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Living together in 21st-century Europe: follow-up to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe

Report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Rapporteur: Mr Latchezar TOSHEV, Bulgaria, Group of the European People's Party

Summary

The Political Affairs Committee welcomes as most timely the report of the Group of Eminent Persons on “Living together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe” and their proposals as a basis for further reflection on Europe’s future, against the backdrop of the Organisation’s ongoing reform process. It notes that on several issues the Group’s findings corroborate positions already taken by the Assembly. The challenge has been, and still is, to ensure implementation.

The present report suggests that the Parliamentary Assembly is ready and willing to contribute to the changes which are needed to ensure greater cohesion in European societies, so that everyone may fully benefit from living together. It therefore proposes that, *inter alia*, the Assembly reflect on ways to overcome the current “crisis of leadership” in Europe; encourage politicians and elected representatives at all levels to speak out on the challenges currently raised by the threats to the European project; reflect on the proposal for an annual Forum against extremism; address the demographic crisis in Europe, as well as continue to address the challenges raised by extremism and the rise of xenophobic or racist parties.

Among many other specific recommendations addressed to the Committee of Ministers in the fields of migration, intercultural dialogue, education, the role of the media, youth and women, as well as social cohesion and gender mainstreaming, the report also recommends that the Committee of Ministers consider launching a major “Campaign on living together” along the lines of the two “All different – all equal” campaigns.

1. Reference to committee: Reference 3752 of 11 March 2011.



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A. Draft recommendation²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly takes note of the Group of Eminent Persons' report on "Living together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe", presented on 11 May 2011, on the occasion of the 121st session of the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul. The Assembly expects that the report will give a fresh impetus to, and generate a higher political commitment for, a range of current and future Council of Europe activities, against the backdrop of the Organisation's reform process.
2. The analysis of the Group of Eminent Persons provides a basis for further reflection on Europe's future which should involve politicians, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions, youth organisations, academics, as well as representatives of religions, the media and local authorities from different backgrounds and countries. On several issues, the Group's findings corroborate positions already taken by the Assembly, while in some cases suggesting different ways of achieving similar goals. The challenge has been, and still is, to ensure implementation in a situation which the Group correctly refers to as a "crisis of leadership".
3. For its part, the Assembly is ready and willing to contribute to the changes which are needed to ensure greater cohesion in European societies, so that everyone may fully benefit from living together. It therefore wishes to share with the Committee of Ministers its own reflections on the matter and propose concrete ways of implementation of the proposals within the remit of its competences and priorities.
4. Europe is multicultural and European peoples have proved their capacity to live together in diversity and build together their common future. Although multiculturalism is facing increasing difficulties at national level in various European countries, the Assembly firmly believes that assimilation is not an alternative. The response to these difficulties is an intercultural approach which implies an active interaction of the culturally different groups within society in order to develop the best model of living together. The strengthening of common European values and identity should be promoted in a way which does not eliminate the different cultures of specific groups, but preserves and incorporates their specificities in the common European framework. This process can be endangered by growing populist, xenophobic and identity politics and similar such rhetoric coined for short-term electoral purposes and the Assembly therefore calls on member states to develop policies to prevent such negative practices.
5. Respect of one's own culture helps to understand the culture of others and accept differences as normal and enriching. Apart from respect for the law as an important part of the democratic culture, other cultural elements should also be taken into account.
6. People coming lawfully to live in a country should not be expected to leave elements of their identity (faith, language, culture, etc.) behind. However, they are expected to show willingness to integrate into the society of their new country, by not only learning its language, but also gaining knowledge and understanding of the local culture, and they must respect democracy, human rights, including the rights of women, and the rule of law. The communities of origin should not ostracise those who choose to change their faith or culture.
7. As the Assembly has stressed time and again, education is the main tool – but not the only one – against misleading information and stereotypes about specific groups. Moreover, education is indispensable to individual and societal welfare and cultural development, without which democracy, human rights and the rule of law would lose their foundations. The capacity to be open to and value diversity is highly dependent on quality education. An emphasis on teacher training should be added to the specific recommendations of the Group of Eminent Persons in this area. The work of the Council of Europe in areas such as education for democratic citizenship or history teaching should be enhanced.
8. In this context, the Assembly recalls the 1999 Committee of Ministers Declaration and Programme on education for democratic citizenship based on the rights and responsibilities of the citizens, and believes that their implementation could substantially contribute to the development of a European spirit within society. It thus urges member states to strengthen the implementation of the 1999 Programme as well as the more recent Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2010, taking concrete steps adapted to their local specificities.
9. The Assembly recalls its [Resolution 1754 \(2010\)](#) on the fight against extremism: achievements, deficiencies and failures, in which it "regrets that the challenge of establishing a more ethical attitude in politics when dealing with issues related to race, ethnic and national origin and religion is still to be met". Elected representatives have a special responsibility to change the situation both as individuals and as members of the bodies to which they are elected, be it at local, regional, national or international level. The Assembly

