

Recommendation 1162 (1991)¹

Contribution of the Islamic civilisation to European culture

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Council of Europe has the statutory mission to safeguard and realise the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of its member states. Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights enshrines the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
2. Multicultural Europe is based on humanist and religious traditions, which are the source of its dedication to freedom and human rights, as recalled by the Assembly in [Resolution 885 \(1987\)](#) on the Jewish contribution to European culture.
3. In a similar spirit, the Committee on Culture and Education held a colloquy in Paris in May 1991 on the contribution of the Islamic civilisation to European culture. The colloquy was organised in collaboration with the Western Institute for Islamic Culture (Madrid) and in association with Unesco.
4. The colloquy showed that, in addition to Christianity and Judaism, Islam in its different forms has over the centuries had an influence on European civilisation and everyday life, and not only in countries with a Muslim population such as Turkey. The new Europe as well is becoming increasingly subject to influences from Islam, not only through the regions of predominantly Islamic culture such as Albania or some southern republics of the USSR, but also by immigration from the wider Islamic world.
5. It must indeed be recognised that the Islamic world also embraces countries from Asia and Africa as well as the Middle East and the Maghreb.
6. Islam has, however, suffered and is still suffering from misrepresentation, for example through hostile or oriental stereotypes, and there is very little awareness in Europe either of the importance of Islam's past contribution or of Islam's potentially positive role in European society today. Historical errors, educational eclecticism and the over-simplified approach of the media are responsible for this situation.
7. The main consequence of such misrepresentation, to which many contemporary Muslims have contributed through their own lack of critical intellectual examination or intolerance, is that Islam is too often perceived in Europe as incompatible with the principles which are at the basis of modern European society (which is essentially secular and democratic) and of European ethics (human rights and freedom of expression).
8. While this incompatibility certainly does exist, as between Islamic fundamentalism and the cultural and ethical principles which the Council of Europe upholds, for example in regard to the treatment of women and respect for freedom of expression, it is not representative of Islam as a whole. It must be recognised that intolerance and distrust unfortunately exist on both sides, Islamic and non-Islamic.
9. The Assembly is aware of this situation, of the need for a better knowledge of the past so as better to understand the present and prepare the future, and of the valuable contribution that Islamic values can make to the quality of life through a renewed European approach on an overall basis to the cultural, economic, scientific and social fields.

1. Assembly debate on 19 September 1991 (11th Sitting) (see [Doc. 6497](#), report of the Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteur: Mr de Puig). Text adopted by the Assembly on 19 September 1991 (11th Sitting).



10. Greater attention moreover should be given to co-operation with the Islamic world. The Council of Europe has already done a considerable amount of work on intercultural understanding and this should be further developed with specific reference to Islamic culture. Further co-operation should be sought with non-governmental institutions and organisations in this field, such as the Western Institute for Islamic Culture in Madrid, the Paris Institute for the Arab World and others.

11. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers find room for consideration of the Islamic world in the intergovernmental programme of activities of the Council of Europe and in its recommendations to the governments of member states. The following measures are proposed: In the field of education :In the field of education

11.1. A balanced and objective account of the history of Islam should be included in education curricula and textbooks along the lines of the international research project: "Islam in textbooks".

11.2. There should be wider provision for the teaching of Arabic as a modern language in European schools

11.3. Scientific research on Islamic matters should be encouraged, inter alia, by increasing the number of Arabic and Islamic professorial posts in universities. Islam should also be included in mainstream studies, for example Islamic history should be taught in history departments, Islamic philosophy in philosophy departments and Islamic law in law departments, and should not be relegated, as is often the case, to oriental language departments

11.4. Similarly, in theology courses, a comparative approach should be encouraged, including Islamic, Christian and Jewish studies.

11.5. An integrated teaching approach should be adopted to specific areas such as the Mediterranean basin, including studies on religion, philosophy, literature and history.

11.6. Student and teacher exchanges should be set up and developed within a framework of university co-operation between Europe and the Islamic world, along the lines of [Recommendation 1032 \(1986\)](#) on the creation of a Euro-Arab University. This could be called the "Averroës programme" in comparison with the existing "Erasmus" and "Demosthenes" programmes. In the field of the media

11.7. The production, co-production and broadcasting of radio and television programmes on Islamic culture are to be encouraged. In the field of culture

11.8. Places of cultural and intellectual expression are needed for immigrants from the Islamic world. The development of their own culture, however, should not entail their isolation from the society and culture of the host country

11.9. Cultural itineraries of the Islamic world inside or outside Europe and cultural exchanges, exhibitions, conferences and publications in the fields of art, music and history should be encouraged. Museums have an important role to play in this respect.

11.10. Selected Islamic works, classic and modern, should be translated and published in a manner more conducive to greater understanding in Western society. Administrative questions and everyday life

11.11. Governments should encourage dialogue between Islamic communities and the competent authorities to provide for the religious requirements of their faith (such as holy days, prayer rules, dress and food), while respecting the customs of the host country, in addition to the usual provisions for the association and representation of immigrant and indigenous Islamic communities.

11.12. The twinning of towns between Europe and the Islamic world, especially those which are geographically closer to Europe, should be encouraged. In the field of multilateral co-operation

11.13. A real effort is necessary to provide a basis for a continuing dialogue between Europe and the Islamic world with a view to the reinforcement and development of all democratic and pluralistic tendencies. Particular attention can be given to direct co-operation with specific parts of this world, for example with the Arab countries around the Mediterranean (as a contribution to the possible development of a conference on security and co-operation in the Mediterranean) or with immigrant communities within Europe.

11.14. A positive dynamic should be given to this dialogue by tackling in future seminars key issues such as Islamic fundamentalism, the democratisation of the Islamic world, the compatibility of different forms of Islam with modern European society and, in general, the new problems posed by religions in contemporary society, whether the secular societies of the West or the traditional societies of the Third World. The problems posed by Islam should be examined in the same perspective as those posed by

Christianity, by Judaism and by other religions in the world. Such studies will more surely help forward the historical process of the democratisation of traditional societies thanks to a broadening of the cultural horizons on which they are based.

11.15. The Assembly also asks the Committee of Ministers to invite interested countries of the Islamic world to take similar initiatives on a reciprocal basis and, wherever appropriate, to accede to Council of Europe conventions and open partial agreements, with a view to harmonising legislation and developing intercultural understanding.