



Resolution 1652 (2009)¹

Attitude to memorials exposed to different historical interpretations in Council of Europe member states

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The totalitarian regimes and wars of 20th-century Europe have left behind a number of graves and memorials which have acquired divergent historical and political connotations since the collapse of these regimes and the subsequent revision of history in the countries in which they are located. In recent years, several such memorials have been relocated or demolished, in particular in the former Soviet bloc countries. At the same time, new and controversial commemorative monuments have been erected, provoking fierce political disputes both internally and at international level. In broader terms, the question of how to make peace with the past while facing up to the challenges of the 21st century is of common concern to all European countries that have experienced totalitarian regimes or have been subjected to foreign occupation.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that disputes relating to divergent interpretations of history can only be resolved with time and through a process specific to each nation. In this regard, the Assembly recalls its [Resolutions 1096 \(1996\)](#) on measures to dismantle the heritage of former communist totalitarian systems, [1481 \(2006\)](#) on the need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes and [1495 \(2006\)](#) on combating the resurrection of Nazi ideology, and [Recommendation 1736 \(2006\)](#) on the need for international condemnation of the Franco regime, and reiterates its conviction that, in order to enable individual Council of Europe member states to come to terms with the controversies of their recent past, Europe must unequivocally reject and unreservedly condemn all forms of dictatorial regimes such as National Socialism, fascism and totalitarian communism.
3. The decisions adopted by Council of Europe member states on the fate of controversial monuments have taken extremely varied forms: in some cases demolition, in others relocation to museums or new open-air museum parks; some monuments have been preserved as they stood and others (buildings or complexes, for instance) preserved but given a new function or converted into museums, sometimes dedicated to the victims of the regimes which built them.
4. The Assembly, while drawing attention to its [Recommendation 898 \(1980\)](#) on memorials, which suggests conserving “monuments set up by invaders or by a regime regarded as oppressive or hated” in museums as an alternative to their demolition, expresses its belief that the final decision on the fate of such memorials is a sovereign one of the state in which the monument is located; it should, nevertheless, be based on the norms of international conventions and bilateral agreements.
5. In this context, however, the Assembly deems it necessary to distinguish between war graves and victory monuments erected to glorify totalitarian regimes or former occupation forces – or at least perceived as such by the majority population. It underlines that, where graves and burial sites containing the remains of foreign soldiers and war victims are concerned, national decisions must fully abide by the respect for the dead, often victims rather than occupiers, and bilateral or multilateral agreements, notably Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts.

1. *Assembly debate* on 29 January 2009 (8th Sitting) (see [Doc. 11746](#), report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Eörsi). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 29 January 2009 (8th Sitting). See also [Recommendation 1859 \(2009\)](#).



6. The Assembly regrets that to date there is no complete list of war graves located on the territories of Council of Europe member states. It recalls its appeal made to the Committee of Ministers almost thirty years ago in [Recommendation 898 \(1980\)](#), to engage in a general study of memorials in member states which might lead, *inter alia*, to proposals on systematic recording, on protection against destruction or on responsibility for upkeep. The Assembly reiterates the need to draw up a common database in order to better protect burial sites and to further facilitate the conclusion of new bilateral agreements between member states. Furthermore, the Assembly encourages the development of good practice comprising consultation of any member state concerned, prior to the taking of any action to exhume foreign soldiers and war victims, even outside the framework of existing agreements.

7. Because of the controversial nature of such memorials, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member states to initiate the broadest possible discussions between historians and other experts on the complexity of the historical background of these monuments, their meanings to different segments of the societies, internally and, if appropriate, internationally.

8. The Assembly emphasises the need for deeper mutual understanding and for conciliatory action to prevent memorials of disputed symbolic significance becoming a source of tension in intra-state relations. It appears vital to seek consolidation of all major political forces representing different approaches when discussing the fate of such memorials, with a view to reaching sustainable final decisions based on the opinion of the majority. Similarly, the Assembly underscores that under no circumstances should memorials become tools for advancing foreign policy goals or increasing tensions in third states.

9. In the light of the above, the Assembly invites Council of Europe member states to:

9.1. initiate the broadest and most inclusive possible debate about the fate of memorials exposed to different interpretations, involving historians, active members of civil society and political leaders, and organising conferences, colloquies and seminars on the subject;

9.2. support the creation of a European centre of expertise to help member states with historiographical and archaeological investigation and elucidation of memorials;

9.3. welcome the establishing of a common database including a complete list of war graves and memorials within the territory of Council of Europe member states, and, to this end, open up all national archives that may contain relevant information on the location of burial places in full compliance with Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (2000) 13 on a European policy on access to archives;

9.4. consider creating historical museums and provide these with support;

9.5. continue to honour their commitments under bilateral or multilateral treaties on the maintenance and conservation of monuments, including those containing the remains of foreign soldiers or war victims;

9.6. consider concluding such treaties where none exist;

9.7. consult the relatives or the states concerned and relevant NGOs before exhuming any foreign soldiers or war victims buried on their territories;

9.8. avoid and condemn any form of provocation around memorials, in particular as this may entail sharp confrontations between different segments of society in these countries.