2. Draft recommendation adopted by the committee on 31 May 2011.

reiterates that politicians have a special responsibility to eliminate from political discourse negative stereotyping or the stigmatising of any ethnic, minority or migrant group, be they present or not within the borders of their states. They should promote a message of non-discrimination, tolerance and respect for people from different backgrounds.

10. The Assembly regrets that, as stated in several passages of the report of the Group of Eminent Persons, women from minority groups are particularly affected by marginalisation. This situation must be addressed as a priority, not only to ensure gender equality but also to strengthen women's potential to act as a bridge between their communities and the society at large, by educating children in a culture of diversity and dialogue and helping them reconcile multiple identities.

11. The Assembly wishes to stress the need to focus on youth and implement youth rights as an investment in Europe's cohesion and future. Youth policies should be at the core of member states' strategies aimed at building up "Living together" societies. In this respect, national authorities should adopt specific measures to encourage youth participation in economic and democratic life, and offer to all young people equal opportunities to contribute to the development and well-being of their societies. In addition, more attention should be paid to the potential of sport as a powerful tool to further intercultural dialogue and living together among young people.

12. The Assembly also stresses the central role the media can play in strengthening democracy, the respect of fundamental rights and the development of culture. It believes that the Council of Europe should strengthen its relations with the media world.

13. The Assembly considers that an important role can and should be played by the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre); appropriate means should be given to it in order to develop a specific comprehensive "Living together" programme, including the educational, intercultural and youth policy dimensions, to support development in non-member countries of the Mediterranean region.

14. The Assembly, prompted by the relevant proposals and recommendations made by the Group of Eminent Persons, resolves, for its part, to:

14.1. initiate its own reflection on ways to encourage politicians and elected representatives at all levels to speak out on the challenges raised at present by the threats to the European project and solidarity;

14.2. pursue reflection on the proposal for an annual Forum against extremism, while keeping in mind the necessity for the Assembly to maintain its capacity for rapid reaction in the face of new disturbing developments;

14.3. consider organising jointly with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), as appropriate, and in co-operation with all relevant sectors of the Organisation and, possibly, the European Parliament, a Conference to take stock of best practices and shortcomings in the implementation of the 2003 Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist society, as well as the 2005 Declaration on the use of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse and the earlier Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (97) 20 on "hate speech";

14.4. consider organising an Assembly campaign to promote the Convention on Nationality (ETS No. 166) and the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144);

14.5. address the issue of ageing societies in Europe, *inter alia* through appropriate family support policies.

15. Recalling that in [Recommendations 1927 \(2010\)](#), [1933 \(2010\)](#) and [1962 \(2011\)](#), the Assembly addressed a number of concrete proposals to the Committee of Ministers with respect to the fight against extremism and the promotion of intercultural dialogue calling for "a new culture of living together", it urges the Committee of Ministers to consider those proposals also in the light of the recommendations of the Group of Eminent Persons.

