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## Education and religion

Recommendation 1720 (2005)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers  
adopted at the 965<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (24 May 2006)

1. The Committee of Ministers has examined Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1720 (2005) on education and religion with great interest. It considers the subject matter to be in keeping with the fundamental aims of the Council of Europe. It also notes that the recommendation is in line with the general thinking underlying most Council of Europe activities, including those of its Steering Committee for Education (CDED), especially its work on education for democratic citizenship.
2. The recommendation follows the same logic as the Declaration on "Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy" adopted by the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education at its 21st session in Athens in 2003. In this context, the Committee of Ministers would also refer to the project carried out by the CDED on "The new challenge of intercultural education: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe", which reflects both the aim of promoting intercultural education and the need for schools to deal specifically with the aspect of religion. The Committee of Ministers draws attention to the outcome of the work carried out under this project and the publications and teaching materials produced for use by teachers, particularly the "Compendium of successful activities related to the religious dimension of intercultural education in schools".
3. The Committee of Ministers refers to the declaration adopted at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, in Warsaw, in May 2005, in which the Heads of State and Government reiterated their "commitment to the common values and principles which are rooted in Europe's cultural, religious and humanistic heritage".
4. The Committee of Ministers would also refer to the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue, adopted in November 2005 at the closing conference of the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, in which the Ministers:
  - emphasised that the Organisation has an essential role to play in the systematic development of intercultural dialogue advocated at the Third Summit;
  - expressed their commitment "to ensuring that diversity is a source of mutual enrichment, by promoting political, intercultural and interreligious dialogue";
  - called for new dialogue between Europe and its neighbouring regions, i.e. the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Asia, particularly by developing human rights, democratic citizenship and civil participation education programmes and promoting knowledge of history, cultures, arts and religions.
5. The Committee of Ministers would like to highlight the importance of the Declaration of Intent signed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Director General of UNESCO on the setting up of an open platform of inter-institutional co-operation for intercultural dialogue and of the co-operation agreements with the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO).

6. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers has adopted and transmitted to the Parliamentary Assembly in early April 2006 "Guidelines for drawing-up the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue". It is expected that the White Paper will be ready in time for the European year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008.

7. Finally, the Committee of Ministers refers the Assembly to the comments of the Chair of the Steering Committee for Education contained in his opinion on Recommendation 1720 (2005), set out in the appendix to this reply.

*Appendix to the reply*

**Opinion of the Chair of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED) on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1720 (2005) on education and religion**

The Chair of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED):

1. having taken note with great interest of Recommendation 1720 (2005) on education and religion, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly;
2. considers the subject to be in keeping with the Council of Europe's fundamental aims and to be one of the priority issues it deals with;
3. welcomes the fact that the recommendation is in line with the general thrust of the Steering Committee for Education's activities, particularly those on education for democratic citizenship and human rights;
4. notes with great satisfaction that the recommendation is consistent with the Declaration on "Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy" adopted by the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education at its 21st session in Athens in 2003;
5. refers to the declaration adopted at the Third Summit in Warsaw in May 2005, in which the Heads of State and Government reiterated their "commitment to the common values and principles which are rooted in Europe's cultural, religious and humanistic heritage";
6. calls to mind the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue, adopted in November 2005 at the closing conference of the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention;
7. refers to the Declaration of Intent signed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Director General of UNESCO on the setting up of an open platform of inter-institutional co-operation for intercultural dialogue and the co-operation agreements with the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO);
8. with regard to paragraph 13 in particular:
  - refers to the Action Plan of the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held in Warsaw in May 2005, which calls for the enhancement of all opportunities for the training of educators in the fields of education for democratic citizenship, human rights, history and intercultural education;
  - stresses the importance of the "Pestalozzi" programme for the training of trainers and education professionals, which will include training activities on intercultural education and religious diversity;
  - points out that a more specific project in the CDED activity programme entitled "Policies and practices for teaching socio-cultural diversity" will examine the initial education provision for teachers, taking account of diversity, including religious diversity, in a number of higher education institutions in member states;
  - reiterates the interest of CDED in setting up a network, a centre or a pole of excellence for the training of education staff in the Council of Europe's spheres of competence such as education for

democratic citizenship and human rights, history teaching and intercultural education. Training for teachers on education about religion could be featured more prominently in the centre's programme;

9. endorses the criteria, listed in paragraph 14 of the recommendation, on the basis of which governments should be encouraged to ensure that religious studies are taught. In order to foster impartiality (paragraph 14.2), governments could also be encouraged to promote teaching of different ways of thinking, as the purpose of this type of education is to provide a balanced general education and develop open-mindedness and critical-mindedness, which will help when practicing democratic citizenship and respect for human rights;

10. refers in this context to the CEDEP project on the "New intercultural challenge to education: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe", whose title reflects both the goal of intercultural education and the specific efforts in this context to cater for religion in schools. Attention should be drawn here to the results of the activities, publications and material for teachers produced under the project, particularly "Religious diversity and intercultural education: a guide for schools", which is to be published in 2006. At the end of the project, the CEDEP will submit a draft recommendation on the management of religious diversity in schools to the Committee of Ministers;

11. with regard to paragraph 14.1, stresses that the theme of cultural and religious diversity has been incorporated into a new CEDEP project on "The Image of the Other in History Teaching", which will be launched in 2006.