Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1178 (1992)[1]
Final version

Sects and new religious movements

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly is concerned at certain problems connected with the activities of sects and new religious movements.

2. It has been alerted by various associations and families who consider that they have been harmed by the activities of sects.

3. It has taken account of the invitation, given to the Council of Europe by the European Parliament in the Cottrell report, to consider this problem.

4. It has asked all the member states to indicate what practices they follow and what the legal problems are.

5. It considers that the freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights makes major legislation on sects undesirable, since such legislation might well interfere with this fundamental right and harm traditional religions.

6. It considers, however, that educational as well as legislative and other measures should be taken in response to the problems raised by some of the activities of sects or new religious movements.

7. To this end, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on the member states of the Council of Europe to adopt the following measures :

7.1. the basic educational curriculum should include objective factual information concerning established religions and their major variants, concerning the principles of comparative religion and concerning ethics and personal and social rights ;

7.2. supplementary information of a similar nature, and in particular on the nature and activities of sects and new religious movements, should also be widely circulated to the general public. Independent bodies should be set up to collect and circulate this information ;

7.3. consideration should be given to introducing legislation, if it does not already exist, which grants corporate status to all sects and new religious movements which have been registered, together with all offshoots of the mother sect ;

7.4. to protect minors and prevent abductions and transfers abroad, member states which have not yet done so should ratify the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children (1980), and adopt legislation making it possible to implement it ;

7.5. existing legislation concerning the protection of children should be more rigorously applied. Additionally, those belonging to a sect must be informed that they have the right to leave ;

1. Assembly debate on 5 February 1992 (23rd Sitting) (see Doc. 6535, report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Rapporteur : Sir John Hunt ; and Doc. 6546, opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteur : Mr de Puig). Text adopted by the Assembly on 5 February 1992 (22nd Sitting).

7.6. persons working for sects should be registered with social welfare bodies and guaranteed social welfare coverage, and such social welfare provision should also be available to those deciding to leave the sects.