



Recommendation 1086 (1988)¹

Situation of the Church and freedom of religion in Eastern Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recalling its past work on freedom of thought, conscience and religion in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and its Resolutions 730 (1980) and 787 (1982), calling for an end to all restrictions on the practical expression of freedom of religion in all the countries concerned ;
2. Noting its subsequent work on the CSCE process, with particular reference to Principle VII of Basket I of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 (during the period prior to the commencement of the current Vienna Review Conference in November 1986), which continued to be subjected to violation with the widespread harassment, discrimination and persecution of Christians, Jews and Muslims in all the countries concerned ;
3. Noting in particular its Resolutions 845 (1985) and 898 (1988) on the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union, which confirmed that Jewish emigration remained at a low level in comparison with a decade ago, [Resolution 830 \(1984\)](#) on the situation of minorities in Romania, which noted with alarm reports of serious injustices to persons belonging to religious minorities, and [Resolution 846 \(1985\)](#) on the situation of ethnic and Muslim minorities in Bulgaria, which expressed concern at the deprivation of ethnic and religious rights ;
4. Encouraged by the reform movement initiated by Secretary General Gorbachev, which has included in its stated aims greater openness and tolerance and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion ; encouraged in particular by the release of a large number of religious prisoners, the greater role being accorded the Orthodox Church in public life and in official ideology, the registration of hitherto illegal groups and communities, the restoration of Church property, the opening of new churches, and the announcement of the building of the first new Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Moscow since the Revolution ;
5. Noting that, in this the year of the millennium of Christianity in Russia, errors in dealing with the Church during the Stalin and Brezhnev eras have been admitted by the Soviet Government, but regretting that the Pope, as head of the second largest Christian denomination in the Soviet Union, was not invited to visit the Soviet Union to share in these celebrations ;
6. Noting that Article 52 of the Soviet Constitution guarantees each citizen freedom of conscience, but allows only the conduct of atheist propaganda, effectively denying the equal promotion of religious faiths ; that this is reflected in the constitutions of all the other East European countries ; and that laws and regulations effectively control churches and religious organisations, and curtail the freedom of movement and action for clergy and believers, who are subject to regulation and control by departments and councils of religion ;
7. Welcoming, however, recent pronouncements that laws governing Church-state relations in the Soviet Union are to be reformed, and hoping that similar reforms in the other East European countries will lead to a real and lasting freedom of religion without discrimination, intimidation and bureaucratic harassment for all religious believers ;

1. Assembly debate on 5 and 6 October 1988 (12th and 13th Sittings) (see [Doc. 5944](#), report of the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries, Rapporteur : Mr Atkinson). Text adopted by the Assembly on 6 October 1988 (13th Sitting).



8. Concerned, however, that despite these trends and the recent release of over two hundred prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union, there remain at least two hundred known individuals in labour camps, prisons, psychiatric hospitals and in internal exile for their religious beliefs, and many more whose names are not known ; that there are many religious prisoners in Albania, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and to a lesser extent in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia ; and that there remain many imprisoned conscientious objectors to military service on religious grounds in Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia ;

9. Welcoming the progress made by the governments of Council of Europe member states participating at the CSCE Review Conference in Vienna in providing for more effective implementation of Principle VII of Basket I, on freedom of thought, conscience and religion,

10. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the governments of the Council of Europe member states to take the necessary steps to ensure that the concluding document of the CSCE Review Conference in Vienna will in particular provide for :

- 10.1. the right of religious associations to unhindered existence and recognition under the law ;
- 10.2. the right to practise religion and associate in churches, private homes and dwellings and in public, without the need for official approval ;
- 10.3. the right to free election of church officers and bodies without interference ;
- 10.4. the right of religious associations to combine anywhere within the territory of the state ;
- 10.5. the right to erect, purchase or hire churches and prayer centres without the need for official approval ;
- 10.6. the right of ownership of churches, liturgical objects and donations ;
- 10.7. the right to public freedom of religious opinion on an equal footing with anti-religious propaganda ;
- 10.8. the right to print and distribute religious literature without the need for official approval ; in particular, the right to print religious works in the necessary quantities, or to import them ;
- 10.9. the right to operate pastoral work without restriction anywhere in the territory, particularly in hospitals, old people's homes and prisons ;
- 10.10. the right to run religious education for children and young people, and to organise youth groups ;
- 10.11. the right to operate charitable aid schemes, particularly through collection, relief funds, etc. ;
- 10.12. the right to erect and run educational centres for ministers without official interference, and for free selection of candidates for the ministry ;
- 10.13. the right to run religious courses and congresses without official permission being required ;
- 10.14. the right of parents to bring up their children in a religious manner ;
- 10.15. the right to contact with sister churches and religious associations abroad by correspondence, exchange of literature and participation in congresses, etc. ;
- 10.16. the right to contact with sister churches and religious associations abroad by correspondence, exchange of literature and participation in congresses, etc. ; the right to freedom from discrimination on religious grounds, particularly in housing, social security, employment, education and academic life, as well as in the exercise of civil, civic and political rights ;
- 10.17. the right of Churches and religious associations to uncensored access to the mass media (press, radio, television), and to broadcast religious services on Fridays, Saturdays or Sundays and at major religious festivals ;

11. Urges the Committee of Ministers to ensure that any human rights conference that takes place in Moscow or in any COMECON country within the CSCE process includes discussion on the above rights as a contribution towards a wider understanding by all participating states of religious freedom.