16. The Assembly further recommends that the Committee of Ministers, in implementing the recommendations of the Group of Eminent Persons, give priority to the following issues:

16.1. promote further the Council of Europe Conventions on Nationality (ETS No. 166) and on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144);

16.2. consider launching a major campaign on "Living together", along the lines of the two "All different – all equal" campaigns;

- 16.3. explore the possibility of enhancing the role of the Council of Europe Development Bank in integration projects in member states;
- 16.4. call on member states to build cultural bridges by encouraging their citizens to familiarise themselves with and respect the culture, language, traditions and history of immigrant groups;
- 16.5. consider the development of guidelines addressing both the rights and responsibilities of migrants and the links between them through, as a minimum, a code of good practice on living together, possibly leading at some stage in the future to a framework convention;
- 16.6. take urgent measures to implement Assembly [Recommendation 1963 \(2011\)](#) on combating poverty, to improve access for people experiencing poverty, in particular from migrant and minority communities, to all human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights);
- 16.7. reinforce all its programmes aimed at assisting member states in the design of sound educational policies and the proper implementation of the right to education, with no discrimination, in particular as regards people from disadvantaged, minority or migrant backgrounds, in order to combat the educational and cultural divide in our societies;
- 16.8. enhance the work of the Council of Europe in the areas of education for democratic citizenship based on the rights and responsibilities of the citizens, which should include education in multiculturalism, and history teaching with a special emphasis on teacher training;
- 16.9. establish pilot projects on intercultural dialogue with local authorities, schools and higher education institutions and media in member states, including, where possible, a multilateral dimension in such pilot schemes;
- 16.10. call on representatives of religions to contribute, when appropriate, to the debates on common values, common heritage, protection of religious freedom, respect for human rights and democratic citizenship, the fight against terrorism, xenophobia and intolerance;
- 16.11. create a regular process to assess the development of intercultural dialogue in member states, including a thematic European forum on intercultural dialogue to be organised periodically;
- 16.12. have regular contacts with the main European media networks, with a view to further implementing the Council of Europe recommendations on training, ethical and content production issues;
- 16.13. fully integrate gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the recommendations of the Group of Eminent Persons;
- 16.14. propose positive measures to member states to avoid the risk of women from minority groups being subjected to double discrimination – compared to men and compared to other women – and to promote their active participation in social, economic and political life;
- 16.15. promote the signature and ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210).

17. The Group of Eminent Persons proposes to appoint a high-level special representative mandated to bring the content of the report to the attention of political leaders and monitor its implementation. In this respect, the Assembly recalls that, in its [Recommendation 1928 \(2010\)](#) on democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives, it proposed that “a high-profile personality, a sort of a Delegate for Democracy, be entrusted with the task of ... disseminating, on a permanent basis, the Council of Europe’s message on democracy-related issues of major current interest”. The Assembly believes that the two proposals are not mutually exclusive and that a possible way forward would be for one and the same person to embrace both the actions proposed by the Group and those proposed by the Assembly and invites the Committee of Ministers to examine this proposal.

18. The Group of Eminent Persons proposes to offer a special status in the Council of Europe to countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores and of Central Asia. The Assembly recalls its status of “Partner for Democracy” for parliaments of countries in neighbouring regions and its Resolution ... (2011) on the request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco and Resolution ... (2011) on the situation in Tunisia. In view of recent developments on the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores, the Assembly wholeheartedly supports ways of bringing countries from that region closer to the Council of Europe.

19. The Assembly resolves to pursue its reflection on this matter, *inter alia* by organising a conference, involving the Secretary General, representatives of the Committee of Ministers and of the Group of Eminent Persons, the rapporteur and other members of its Political Affairs Committee, as well as the rapporteurs of the other committees seized for opinion, in order to deepen and enlarge the debate related to the development of our multicultural societies.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Toshev, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. At the initiative of the Turkish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General appointed, in the summer of 2010, a Group of Eminent Persons, headed by the former German Foreign Minister, Mr Joshka Fischer,³ “to prepare a report on the challenges arising from the resurgence of intolerance and discrimination in Europe”.
2. At the request of the Political Affairs Committee, the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly authorised the committee to prepare a report on “Living together in 21st-century Europe: follow-up to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons”, to be debated at the Assembly’s June 2011 part-session, with the following committees seized for opinion: Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee; Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population; Committee on Culture, Science and Education; and Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The Political Affairs Committee appointed me rapporteur in April 2011.
3. The Group of Eminent Persons’ report on “Living together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe” was presented on 11 May 2011, on the occasion of the 121st session of the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul.⁴
4. This allowed an extremely short period of time to prepare the present report, not least considering that four other Assembly committees should contribute to it.
5. As a consequence, I will make some general and some specific comments on the areas of competence of the Political Affairs Committee, leaving it for the rapporteurs of the other four committees to comment on their respective areas. This is all the more appropriate as the report raises a number of important issues related to migration, the role of the media, as well as, even if to a lesser extent, education, intercultural dialogue, social cohesion and challenges faced by women belonging to the groups mentioned in the report.
6. Mr Martin Hirsch, President of the Civil Agency in France and member of the Group of Eminent Persons, was invited to the committee’s meeting in May 2011 to present the main findings of the Group and respond to our questions. We also invited the rapporteurs of the four committees seized for opinion who were thus able to acquire first-hand information on the discussions in the Political Affairs Committee and inject ideas into the draft recommendation.

