Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1401 (1999)[1]

Education in the responsabilities of the individual

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The European Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have made a major contribution to human rights protection for European citizens. However, the general situation in Europe with regard to human rights is far from satisfactory.

2. The Council of Europe Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance showed that disrespect for and violations of human rights are not only a matter of government policies but also depend on the attitudes of ordinary citizens in everyday life.

3. The Assembly has repeatedly advocated education as one of the most effective ways of preventing negative attitudes towards others and of promoting a culture of peace among all groups in society.

4. As the exercise of fundamental freedoms entails responsibilities, the Assembly recognises the need to take steps to promote both education in the responsibilities of the individual and awareness on the part of citizens of their responsibilities, within the context of human rights education, so as not to neglect the social aspect of these rights.

5. Bearing in mind the increasing prevalence of intolerance, racism and xenophobia, the Assembly believes that education in the rights and, at the same time, in the responsibilities of the individual should be taken much more seriously in all Council of Europe member states. It is particularly important to strengthen citizens' awareness with regard to their responsibilities towards themselves and others, as well as towards society as a whole.

6. On the occasion of the 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held in Strasbourg in October 1997, the participants expressed their commitment to developing education for democratic citizenship, based on both the rights and responsibilities of citizens. The heads of state decided that efforts should be made to strengthen awareness among citizens of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society.

7. In Recommendation 1346 (1997) on human rights education, the Assembly stated its belief that human rights education should be considered as a priority for the intergovernmental work of the Council of Europe in the years to come.

8. The Assembly is convinced that awareness of citizens' responsibilities should be raised through education, and that it is not the role of a democratic state to dictate rules for every aspect of human behaviour, since moral and ethical attitudes must remain an area in which the individual has freedom of choice, but always respecting the rights of others.

1. See Doc. 8283, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur: Mr Martelli. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 30 March 1999.

9. In view of the need to integrate education in the responsibilities of the individual into the existing programmes (human rights education, education in democratic citizenship), and given that the awareness of European citizens with regard to their rights and responsibilities is far from satisfactory, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on member states :

9.1. to include in school curricula, from primary schools to higher education, information designed to alert pupils and students to the importance and the substantive contents of human rights, including their social dimension and each person's obligation to respect the rights of others. In higher education, the teaching should include legal subject-matter;

9.2. to prepare similar initial and in-service training programmes for adults such as teachers, public officials and particularly police officers, prison staff and those responsible for refugees and asylum seekers;

9.3. to prepare similar programmes aimed at raising the awareness of immigrants and asylum seekers about the human rights to which they will be entitled and the responsibilities that must be assumed in the country where they settle;

9.4. to encourage, through schools, universities and non-governmental organisations' activities, a positive climate of understanding of and respect for the qualities and cultures of others, applying the rules of participatory democracy by promoting direct participation, for example, through pupils' councils or parliaments;

9.5. to develop documentation and information programmes, in particular on the Internet, aimed at raising awareness of human rights and duties among as wide a public as possible;

9.6. to bear in mind that all initiatives and programmes should take account of fundamental values, particularly as expressed in the European Convention on Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Social Charter and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Everyone should, inter alia:

a. fully respect the dignity, value and freedom of other people, without distinction of race, religion, sex, nationality, ethnic origin, social status, political opinion, language or age; everyone must act towards others in a spirit of fellowship and tolerance;

b. act peacefully without recourse to physical violence or mental pressure;

c. respect the opinions, privacy and personal and family life of other people;

d. show solidarity and stand up for the rights of others;

e. in practising his or her own religion, respect other religions, without fomenting hatred or advocating fanaticism, but rather promoting general mutual tolerance;

f. respect the environment and use energy resources with moderation, giving thought to the well-being of future generations.

10. In addition, the Assembly believes that it is necessary to step up the Council of Europe's action in this field, and recommends that the Committee of Ministers consider human rights education and awareness-raising, including respect for the rights of others and the corresponding responsibilities, as a priority for the intergovernmental work of the Council of Europe in the years to come, and consequently:

10.1. instruct the Council for Cultural Co-operation to assist in raising citizens' awareness of their rights and responsibilities by taking this aspect into account as part of its project on "education for democratic citizenship";

10.2. organise a colloquy in order to study more deeply the concept of responsibilities/obligations and ways of integrating education in the responsibilities of the individual into the existing programmes;

10.3. at international level, establish close co-ordination between the Council of Europe, the European Union, the United Nations, Unesco and non-governmental organisations in the field of education in the rights and responsibilities of the individual;

10.4. refrain from interfering in citizens' private lives by prescribing rules of behaviour which could infringe on individual freedoms, recognising that every person must be responsible for his or her own moral and ethical behaviour as long as this responsibility does not jeopardise the rights of others;

11. The Assembly in particular recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on governments of member states to encourage political parties and professional organisations of journalists to set up training courses for members, given the considerable influence exercised by elected representatives and the mass media on public attitudes.

12. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to take into consideration the proposals set out in this recommendation when adopting and implementing the declaration and programme on education for democratic citizenship based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

13. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to mention particularly in its declaration on education for democratic citizenship the need for political institutions to set up programmes for adults and society in general in order to develop awareness of democratic duties and responsibilities.

14. Lastly, the Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to inform it on a regular basis of progress made in implementing these recommendations.