bosnia and Herzegovina education authorities, leading to the publication of a new generation of history schoolbooks.

The latest event organised in this context was the Symposium on “The Image of the Other in Post-Conflict Situations: Learning Histories for Confidence Building”, which was held at the end of November 2009 at the invitation of the Greek Ministry of Education.

10. A new project entitled “Shared Histories for a Europe without Dividing Lines” has been launched, following directly on from the previous work. In the general spirit of [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#), this project will endeavour to highlight, from the angles of both post-conflict reconciliation and conflict prevention, the positive interactions and common or shared elements of the history of Europe and its relations with other regions of the world, particularly the Mediterranean.

11. Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union is based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed in May 2007. It operates in many fields, particularly under the joint programmes geared to helping various member states to progress along the road to the universal values enshrined by both organisations. The Committee of Ministers firmly encourages the continuation of such co-operation in the various fields of common interest identified in the Memorandum of Understanding.

Appendix 1 to the reply

Comments of the Bureau of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED)

The Bureau of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED):

Having read with great interest Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#) on “History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas”;

Agrees with the Parliamentary Assembly on the importance of history teaching in taking up the challenges of the increasing interculturalism in Europe and of globalisation in general and more particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations;

In this spirit, it is important, either in the intergovernmental programme or as part of the bilateral or regional co-operation activities, to guarantee the development of history teaching policies in accordance with the general guidelines adopted by the Committee of Ministers in Recommendation Rec(2001)15 on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe;

Recalls that for many years now, all its activities in the history teaching field have been based on the principles and guidelines set out in Recommendation Rec(2001)15 of the Committee of Ministers on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe, notably including history teaching in an overall policy of education for democratic citizenship, tolerance and respect for others, sensitivity and awareness, cultural diversity as a common asset, acquisition of analytical and critical skills, listening to others and openness not only to the diversity present in their countries and Europe but also to that noted in other regions and cultures worldwide;

Also recalls that as recommended by the Assembly, many activities, in the context both of implementing the Intergovernmental Project on “Intercultural Dialogue and the Image of the Other in History Teaching” and of bilateral and regional co-operation, have devoted particular attention to producing additional educational material enabling teachers to enrich their teaching methods with multi-perspective approaches, an interactive methodology and co-operation between formal education and other partners in the history-learning process such as museums, cultural centres, the media, etc;

Stresses that since the Committee of Ministers launched the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue in May 2008, the Steering Committee for Education has been even more careful to conduct its activities in the history field in line with the guidelines and principles set out in the Paper;

Recalls that with particular reference to paragraph 16, the activities implemented under bilateral and regional co-operation projects in post-conflict situations (which have been the subject of detailed comments by the Assembly Rapporteur – see [Doc. 11919](#), report by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education) are geared not only to developing strategies for history teaching vis-à-vis sensitive, tragic and controversial subjects, but also, as recommended by the Assembly, to highlighting other dimensions in this context, such as cultural history, the history of lifestyles, of positive interactions, etc;

Agrees with the Assembly that the role played by teachers and therefore by teacher training is vital. This concern has been reflected in a series of activities geared to defining and acquiring new competences linked to implementing interactive and multi-perspective educational approaches in multicultural contexts;

In connection with the recommendations to the Committee of Ministers set out in paragraph 22, stresses that it has established and is maintaining excellent co-operation with the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Euroclio and other non-governmental organisations working in this field;

As regards implementation of the Project “Intercultural Dialogue and the Image of the Other in History Teaching”, the Committee recalls that a symposium on “The Image of the Other in Post-Conflict Situations: Learning Histories for Confidence-Building” was organised in co-operation with the Greek Ministry of Education at the end of November 2009;

Still in connection with intergovernmental co-operation, the Steering Committee for Education also recalls that it has included in its new 2009-2012 programme of activities a project entitled “Shared Histories for a Europe without Dividing Lines”, which, in the general spirit of [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#), will endeavour to highlight, from the angles of both post-conflict reconciliation and conflict prevention, the positive interactions and common or shared elements of the history of Europe and its relations with other regions of the world, particularly the Mediterranean;

Lastly, the Committee confirms its wish to continue and to step up bilateral and regional co-operation activities, notably in Ukraine, Cyprus and the Caucasus, but must stress that these activities can only be partly based on the appropriations included in the Ordinary Budget, as they also heavily rely on voluntary contributions and co-operation with the European Union.

Appendix 2 to the reply

Comments of the Steering Committee for Culture (CDCULT)

The CDCULT welcomes [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#), issued by the Parliamentary Assembly, and confirms that history does play an important role in contributing to greater understanding, tolerance and confidence between individuals and between the peoples of Europe. History teaching is thus a vital tool for supporting peace and reconciliation in conflict and post-conflict areas. It can contribute to tolerance and understanding, including with a view to current challenges posed by globalisation, migration, immigration and changing demographics.