2. General comments

7. To begin with, I would like to make it clear that I welcome the report by the Group of Eminent persons as a basis for further reflection on Europe’s future, which should involve politicians, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), youth organisations, academics, as well as representatives of religions, the media and local authorities from different backgrounds and countries.
8. Taking stock of the challenges arising from the resurgence of intolerance and discrimination in Europe, the report analyses “the threat” and proposes “the response” for “living together” in open European societies.
9. Referring to the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Group highlights eight specific risks to values upheld by the Council of Europe: widespread intolerance; growing discrimination (especially against Roma and immigrants); rising support for xenophobic and populist parties; parallel societies; Islamic extremism; loss of democratic freedoms; presence of a population without rights and the potential clash between “religious freedom” and freedom of expression.
10. The report underlines some of the reasons behind “the threat”: insecurity deriving from the Old Continent’s financial crisis and a sense of relative decline; distorted perceptions of large-scale immigration; detrimental stereotypes of minorities in the media and public opinion; and a clear leadership deficit in shaping Europe’s present and future.

3. Besides Joshka Fischer, the Group included Emma Bonino (Italy), Timothy Garton Ash (United Kingdom), Martin Hirsch (France), Danuta Hübner (Poland), Ayşe Kadioğlu (Turkey), Sonja Licht (Serbia), Vladimir Lukin (Russian Federation) and Javier Solana (Spain). The rapporteur was Edward Mortimer (United Kingdom).

4. The text of the report: <http://book.coe.int/ftp/3667.pdf>.

11. “The response” envisages 59 “proposals for action”, the first 17 of which are labelled “strategic recommendations” to European Institutions and their member states. The Group identifies the main actors for change in public attitudes.

12. Amongst its 17 guiding principles, the Group insists on the fact that, provided they obey the law, immigrants should not be “expected to renounce their faith, culture or identity”.

13. It is worth recalling that, in the history of the Council of Europe, several groups of external personalities have been occasionally invited to reflect on major challenges facing European society and to propose initiatives to be taken by our Organisation, as did the Committee of Wise Persons of the 1990s and the “Colombo” Commission set up in the mid-1980s, which were also asked to identify the challenges facing European society and which also formulated a number of recommendations. A slightly different, albeit comparable, exercise was the 2006 Juncker report on the relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

14. We are aware that the society we live in is far from perfect. In recent years, in particular, we have witnessed frequent displays of negative phenomena and deeds which indicate the need not only to reflect upon, but also to act and to do something about our common future. The media keep reporting on displays of intolerance, racism and xenophobia. Manifestations of anti-Semitism have also occurred. Frequently we witness tolerance towards intolerance. Failure to come to someone else’s aid or to attend to strangers’ needs is hardly an exception anymore. Ethnic and religious conflicts still constitute unsettled questions and potential sources of trouble. Egoism, egocentrism, apathy towards social advancement and diminishing voter turnouts should cause serious concern.

15. In 1999, in order to address these negative developments, the Committee of Ministers adopted the Declaration and Programme on education for democratic citizenship, based on the rights and responsibilities of the citizens. I believe that the continuation of their implementation could be a substantial contribution of the Council of Europe to the development of a European spirit within the society. In this respect, a strong impetus given to the implementation of the Council of Europe’s Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2010, could also be very instrumental in achieving this goal.

16. As Ms Brasseur pointed out recently in her report on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, which I commented on in our committee’s opinion, the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – “Living together as equals in dignity” of 2008 is an important contribution by the Council of Europe to the issue of living together.

