



## Recommendation 1687 (2004)<sup>1</sup>

# Combating terrorism through culture

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Faced with the growing terrorist threat in the world, the Parliamentary Assembly stresses the need for an overall approach to combating terrorism, combining cultural with political, economic, legal and social methods. It is not a matter here of confusing blind terrorism and its innocent victims with what are sometimes acts of resistance to oppression and violation of human rights.

2. Culture in all its aspects – the arts, heritage, religion, the media, science, education, youth and sport – can play an important role in preventing the development of a terrorist mentality, in dissuading would-be terrorists and in cutting them off from wider support. Its importance in this respect is, however, often underestimated.

3. The basis for any cultural action against terrorism lies in understanding the complex and delicate relationship between terrorism and its cultural context.

4. The Assembly stands resolutely against attempts to qualify any specific world, national, regional or local culture as terrorist. At the same time, under certain conditions, any society is capable of producing terrorism. Extremist interpretation of elements of a particular culture or religion, such as heroic martyrdom, sacrifice, apocalypse or holy war, as well as secular ideologies (nationalist and revolutionary), can also be invoked to justify terrorist acts.

5. Culture is, however, also becoming increasingly a target of terrorism. Beyond the physical damage or destruction of monuments, temples or symbols of a given culture and way of life, such terrorist acts target the very cultural identity of a people or a population. They also harm a cultural heritage that is common to all peoples of the world.

6. Globalisation and the information society allow unprecedented contact and interaction between peoples, ideas and cultures. Some aspects of it, however, can potentially foster terrorism and the ideologies that encourage it in several ways:

6.1. the gap is increasing between rich and poor nations and populations. Poverty, oppression, disrespect for human rights, a sense of injustice and the lack of brighter prospects provide a breeding ground for all kinds of violence;

6.2. the world dominance of western culture in its most commercial forms, based on violence, money and sex, is perceived by more traditional societies as deeply offensive and in sharp contradiction with the high democratic standards which it is supposed to reflect;

6.3. the global village created by the modern media and the Internet means that never before have terrorist acts gained such public prominence. Terrorist acts thus appear to extremists as the most efficient and “cost-effective” means of getting a message through;

6.4. modern information technologies have also allowed far better communication and networking of terrorist groups, leading to a new form of international terrorism with an “a-territorial” and “a-cultural dimension”, even if affiliation is claimed with a particular territory or culture;

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1. (see [Doc.10341](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Sudarenkov). Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 23 November 2004



- 6.5. dependence on information technologies has led to the appearance of cyberterrorism, threatening the functioning of modern life through manipulation of computer systems.
7. The Assembly welcomes responsible media portrayal of terrorist acts and handling of the public debate on terrorism, and encourages further discussion between media professionals on the relevant professional ethics.
8. Greater acceptance of terrorism is linked to the acceptability of violence as a means of conflict resolution in society in general, which the Assembly deplures.
9. It is becoming vital to consider education not purely in quantitative but in qualitative terms, as a means of transmitting not only knowledge but also values, and as a means of developing a critical mind. Education should also offer individuals the possibility of participating fully in the development of a democratic, just and equitable society in which terrorism has no place.
10. A further challenge of education is to improve mutual understanding between different groups and cultures. The main aim of any cultural action aimed at combating terrorism should be to create a culture of tolerance, dialogue, understanding, respect and pluralism. This, in turn, would reduce the heroic aura surrounding terrorists and help eradicate public acceptance of terrorist acts.
11. The Assembly notes that several Council of Europe projects have promoted such goals, for instance projects on education for democratic citizenship, on history teaching, on combating violence or on intercultural dialogue and conflict prevention. It also welcomes the Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention adopted by the European Ministers of Culture in Opatija on 22 October 2003, the Declaration on Intercultural Education in the New European Context adopted by the European Ministers of Education in Athens on 12 November 2003 and the ongoing work on a declaration on freedom of expression and information in the context of the fight against terrorism. There is, however, a need for further and more concerted action by the different sectors of the Organisation.
12. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
  - 12.1. include relevant provisions on the role of culture in a future comprehensive Council of Europe convention against terrorism, as already recommended by the Assembly;
  - 12.2. ensure co-ordinated action between the Council of Europe bodies involved in the fight against terrorism and in culture;
  - 12.3. organise a European conference on combating terrorism through culture with the involvement of other European and international bodies;
  - 12.4. make intercultural and interreligious dialogue and conflict prevention one of the main areas of activity of the Council of Europe and provide for this in the action plan and in the final declaration to be adopted by the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe;
  - 12.5. develop, or further strengthen, projects aimed at:
    - a. encouraging reflection and research on terrorism and culture, in order to understand better and monitor the causes and development of terrorism;
    - b. developing educational programmes aimed at promoting better knowledge of different cultures and religions, ensuring that this extends beyond the European dimension;
    - c. continuing its work on history teaching and the revision of school books, extending it to the countries neighbouring Europe, in order to reduce prejudice and stereotypes and remove incitements to terrorism;
    - d. encouraging discussion on terrorism among the younger generation; supporting international youth work as a way of giving concrete expression to intercultural dialogue; further developing youth projects on conflict prevention and the promotion of a culture of peace;
    - e. developing human rights education and education for citizenship, thereby creating better understanding of human rights and of the ways of protecting them;
    - f. ensuring that states, in their policy towards the media and the Internet, strike the right balance between protection of human rights and the fight against terrorism;
    - g. guaranteeing in all member states an appropriate legal and political framework for free expression and true representation of all opinions, political views, religious beliefs and cultural minorities;

- h.* developing intercommunal cultural activities as a way of relieving tension between communities;
  - i.* promoting understanding and tolerance by encouraging the distribution of cultural and audiovisual works from other parts of the world and supporting mobility and exchanges of artists, performers, scholars and scientists;
- 12.6. design cultural projects targeting specific critical areas of tension and potential terrorism in Europe;
- 12.7. support and actively contribute to the creation of international instruments on cultural diversity, co-operation and dialogue;
- 12.8. enhance dialogue and cultural co-operation between European and neighbouring countries, along the lines of Assembly [Resolution 1313 \(2003\)](#) and [Recommendation 1590 \(2003\)](#) on cultural co-operation between Europe and the south Mediterranean countries.