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Education for Europe

Recommendation 1682 (2004)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 951st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (14 December 2005)

1. The Committee of Ministers has considered Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1682 (2004) on education for Europe and brought it to the attention of its member governments. It also forwarded it to the Steering Committee for Education (CD-ED) and the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH); their comments are reproduced in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

2. The Committee of Ministers agrees with the Parliamentary Assembly that it is essential to educate young people about Europe and for Europe. Not only is it necessary to transmit knowledge about the European institutions and history to young Europeans, but also to prepare them to live in a Europe of linguistic and cultural diversity, giving them the necessary tools and skills to fully exert their citizenship. The Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government of member states of the Council of Europe at their Third Summit held on 16 and 17 May 2005 in Warsaw makes an explicit reference to democratic culture, without which democratic institutions and democratic legislation cannot work.[1] The Third Summit Declaration and Action Plan will guide the Council of Europe's priorities over the coming years. For information, the Action Plan's passeges dealing with education, youth matters, sport, cultural diversity and inter-cultural dialogue are reproduced in Appendix 3 to this reply.

3. The Committee of Ministers notes with satisfaction that the Recommendation is fully consistent with the Declaration on Intercultural Education: managing diversity, reinforcing democracy adopted by the Standing Conference of the European Ministers of Education at their 21st session in Athens in November 2003, and that the Council of Europe's education programme already encompasses its specific goals and meets the concerns expressed in the recommendation, in particular those set out in paragraphs 1 to 5. Special mention can be made, in this context, of such projects as history teaching, intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship and human rights, higher education and language policies, as well as the programme of in-service training for education professionals.

4. Regarding paragraph 6 as a whole, the Committee of Ministers recalls that the Council of Europe has gained considerable expertise in the field of education over the last decades and has been able to assist numerous member states in adapting and developing their education policy and legislation in various spheres. This work has, in itself, created an awareness of the values promoted by the Council of Europe, and has yielded significant results for the development of education policies which take account of these, especially in many of the newer member states. In this context, the Committee of Ministers wishes to point out that most of the projects carried out in the framework of the Council of Europe's education programmes not only deal with policy development, but also comprise the preparation of instruments and tools (for example for the adaptation of curricula and teacher training) aimed at promoting practical aspects of policy development and implementation.

[1] "We are convinced that effective democracy and good governance at all levels are essential for preventing conflicts, promoting stability, facilitating economic and social progress, and hence for creating sustainable communities where people want to live and work, now and in the future. This can only be achieved through the active involvement of citizens and civil society. Member states must therefore maintain and develop effective, transparent and accountable democratic institutions, responsive to the needs and aspirations of all. The time has come to intensify our work within the Council of Europe to this effect, in particular through the establishment of the Forum for the Future of Democracy."

5. The question of teacher training is indeed crucial when it comes to preparing and empowering young people to live in a culturally diverse Europe, in particular young people belonging to marginalised or disadvantaged groups. The Committee of Ministers recalls that the Council of Europe has acquired considerable experience in this field, both through the programme of in-service training for education professionals and as concerns, in particular, the training of language teachers (cf. European Centre for Modern Languages, Graz). Also, special efforts have been made in a number of member states regarding the training of history teachers as well as the training of teachers in education for democratic citizenship and human rights. However, the Committee of Ministers is conscious of the fact that the teaching profession is currently undergoing a radical change and that special efforts will need to be undertaken to define the necessary new competences and skills for teachers in the years to come. In this perspective, the Committee of Ministers wishes to inform the Parliamentary Assembly that the next Council of Europe Prague Forum on educational policies (November 2005) will deal with the issue of new teachers' competences/roles.

6. The Committee of Ministers wishes to point out that international NGOs have been fully involved in the organisation and the implementation of the various activities in the framework of the project Education for Democratic Citizenship and in particular the 2005 European Year of Citizenship through Education. Moreover, it should be recalled that the Youth Programme builds on a true partnership between youth organisations and networks and governments, through the system of co-management of the Council of Europe's youth sector, in order to promote young people's participation in democratic institutions and processes throughout Europe. Partnerships with NGOs will no doubt be further strengthened in the future.

7. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the idea that possibilities afforded by the new information and communication technologies be developed to foster contacts between schools in Europe. However, they do not replace direct exchanges and visits. The Committee of Ministers recalls that a few years ago the Council of Europe, with the support of the Norwegian Government, successfully implemented the ESSE programme (European Secondary School Exchanges), which can still be seen, today, as a prototype for school and family-based exchange programmes, which could be taken as an example on a broader scale.

8. The Committee of Ministers is of the opinion that education for democratic citizenship and human rights are of particular importance for establishing a democratic culture in Europe. In this connection, it points out that the "Education for democratic citizenship" pack contains tools for EDC policy, in-service teacher training and quality assurance. Widespread distribution of this pack and regular updating of its content can undoubtedly help achieve the objectives being pursued, regardless of the conclusion of the debate on the advisability of drafting a European framework convention on education for democratic citizenship and human rights initiated by the Assembly in paragraph 8.i. of its recommendation.