17. In preparing its report, the Group of Eminent Persons exchanged views with different bodies of the Council of Europe, the European Union, other international organisations and civil society.

18. A number of relevant Assembly documents are quoted in the report, for instance [Resolution 1760 \(2010\)](#) on the recent rise in national security discourse in Europe: the case of Roma⁵ or [Resolution 1754 \(2010\)](#) on the fight against extremism: achievements, deficiencies and failures.⁶ Some other recent texts are also relevant, such as [Resolution 1746 \(2010\)](#) on democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives⁷ or [Recommendation 1962 \(2011\)](#) on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue,⁸ adopted only a month before the publication of the report of the Group of Eminent Persons, in which the Assembly called for “a new culture of living together”.

19. The report has the merit of presenting a comprehensive approach and concrete proposals. Many of the proposals are dictated by common sense and should indeed be followed up. On several issues, the findings corroborate positions taken by the Assembly, while suggesting different ways of achieving similar goals. That said, the main challenge has been and still is to ensure implementation⁹ in a situation which the Group correctly refers to as a “crisis of leadership”. And I believe that the Assembly should in particular play a role in this respect, that is by suggesting concrete ways of implementing proposals in the specific areas dealt with in the report, either by itself, the Committee of Ministers, or other actors. However, I believe that all these steps

5. See [Doc. 12386](#) (rapporteur: Ms Anne Brasseur).

6. See [Doc. 12265](#) (rapporteur: Mr Pedro Agramunt Font de Mora).

7. See [Doc. 12279](#) (rapporteur: Mr Andreas Gross).

8. See [Doc. 12553](#) (rapporteur: Ms Anne Brasseur).

9. See also the address by Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on the occasion of the 121st session of the Committee of Ministers (Istanbul, 11 May 2011).

should not be seen as reflecting a holistic social engineering approach which, in the history of mankind, has never produced other results than disasters. On the contrary, any proposed measures should be adapted taking into account local specificities, on the basis of wide acceptance, understanding and agreement.

20. Values should be cultivated, but not imposed through administrative means. They can be nurtured by education and training at family level, school level and at local level, where the role of media is also essential.

21. The challenges we face today in our society cannot be addressed properly by renouncing the values of European culture. It is a widely spread view that culture forms society. Therefore the society forms citizenship and establishes freedom in its turn. Respect for culture makes it possible to understand the culture of others and to consider the differences as something normal, which enrich society. Respect for the law and the acceptance of free market rules are important elements of culture, but culture is much more than that.

22. To quote an example, among the various specific recommendations, the Group has suggested that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe should appoint a high-level special representative to bring the content of the report to the attention of political leaders and to monitor its implementation.

23. I would recall in this context that, in its [Resolution 1746 \(2010\)](#) and [Recommendation 1928 \(2010\)](#) on democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives, the Assembly had proposed that “a high-profile personality, a sort of a Delegate for Democracy, be entrusted with the task of leading and animating the Strasbourg Democracy Forum, as well as disseminating, on a permanent basis, the Council of Europe’s message on democracy-related issues of major current interest”. I believe that the two proposals are not mutually exclusive and that a possible way forward would be for one and the same person to embrace both the actions proposed by the Group and those proposed by the Assembly. The Committee of Ministers, which has not so far taken position on the Assembly’s proposal, could reflect on this possible way forward. In any event, the Assembly is supportive of the idea of a Task Force to be set up by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for ensuring coherence in the implementation of the recommendations of the report within the Organisation and is ready to be associated with it.

24. The demographic crisis, which is also one of the outstanding issues for Europe, could be addressed by pro-family and pro-life policies – issues to which the Assembly has contributed through numerous resolutions and recommendations.

25. Concerning the proposal by the Eminent Persons to offer a special status in the Council of Europe to countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores and of Central Asia, I should like to recall that the Assembly recently created the status of Partner for Democracy for parliaments of countries in these regions and has organised six Interparliamentary Conferences of the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins, which offered the opportunity for a constructive dialogue between representatives of the non-European states from this region and the Assembly. So far, Morocco and the Palestinian National Council have officially requested the status of “Partner for Democracy” and the report by my colleague Luca Volontè on the Moroccan request will be debated by the Assembly at its June 2011 part-session. In addition, my colleague Jean-Charles Gardetto is currently preparing a report on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the emerging democracies in the Arab world. In view of the recent developments on the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores, I believe that the Assembly should support ways of bringing countries from this region closer to the Council of Europe as a whole. The Assembly should also continue its dialogue on these issues within the United Nations framework as part of a dialogue between Europe and the rest of the world.

