Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2647 (2026)[1]

Countering discrimination based on religion and protecting freedom of religion or belief in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that freedom of religion or belief, which includes the right not to hold a religious belief or affiliation, is not only a fundamental right but also a vital element of any democratic system. By fostering pluralism, the freedom of religion promotes peaceful living together as equals in Europe's culturally diverse societies. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as protected under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, "the Convention"), is a cornerstone of the Council of Europe's human rights protection system.

2. Equality and the absence of discrimination are essential preconditions for the effective enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief. Member States should guarantee the effective enjoyment of this right by everyone, without discrimination based on religious affiliation or any other ground.

3. The increasing number of manifestations of exclusion and intolerance on the grounds of religion across Europe is a reason for serious concern. Referring to its Resolution 2447 (2022) "Preventing and combating antisemitism in Europe", its Resolution 2457 (2022) "Raising awareness of and countering Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism, in Europe" and its Resolution 2069 (2015) "Recognising and preventing neo-racism", the Assembly considers that member States should step up efforts to prevent and counter all forms of racism and intolerance that misrepresent cultural differences, notably religious affiliation, as a cause of supposed incompatibility between minority groups and European societies.

4. The Assembly notes that manifestations of religious intolerance in Europe often appear to be linked to conflicts occurring in other regions and to reflect heightened tensions in those regions. In the wake of the terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 and the conflict in Gaza, there has been a significant resurgence of antisemitism, and many European countries have recorded an increase in antisemitic incidents, with an exponential increase of not only acts of violence and physical attacks but also hate speech on social media, as noted by international bodies including the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The same international bodies have also recorded an increase in Islamophobic incidents. The Assembly affirms that no individual shall be held responsible, on the basis of their actual or perceived religious affiliation or belief, for acts committed by others purportedly in the name of that religion or belief.

5. The Assembly highly values and supports the work of ECRI, which is instrumental in promoting equality and inclusion in today's diverse Europe. ECRI's recommendations should be fully implemented by public authorities across Council of Europe member States. The Assembly further supports the action of all the bodies that operate to prevent and counter discrimination, and the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and all forms of religious intolerance, in view of the importance of promoting peaceful living together in response to the challenges that Europe is facing today. It recommends that actions in this area take into account the full diversity of religious beliefs and communities.

6. Referring to its Resolution 2076 (2015) "Freedom of religion and living together in a democratic society", the Assembly reiterates that member States should ensure that religious communities and their members are able to exercise their right to freedom of religion without impediment or discrimination, in

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 April 2026 (13th sitting) (see Doc. 16373, report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Mr Francesco Verducci). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 April 2026 (13th sitting).

accordance with Article 9 of the Convention, as well as the right to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly. This includes the possibility to practise their faith publicly and freely, in places of worship designed for that purpose or in other places accessible to the public, and to make their opinion publicly known without being subjected to censorship or intimidation.

7. The Assembly also reiterates that education is key to combating ignorance, breaking down stereotypes and bias, and building trust and mutual respect, and that schools should promote constructive dialogue between individuals of different beliefs, whether religious or secular, as a basis for building and strengthening a democratic society.

8. The Assembly refers to the activities carried out by the Council of Europe in the area of religious education, which argues for an integrated approach to spiritual, religious, moral and civic values. It reiterates that religious education can be a powerful tool for preventing and countering religious intolerance and discrimination, and for promoting peaceful living together and social cohesion. To this end, religious education must be based on pluralism and be objective and non-confessional.

9. The Assembly emphasises that religious education should make an important contribution to a democratic society. It further recognises that religious communities have a great responsibility, when passing on their faith, to convey not only their own beliefs but also respect for other religions and religious convictions. It further calls on parents, in raising their children, and on all types of denominational religious education institutions, to teach respect for other religions and world views, and to ensure that religious education contributes to peaceful coexistence and social cohesion.

10. Referring to its Resolution 2036 (2015) “Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians”, the Assembly notes that intolerance and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief affect both majority and minority religious groups in Europe; it observes that the expression of faith is sometimes unduly limited by national legislation and policies; and it highlights the need to identify practical ways to make religious observance possible in the workplace and other settings. These practical ways constitute a pragmatic means of ensuring the effective and full enjoyment of freedom of religion, allowing all religious groups to live in harmony.

11. The Assembly highlights the special responsibility of public figures to speak out against religious hatred and all other forms of intolerance. It stresses that political leaders and representatives should refrain from any instrumentalisation, manipulation, misrepresentation or other misuse of religion or belief, whether to stigmatise or exclude individuals or groups or to obtain an electoral or other advantage.

12. The Assembly also notes with particular concern that violations of freedom of religion or belief may be linked to situations of armed conflict and foreign occupation, including in the context of the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, where reports indicate the suppression of religious pluralism, restrictions on non-aligned religious communities and the misuse of religion for political purposes by occupation authorities.

13. The Assembly is deeply concerned that religion is increasingly being weaponised and used as a tool of propaganda and hybrid warfare, as referred to in its Resolution 2540 (2024) “Alexei Navalny’s death and the need to counter Vladimir Putin’s totalitarian regime and its war on democracy”.

14. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States, observers and partners for democracy:

14.1. with regard to research and data collection, to:

14.1.1. collect data on intolerance and discrimination on the grounds of religion, disaggregated by characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, nationality and religious affiliation of victims;

14.2. with regard to education, information and awareness raising, to:

14.2.1. provide religious literacy training for public officials, law-enforcement officers and the judiciary, in order to facilitate the identification of cases of discrimination on the grounds of religion and the consistent enforcement of freedom of religion or belief;

14.2.2. provide teachers in schools with training and guidance on religion, based on a pluralist and inclusive approach, with a view to fostering respect and mutual understanding, and preventing conflicts;

14.2.3. strengthen co-operation with media organisations to promote fair and accurate representation of religious beliefs and lifestyles in the media, and to counter negative stereotyping and stigmatisation based on religion or belief, without encroaching on the independence of the media;

14.3. with regard to co-operation with civil society and religious organisations, to:

14.3.1. ensure fair and equal treatment of religious communities and organisations in all administrative formalities, in particular by establishing clear, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures for recognition, based on objective criteria, which are applied within reasonable time limits and subject to effective review;

14.3.2. strengthen consultation and communication with religious communities and civil society organisations in the drafting of legislation that could directly or indirectly affect the freedom of religion of any individual or group;

14.3.3. promote interreligious dialogue, with a view to fostering mutual understanding and preventing discrimination, and endeavour to include representatives of the widest possible range of religions or beliefs;

14.4. with regard to harmful language in public and political discourse, to:

14.4.1. urge legislators and political leaders to abstain from using stigmatising and discriminatory language or making political use of religion, and consider adopting effective tools to prevent and counter these practices;

14.5. with regard to the protection of freedom of religion or belief in situations of armed conflict, to:

14.5.1. ensure that violations of freedom of religion or belief linked to situations of armed conflict and foreign occupation are effectively monitored, documented and addressed at national and international levels.

15. The Assembly welcomes the action of the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance and reiterates its call for national parliaments to establish parliamentary groups dedicated to preventing and countering racism, intolerance and hatred.

16. The Assembly calls on political parties to sign the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist and Inclusive Society, as endorsed in its Resolution 2443 (2022) “The role of political parties in fostering diversity and inclusion: a new charter for a non-racist society”, and to enforce it in their internal functioning and their public action.