Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1202 (1993)[1]

Religion tolerance in a democratic society

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly has already adopted a number of texts on related subjects and recalls in particular Recommendation 963 (1983) on cultural and educational means of reducing violence, Resolution 885 (1987) on the Jewish contribution to European culture, Recommendation 1086 (1988) on the situation of the Church and freedom of religion in Eastern Europe, Recommendation 1162 (1991) on the contribution of the Islamic civilisation to European culture, and Recommendation 1178 (1992) on sects and new religious movements.

2. Attention should also be drawn to the hearing on religious tolerance held by the Committee on Culture and Education in Jerusalem on 17 and 18 March 1992 and to the colloquy marking the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Jewish refugees in Turkey held on17 September 1992 in Istanbul.

3. Religion provides an enriching relationship for the individual with himself and his god, as well as with the outside world and the society in which he lives.

4. Mobility within Europe and migratory movements to Europe have always resulted in the meeting of differing world views, religious beliefs as well as notions of human existence.

5. This meeting of differing religious beliefs can lead to greater mutual understanding and enrichment, although it could also result in a strengthening of trends towards separatism and encourage fundamentalism.

6. Western Europe has developed the model of secular democracy within which a variety of religious beliefs are in theory tolerated. History has shown, however, that such tolerance is also possible under a religious government (for example the Arabs in Spain and the Ottoman Empire).

7. It is a matter of concern that in numerous countries there has been a renewed occurrence of xenophobia, racism and religious intolerance.

8. Religion often reinforces, or is used to reinforce, international, social and national minority conflicts.

9. There is a recognisable crisis of values (or rather the lack of them) in present-day Europe. The pure market society is revealed as inadequate as was communism for individual well-being and social responsibility. The recourse to religion as an alternative has, however, to be reconciled with the principles of democracy and human rights.

10. In the context of current and future social trends and the growing pressures of multicultural communities, inadequate attention has so far been given to promotion of religious tolerance.

11. In each of the three main monotheistic religions a basis can be found for tolerance and mutual respect towards people with differing beliefs or towards non-believers. Every human being is viewed as the creation of the one God and, as such, is due the same dignity and the same rights, regardless of his convictions.

12. The question of tolerance between religions has to be further developed. The three monotheistic religions should be encouraged to give greater emphasis to those basic moral values that are essentially similar and tolerant.

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1. Assembly debate on 2 February 1993 (23rd Sitting) (see Doc. 6732, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteur : Mrs Fischer). Text adopted by the Assembly on 2 February 1993 (23rd Sitting).

13. European history shows that the co-existence of Jewish, Christian and Islamic cultures when based on mutual respect and tolerance have contributed to the prosperity of nations.

14. The universal importance of religious freedom, as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, has to be reaffirmed. This freedom is rooted in the dignity of man and its realisation implies the realisation of a free, democratic society.

15. The secular state should not impose any religious obligations on its citizens. It should also encourage respect for all recognised religious communities and ease their relations with society as a whole.

16. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers call upon the governments of the member states, the European Community as well as the responsible authorities and organisations :

Legal guarantees and their observance :

16.1. to guarantee religious freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of worship with specific reference to the rights indicated in Assembly Recommendation 1086 (1988), paragraph 10 ;

16.2. to allow for flexibility in the accommodation of different religious practices (for example in dress, eating and observance of holy days) ;

Education and exchanges :

16.1. to ensure that studies of religions and ethics are part of the general school curriculum, and to work towards a differentiated and careful depiction of religions in school books (including history books) and in classroom teaching with a view to achieving a better and deeper understanding of the various religions ;

16.2. to emphasise that a knowledge of one's own religion or ethical principles is a prerequisite for true tolerance and that it might act also as a safeguard against indifference or prejudice ;

16.3. to establish a "religious history school-book conference" consisting of a representative selection of theologians, historians and philosophers for the purpose of compiling basic texts, documents and commentaries for teaching in schools ;

16.4. to make it possible to present to young people the ideas and deeds of living individuals of different religious beliefs as examples of religious tolerance in practice ;

16.5. to facilitate, in the framework of existing exchange programmes for secondary school students, university students and other young people, meetings and discussions with informed persons of differing beliefs ;

16.6. to promote inter-religious encounters and organisations that serve the purpose of furthering mutual understanding between religions and thereby peace and respect for human rights ;

16.7. to consider the provision of similar facilities for the religious schools of all recognised religions ;

Information and "sensibilisation" :

16.1. to ensure that fundamental religious texts and related literature are translated and made available in public libraries ;

16.2. to organise cultural projects on religious issues in the context of cultural promotion programmes ;

Research :

16.1. to facilitate the development of a network of research institutes in Europe which would :

collect, analyse and evaluate literature on religious tolerance ;

provide an information service with a good selection of this literature ;

organise workshops and research conferences on religious tolerance ;

serve as a competent and authoritative source of public information ;

16.2. to stimulate academic work (seminars, degree courses, doctoral dissertations) in European universities on questions concerning religious tolerance.