3. Multiculturalism and integration

26. Diversity and integration policies have faced a backlash in many Western democracies, particularly in Europe. They remain, however, a popular idea at the international level, actively promoted by influential international organisations, including the Council of Europe. The European model is multicultural by definition. At the Congress of Europe, in The Hague in 1948, the founding fathers of Europe made it clear that the people from central and eastern Europe had their place in a United Europe, once they were liberated from the communist dictatorships and achieved democracy. Since the destruction of the Berlin wall by the people of Germany in 1989, important changes have taken place in eastern Europe, but also in Western societies. As a consequence, the Council of Europe has expanded to 47 and the European Union to 27 member states. Currently the new member states and their citizens are in a process of active dialogue with the other members of the European family. The cohesion between Western and Eastern Europe and the North and South of the continent is still in progress.

27. The preservation of cultural differences of the various European nations goes hand in hand with the participation of all of us in a common European culture, which should not annihilate national cultures but incorporate them in a harmonious way.

28. Due to the great number of immigrants to Europe, many more cultural traditions are present on the European territory, from Asia, Africa and South America, which are very different from the traditional European cultures. Radical Islam has played its role in fuelling the fears of Europeans of little known newcomers.

29. In respect mainly to these newcomers, the political leaders of Germany (Angela Merkel's speech to members of the Junge Union, Potsdam, 16 October 2010), the United Kingdom (David Cameron, speech to the Security Conference in Munich, 5 February 2011) and France (Nicolas Sarkozy, Interview, *Paroles de Français* – TF1, 11 February 2011) have, in recent times, cast doubt about multiculturalism in almost identical terms and in particular the perceived failure of national multicultural models in these states, which, according to such leaders, have not led to an acceptable state of living together.

30. In the German case, when the *Gastarbeiters* started to come to Germany in the 1950s-1970s, mostly from Turkey, they did not intend to remain there for a long time. Their plan was to return to Turkey after 10 years or so. But the large German employers were not keen to train their workforce over and over again and the contracts of their workers were prolonged. This led to the permanent settlement of whole families, which remained even after retirement, thus forming a community. The concept of the German Greens widely spread in Europe under the slogan "Multikulti" was based on the understanding that the different cultures should be respected and these people would integrate themselves in society provided the necessary conditions were met. Therefore the previous German governments did not pursue an active approach to integrating the Turkish community in German society. And today some members of such communities have formed self-isolated groups.

31. This is a clear example why a multicultural approach was not an adequate solution and should be replaced by an intercultural approach comprising an active interaction between the national society of the state and the groups which have different cultures. Integration and preservation of cultural differences should be promoted instead of assimilation, which is not at all an alternative solution to the problem.

32. Refusing to assess and properly address the existing problems might lead society to such negative developments as extreme nationalism, populism and xenophobia.

33. The report of the Group of Eminent Persons rightly points out that identities are multiple and that no one should be forced to choose one, to accept one or to exclude another. People coming to live in a country should indeed not be expected to leave elements of their identity (faith, language, culture, etc.) behind, but they are expected to add new elements to it, including, but not limited to, the language of their new country. Nor should they be ostracised within their communities of origin should they choose to change their faith or culture.

34. European societies are rightly criticised for not performing well in integrating members of minority groups (with a special emphasis on immigrants and Roma). However, efforts towards living together must come from both sides and here I see a role for education for all.

35. The report rightly states that people coming to live in a new country must obey the law and that neither religion nor culture can be accepted as excuses for not doing so. Obeying the law is the minimum expected from all those living in a country, but obviously it is not enough for real integration in society.

36. Some immigrants, however, bring to Europe some attitudes which are incompatible with the values upheld by our Organisation. Even if they are only a tiny minority among immigrants and persons from recent immigrant descent, such attitudes contribute negatively to the stereotypes about some immigrant groups.

