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A study of history teaching in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Motion for a recommendation
presented by Mr Platvoet and others

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

Since October 2001, when the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on history teaching in twenty-first century Europe, the Council has been promoting reforms in history teaching in the member states and encouraging an awareness of multiple perspectives in history (multiperspectivity). Because multiperspectivity is typically defined as a means of fostering tolerance and respect for diversity, the method is seen as particularly relevant for post-conflict societies such as Bosnia and Herzegovina where history teaching continues to be a vehicle for promoting nationalistic and ethnocentric views.

1. Considering that:

i. in Bosnia and Herzegovina, history teaching is still part of the so-called “national group of subjects”, which also includes geography, languages and literature, religious instruction and, in some cases, music and art,

ii. different ethnic groups continue to use different history textbooks, often offering distorted and one-sided representations of historical events,

iii. the Council of Europe, together with the Georg Eckert Institute and the OSCE mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, has worked for a few years now on introducing multiperspectivity to the country’s schools and offered seminars on this approach to potential history (and geography) textbook authors, as well as teachers,

iv. the Council’s associates warn that multiperspectivity is still a term “more often used than defined” ..., “can mean very different things to different people” ..., “[is] subject to redefinition in order to fit particular political and ideological positions” ..., “does not necessarily mean that the more multiperspectival the historical account is the more objective it will therefore be” (Stradling 2002),

v. despite all good intentions, multiperspectivity could be easily misused or mistaken for different and/or irreconcilable perspectives of a country’s history,

vi. multiperspectivity may hinder post-conflict reconciliation efforts in post-conflict countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina if this approach is mistaken for the right to equate responsibility of individual groups in the country’s recent conflict (that is, a given perspective may hold that someone is a war criminal while another may hold that the same person is a national hero),

vii. introducing multiperspectivity to schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina requires skilled teachers who, at the moment, lack such knowledge, as well as continuing support by the country's administrative bodies (for example, thirteen ministries of education, pedagogical institutes, etc.) whose work is often said to be influenced by ethnocentric politics;

2. A study (a progress report) of the Council's years-long efforts to introduce multiperspectivity in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina is recommended. (This study could be followed by a comparative study of this method of history teaching in the member states, or at least a number of them).

The report should include, but not be limited to, such topics as:

i. an assessment of the Council's past and current efforts regarding the introduction of multiperspectivity in Bosnia and Herzegovina;

ii. an assessment of how this method is perceived by educators and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (How do they define it? Is there a disagreement as to the method's purpose and possible outcomes?);

iii. an assessment of what is done so that multiperspectivity will foster rather than hinder reconciliation efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina;

iv. an assessment of future steps.

*Signed*¹:

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¹ SOC: Socialist Group
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EDG: European Democratic Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left
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