



Recommendation 1239 (1994)¹

Cultural situation in the former Yugoslavia

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe is witnessing with disbelief, outrage and great sorrow the collapse of European civilisation and values in the parts of the former Yugoslavia affected by the conflicts that have developed following the initial Serbian aggression in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia.
2. The loss of human life and the physical and mental suffering of those involved have already attracted the attention of the world community and the many humanitarian organisations that exist.
3. The Assembly wishes now to draw attention also to the cultural aspects of the situation that have been too readily ignored in the political assessment of the conflict and in the over-restrictive interpretation of the scope of humanitarian assistance.
4. The cultural dimension is, however, constantly exploited by all sides as a means of fuelling the conflict, as a target for intervention, and as a weapon. The war is characterised as a conflict between Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox; religious property is deliberately desecrated or destroyed; the media play on and exacerbate these same divisions, that are not part of the power struggle at the heart of the conflict. Cultural cleansing goes hand in hand with ethnic cleansing.
5. The siege of Sarajevo and the deliberate destruction of the Old Bridge of Mostar are particularly repugnant examples, as they represent direct rejection of the possibility of intercultural co-existence that these cities represented. Such cultural co-existence is basic to the values of the Council of Europe and to the plan of action currently being launched for tolerance.
6. The cultural dimension and the spirit of tolerance remain alive in the former Yugoslavia and must urgently be given support. Recommendations
7. The Assembly welcomes the mission that has been set up by Unesco for all the areas covered by this recommendation. It looks forward to the mission becoming operational and calls on the Committee of Ministers to ensure close co-ordination with any action by the Council of Europe.
8. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers also recognise the cultural dimension as an area for urgent international intervention in the former Yugoslavia and that it press for co-ordinated action by the Council of Europe, by other competent international bodies (including Unesco) and by member states.
9. One priority is that intergovernmental bodies in the area (the European Community Monitor Mission (ECMM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR)) should recognise and pay attention to the cultural dimension. The Committee of Ministers should, through the appropriate channels, encourage these bodies that are responsible for assuring the conveyance of material and personnel to accept the inclusion of material and persons relevant for assistance in the cultural field and ensure that governments provide them with the means to do so. The ECMM in particular should be encouraged to develop its role of monitoring (in co-operation with the local monument authorities) and ensuring the flow of this information and of assisting fact-finding missions in the cultural field (heritage and others).

1. Assembly debate on 14 April 1994 (15th Sitting) (see [Doc. 6989](#), report of the Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteur: Mrs Fischer). Text adopted by the Assembly on 14 April 1994 (15th Sitting).



10. Another priority is that the Committee of Ministers extend recognition as successors to the European Cultural Convention to all the states of the former Yugoslavia without exception. This is necessary in order to ensure that these states are properly consulted on decisions and action that may concern them in the field covered by the convention.
11. A third priority is increased funding for cultural action in the areas affected by conflict. This should not be left to the generosity of the general public nor to certain private initiatives. In the light of the commitment given at the Vienna Summit to promotion of tolerance, the Committee of Ministers should ask the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance to develop practical projects for promoting intercultural co-existence in the former Yugoslavia.
12. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers initiate action in the following more specific fields: Cultural heritage.
13. All is not yet destroyed, but much is damaged. Temporary protection can be provided, but materials are lacking, and assistance in damage assessment and the drawing up of priority intervention plans is needed. Measures should in particular be taken for the safeguarding of moveable cultural property.
14. Plans have to be made, and funds collected, for the much more extensive reconstruction that will only be possible once fighting has moved away from an afflicted area. Where practicable and appropriate, reconstruction should then be begun, as in the region of Vukovar where the example of private initiatives in other areas could be followed.
15. Member states should make experts available to assist in the training and organisation of restoration work conducted by the national and local bodies responsible.
16. The plan of action established by the Cultural Heritage Committee of the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) for Croatia and Slovenia should be reinforced to include questions of regional planning and should be extended to other parts of the former Yugoslavia.
17. The Committee of Ministers should also set up an appropriate structure to monitor the illegal dispersal of works of art moved from the former Yugoslavia in the course of the current conflict.
18. It should give its support to the international effort to reconstitute the National and University Library of Sarajevo and should provide assistance for the administrative staff.
19. The Assembly draws the attention of the Committee of Ministers to the information reports that the Committee on Culture and Education has issued over the past year. It believes that its monitoring of the situation has served a useful purpose, but asks that it be given a more permanent and substantial basis. Independent media.
20. Basic material assistance is urgently needed to keep the independent media functioning: fuel for generators, paper, blank cassettes and other equipment for television, radio and the printed press.
21. Support should be given to practical projects, such as the networking of independent correspondents in the whole area (AIM) and the Co-ordination Centre in Ljubljana. Through the appropriate channels, the Committee of Ministers should invite the United Nations authorities to provide technical support systems for the media for independent news broadcasting under the supervision of "media blue helmets".
22. The continuing conflict has seriously impaired educational provision in the areas affected. Schools and universities have been damaged; staff need replacement or retraining. Yet it is essential that classes and courses continue for the sake of the children and students concerned.
23. A different problem is faced by the children and students who have been moved outside the areas of fighting. As far as possible, they should be able to continue their education in the refugee camps or at least in the neighbourhood, where tuition in their own language can more easily be provided.
24. In conjunction with local groups responsible for education and organisations such as Unicef, programmes for peace education, tolerance and co-existence should be developed.
25. In addition, for students with foreign language capabilities, the governments of all member states should be invited to assist universities in taking in students from the affected area. This assistance should take the form of both financial and administrative aid.

26. A degree of flexibility should be shown in recognising refugee student status and in the administration of education and related assistance. On the other hand return to the area of origin, once the conflict is over, should be retained as a basic principle.
27. The Assembly endorses the proposals adopted by the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education in Madrid in March 1994 regarding the situation of refugee or displaced pupils and students in the former Yugoslavia.
28. It calls on the Committee of Ministers:
 - 28.1. to seek, in co-operation with the European Union, with Unicef and with Unesco, ways of assisting school children and reconstructing the education systems in the former Yugoslavia;
 - 28.2. to collaborate with universities and interested non-governmental bodies in assistance to the universities and to refugee or displaced students of the former Yugoslavia;
 - 28.3. to encourage member states to contribute to the special account opened within the Cultural Fund. The arts and artists
29. Cultural life continues in the countries affected by the fighting and in particular in Sarajevo, which is again holding its Winter Festival. The cultural community of writers and artists throughout Europe supports this activity and so does the Assembly. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe should give its support where that of the European Union has proved so sadly lacking.
30. Of particular importance is the establishment and maintenance of cultural corridors for artists and their works between the affected areas and the outside world.
31. The Council of Europe, in co-operation with Unesco, should examine the possibility of setting up a foundation for commissioning artists of various disciplines to depict the drama of the former Yugoslavia. Other authorities
32. The Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the leaders of the different religions affected by the current conflict to play a more active role in pressures for peace, tolerance and intercultural understanding.
33. The Assembly recognises the importance of European solidarity at local and regional levels. It welcomes the action being taken by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe further to its [Resolution 251 \(1993\)](#) on humanitarian action and aid to local democracy in the former Yugoslavia, and calls on the Committee of Ministers to provide means for reinforcing the co-ordination of such action in the cultural field, in particular through twinning arrangements. Implementation
34. Finally, the Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to report regularly on the implementation of these recommendations.