37. As the Assembly has stressed time and again, education is the main tool – but not the only one – against misleading information and stereotypes about specific groups. An emphasis on teacher training should be added to the specific recommendation of the Group in this area. The work of the Council of Europe in areas such as education for democratic citizenship or history teaching should be enhanced.

38. In its [Resolution 1746 \(2010\)](#), the Assembly called on Council of Europe member states to "improve citizenship education and political training by ensuring compliance with the new Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, as well as implementing the Council of Europe's programmes in the field of democratic citizenship and human rights education".

39. I agree with the Group that “no religion should be considered to be *a priori* incompatible with European values”, but some practices associated by many with some religions are indeed incompatible with such values. It is the role of politicians, the media and also religious leaders to state very clearly which is which.

40. As the Group of Eminent Persons rightly states, “under no circumstances can respect for group identity or religious belief be invoked to justify the exclusion of girls from any form of education which is available to boys, or the seclusion of adult women from normal interaction with society outside their home”.

41. Human rights are not negotiable. In its [Resolution 1510 \(2006\)](#), the Assembly stated that “freedom of expression as protected under article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights should not be further restricted to meet increasing sensitivities of certain religious groups”. More generally, we could state that the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as set forth in the Convention, must not be restricted for the sake of multiculturalism.

4. The role and responsibilities of politicians

42. The report of the Group of Eminent Persons raises legitimate concern about the fact that “In recent months, anti-immigration parties have notched up impressive gains, including in countries with a reputation for liberal politics and tolerant electorates. Over the last two years, election results and polling data in a wide range of European countries have shown an increase in voter support for movements which claim to be defending the interests and culture of the 'indigenous' majority against immigration and the spread of Islam”.

43. In its [Resolution 1746 \(2010\)](#), the Assembly noted that “populist, extremist and identity politics, as well as nationalistic rhetoric, have been reinforced during recent years under crisis conditions in many member states”. The Assembly further expressed its concern about a dual trend in Europe whereby, on the one hand, extreme right-wing parties are being elected into national parliaments in growing numbers and, on the other, mainstream parties, in an attempt to detract their voters from turning to far-right parties and regain popular support, are borrowing some of the radical, xenophobic and discriminatory language of extremist parties.¹⁰

44. At the same time, it can be acknowledged that mainstream political parties, by increasingly refusing to address the fears (even if unfounded) of an increasing part of the population concerning immigration and Islam, or addressing these fears to an insufficient extent, are partly responsible for such an increase in support for xenophobic and populist parties. The cases of Islamophobia should be addressed, as the Assembly proposes in its [Recommendation 1927 \(2010\)](#) and [Resolution 1743 \(2010\)](#).

45. The growing complexity of the contemporary challenges and policies (for example migration policy, policies aimed at tackling intolerance and discrimination and policies to combat terrorism) has the effect of encouraging a tendency to “dumb down” complicated policy issues in public discussions. Politicians are confronted with a gap between complex and technical issues, and the need for policy to be formulated in more catchy terms in order to enlist popular support. This results in a gap, perhaps even a gulf, between policy principles and policy as depicted in party political debates and the mass media.

46. In order to reverse the trend, mainstream political parties and politicians should certainly not compete on anti-immigrant rhetoric, but should address with honesty the concerns of their constituents.

47. Against this background, I do agree with the Eminent Persons when they “urge all political leaders, while striving to respond convincingly to real and legitimate public concerns about excessive or irregular immigration, to resist the rise of xenophobic or racist parties and take care not to seek political advantage by inciting or playing on public anxiety about migrants or members of minorities”.¹¹ Equally, I would underscore the call addressed in this context to the Assembly with respect to the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society, signed by its President and the President of the European Parliament in 2003. In this context, I would like to underline that, in its [Resolution 1754 \(2010\)](#) on the fight against extremism: achievements, deficiencies and failures, adopted less than a year ago, on 5 October 2010, the Assembly, regretting “that the challenge of establishing a more ethical attitude in politics when dealing with issues related to race, ethnic and national origin and religion is still to be met”, recalls this Charter as well as the Declaration on the use of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse, adopted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in 2005, which “it commends for their relevance”. In its [Resolution 1760 \(2010\)](#) on the recent rise in national security discourse in Europe: the case of Roma, adopted

10. See in particular the report on the political consequences of the economic crisis, [Doc. 12282](#) (rapporteur: Mr Emanuelis Zingeris), as well as [Resolution 1760 \(2010\)](#) and [Resolution 1754 \(2010\)](#), *op. cit.*

11. See proposal for action No. 49 of the report with respect to “Political extremism, racism, xenophobic and anti-migrant discourse”.

two days later, the Assembly further urges political parties, political forces and political and public figures in member states, international groupings of political parties and its own members to commit themselves to adhering to, and actively implementing and promoting the principles contained in the Charter.