The CDCULT underlines the importance of culture and the opportunities created through cultural activity to build new skills and confidence within the teaching and student population when dealing with controversial issues (cf. point 3). As a matter of fact, culture provides for innumerable possibilities to practically experience multiperspectivity, learn respect for diversity and cultural differences (cf. point 4) and to engage with “the other”.

Museum visits, as quoted in [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#) (cf. point 8), are just one means. The Council of Europe’s online cultural policy information and monitoring system Compendium (<http://www.culturalpolicies.net>) provides a series of examples related to the arts and heritage, as well as to socio-culture, media, language, education and youth in its database on good practices on intercultural dialogue. Interactivity, creativity and openness are major features of cultural activity in favour of multiperspectivity and training of intercultural competences. The sharing of concepts and good practices (cf. point 12) is essential in the CDCULT’s view.

Knowledge transfer and concrete interaction in a regional and cross-regional perspective are an important part of the agenda in the Committee’s support to the “Kyiv Initiative” and the most recent “Artists for Dialogue” project; whilst the “Intercultural Cities” project focuses on local resources and strategies for the management of diversity and strengthening of an intercultural perspective. Intercultural Cities has demonstrated that the management of intercultural relations in areas where violent conflict has taken place requires an honest, inclusive, pluralist review of history and that artists, when they are encouraged and empowered to deal with these painful themes, can contribute much to coming to terms with a difficult past.

The Committee welcomes the proposal set out in [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#) (cf. point 16) to include cultural, philosophical, economic elements and the role of women and minorities to any curricula revision.

Finally, the CDCULT also underlines the importance of training on intercultural competences through cultural, creative arts and arts education activities, in addition to history teaching and curricula focusing on education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage.

The CDCULT wants to underline that the issue of history teaching in regions which have suffered from recent political tensions has also been dealt with by the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP), mainly within the framework of heritage education activities, and resulting in the publication “Heritage Education for Europe” (Armando Editore 2007).

Moreover, Article 7 of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005) invites reflection on the ethics and methods of presentation of the cultural heritage as well as respect for diversity of interpretations by “dealing equitably with situations where contradictory values are placed on the same cultural heritage by different communities”. Work on the interpretation of the heritage aims at perceiving it increasingly as a resource facilitating peaceful coexistence, confidence and mutual understanding, with a view to preventing conflict.

Lastly, the Third Summit project “Cultural identities, shared values and citizenship” (2006-2007) resulted in two publications of interest in the context of [Recommendation 1880 \(2009\)](#): The “Handbook on values for life in a democracy” reflecting the Council of Europe’s work on multiperspectivity in history teaching, and the “European Manifesto for multiple cultural affiliation” dealing with the relationship of populations with their shared history and their ability to transcend past conflicts.

Appendix 3 to the reply

Comments of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR)

The CDESR welcomes the new recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly concerning “History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas”.

The CDESR is aware of the crucial role of history teaching as a tool to support peace and reconciliation in conflict and post-conflict areas. It considers the contribution of higher education to be essential in as much as it plays a primordial role in training and updating the skills and knowledge of history teachers through lifelong and targeted training.

The CDESR follows with great interest the implementation of the Council of Europe project “Intercultural Dialogue and the Image of the Other in History Teaching”.

Several points of the recommendation retained special attention of the CDESR:

The CDESR supports the Assembly's call to all states signatories of the European Cultural Convention to provide adequate and ongoing finance for history research, particularly on multilateral and bilateral commissions on contemporary history (point 20.2). In this respect it recalls Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research, which states that public authorities “should endeavour to ensure that basic research remains a public good, *inter alia* through providing adequate funding of basic research”.³

With due respect to university autonomy, the CDESR also encourages higher education institutions to raise funds for history research, carry out research on best practices and use existing university networks or, if necessary, create new ones to share experiences between countries that lived through conflict.

With regard to point 20.5 of the recommendation on the “what and how to teach”, the CDESR draws the attention of the Parliamentary Assembly to the higher education structural reform carried out in the framework of the Bologna Process, in which the CDESR is actively involved. At the Ministerial meeting, which took place in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve on 28 and 29 April 2009, the Ministers responsible for higher education reasserted “the importance of the teaching mission of higher education institutions and the necessity for ongoing curricular reform geared towards the development of learning outcomes”,⁴ including subject-specific learning outcomes.

The Ministers also stressed that “student-centred learning requires empowering individual learners, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner”. The CDESR considers that the development of learning outcomes for history teaching as well as a full shift to student-centred learning will greatly contribute to better training of history teachers and subsequently step up history teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas.

3. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6.

4. [Bologna Process](#).