48. As regards the more specific recommendation for the Assembly “to nominate a rapporteur on political extremism, and to organise an annual forum on extremism – perhaps to be called the Stieg Larsson colloquium”,¹² this proposal merits further reflection.

49. For my part, I would like to contribute to this reflection by recalling recent reports of the Assembly, emanating from our committee, which deal with the issue of political extremism, the latest ones being the reports of Mr Agramunt and Ms Brasseur which led to the adoption of [Resolutions 1754 \(2010\)](#) and [1760 \(2010\)](#) quoted above. My preliminary assessment is that, by reacting in a timely manner on the events of summer 2010, the Assembly’s message against extremism was perhaps more effective than an annual forum which, with time, might become a somewhat routine exercise.

50. It is also worth recalling that every two years the Assembly holds a general debate on the state of democracy in Europe and, as has been illustrated by the examples I quoted from Mr Gross’s report on democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives, in the context of last year’s debate on democracy, such Assembly debates are often devoted to issues related to the fight against political extremism. The practice of democracy debates on the one hand, and the possibility of reacting at any moment and rapidly to specific cases of concern, on the other, provide, in my view, a good basis for the Assembly’s contribution to the fight against political extremism.

51. Moreover, as indicated above, in [Resolution 1746 \(2010\)](#) and [Recommendation 1928 \(2010\)](#), the Assembly proposed that “a high-profile personality, a sort of a Delegate for Democracy, be entrusted with the task of leading and animating the Strasbourg Democracy Forum, as well as disseminating, on a permanent basis, the Council of Europe’s message on democracy-related issues of major current interest”. I believe that this high-profile personality would also be responsible for reacting rapidly to cases giving rise to concern. I refer in this respect to the comments I made above in paragraph 19.

52. A number of other concrete proposals in the field of the fight against extremism were addressed by the Assembly, to the Committee of Ministers in [Recommendation 1933 \(2010\)](#). As the Committee of Ministers has not yet adopted its reply to this recommendation, I do not want to repeat the proposals, but to use this opportunity to call on the Committee of Ministers to consider them also in the light of the Eminent Persons’ recommendations

53. For its part, the Assembly, prompted by the two recommendations made by the Group on “political extremism, racism, xenophobic and anti-migrant discourse”, could organise, jointly with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance as appropriate, and in co-operation with all relevant sectors of the Organisation and, possibly, the European Parliament, a Conference to take stock of best practices and shortcomings in the implementation by member states of the 2003 Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist society, as well as the 2005 Declaration on the use of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse, and the much earlier Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (97) 20 on “hate speech”.

54. I note that the report of the Group of Eminent Persons identifies nine groups of “actors for change”, namely educators, mass media, employers and trade unions, civil society, churches and religious groups, celebrities and “role models”, towns and cities, member states and European and international institutions, but does not specifically mention the role of politicians. While it may be understood that the report is effectively addressed to politicians and, as a group, they may be automatically considered as “actors for change”, it would have nonetheless been good to include them as an additional group.

55. Elected representatives are indeed very much responsible for changing the situation both as individuals and as members of the bodies for which they were elected, be it at local, regional, national or international level.

56. As the Assembly stressed in its [Resolution 1760 \(2010\)](#) on the recent rise in national security discourse in Europe: the case of Roma, “politicians have a special responsibility to eliminate negative stereotyping or stigmatising of any minority or migrant group from political discourse. They should promote a message of non-discrimination, tolerance and respect for people from different backgrounds”.

12. See proposal for action No. 50.

57. For its part, the Parliamentary Assembly is more than ready and willing to contribute to the changes which are needed for greater cohesion in European societies, so that everyone may fully benefit from living together.