9. The Parliamentary Assembly recommendation calls on the Committee of Ministers to institute programmes for the training of teachers in education for Europe. The Committee of Ministers will examine this question and would like to recall that it adopted Recommendation Rec(2004)4 on the European Convention on Human Rights in university education and professional training at its 114th Session on 12 May 2004. In this connection, it would draw particular attention to paragraph II of that recommendation, which calls on member states to "enhance the effectiveness of university education and professional training in this field, in particular by: (…) supporting initiatives aimed at the training of specialised teachers and trainers in this field."

10. Finally, the Committee of Ministers would like to mention that the Wroclaw Declaration, adopted by the Ministers of Education and Culture on 10 December 2004, invites the Council of Europe to give consideration to the setting-up of a European centre of excellence for the training of teachers. The possibility of setting up such a centre might be considered. It could specialise in education for democratic citizenship and human rights, history teaching and in intercultural education. All of these constitute, in fact, the Education for Europe, and are considered as priority areas of the Council of Europe education programme.

Appendix 1 to the reply

Opinion of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED)
on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1682 (2004) on education for Europe

The Steering Committee for Education:

1. welcomes Recommendation 1682 (2004) on education for Europe, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly ;

2. believes this subject area is directly instrumental towards the fulfillment of the fundamental goals of the Council of Europe, and a priority within the Organisation's programme of activities;

3. welcomes the fact that the Recommendation on education for Europe is fully in agreement with the general philosophy underlying the work carried out by the Steering Committee for Education ;

4. draws attention to the importance of the theme of education for Europe, which will lead to a better understanding of the working of all European institutions and thus also promote the specificity of the Council of Europe;

5. notes with great satisfaction that the recommendation falls within the framework of the Declaration on Intercultural Education: managing diversity, reinforcing democracy adopted by the Standing Conference of the European Ministers of Education at their 21st session in Athens;

6. recalls that its programmes are already oriented towards the aims of the recommendations, suffice to mention those in the field of history teaching, intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship, language education as well as the programme for in-service training for education professionals;

7. with regard, in particular, to paragraph 5 would have preferred the following phrasing of the first sentence of the paragraph "Europe's richness comes from its diversity: cultural, religious, linguistic, etc.";

8. with regard, in particular, to paragraph 6.i. considers it necessary to take into account the autonomy of universities and consequently to separate primary and secondary schools from higher education in considering the implications of the recommendation;

9. considers that in the wake the European Year of Citizenship though Education in 2005 it would be suitable to look at the possibility of elaborating a framework normative tool on this issue, which would usefully supplement the existing conventional instruments of the Organisation.

Appendix 2 to the reply

Comments of the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH)
on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1682 (2004) on education for Europe

1. The CDDH takes note of this recommendation with interest. It agrees with the Parliamentary Assembly that education is "essential for forming full citizens in democratic societies" and that "the generic values of the Council of Europe, and in particular respect for human rights, political pluralism and the rule of law, have to be transmitted to the younger generation."

2. The CDDH acknowledges that it is more a matter for the Steering Committee for Education (CD-ED) than itself to comment on the subject of education. Nevertheless, it believes that it must comment on three points mentioned in the recommendation.

3. Firstly, the CDDH welcomes the decision to declare 2005 "European Year of Citizenship through Education". It would point out that it was represented on the Ad hoc Committee of Experts set up to prepare the event (CAHCIT).

4. In addition, although the Parliamentary Assembly's recommendation calls on the Committee of Ministers to draft a European framework convention on education for democratic citizenship and human rights, the CDDH does not believe that giving consideration to such a convention would be worthwhile at present.

5. The recommendation also calls on the Committee of Ministers to institute programmes for the training of teachers in education for Europe. The CDDH welcomes this idea and would underline that it drew up Recommendation Rec(2004)4 on the European Convention on Human Rights in university education and professional training (adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 114th Session on 12 May 2004). In this connection, it would draw particular attention to paragraph II of that recommendation, which calls on member states to "enhance the effectiveness of university education and professional training in this field, in particular by: (…) supporting initiatives aimed at the training of specialised teachers and trainers in this field."

Appendix 3 to the reply

Extract from the Action Plan adopted by the Heads of State and Government of member states of the Council of Europe at their Third Summit held on 16-17 May 2005 in Warsaw

III – BUILDING A MORE HUMANE AND INCLUSIVE EUROPE

[…]

3. Education: promoting democratic citizenship in Europe

The tasks of building a knowledge-based society and promoting a democratic culture among our citizens require increased efforts of the Council of Europe in the field of education aimed at ensuring access to education for all young people across Europe, improving its quality and promoting, *inter alia*, comprehensive human rights education.

We will make full use of the opportunity to raise public awareness of European standards and values provided by the "European Year of Citizenship through Education". The Council of Europe shall build on its work on language learning and recognition of diplomas and qualifications. It shall continue to play an important role in the Bologna process aimed at creation of European Higher Education Area by 2010. It will actively promote co-operation and networking in the field of education and student exchanges at all levels.

The Council of Europe will enhance all opportunities for the training of educators, in the fields of education for democratic citizenship, human rights, history and intercultural education.

It will promote relevant intercultural programmes and exchanges at secondary school level, both within Europe and with neighbouring countries.

The Council of Europe will also further develop its network of schools of political studies with a view to promoting European core values among the new generations.

4. Developing youth co-operation

We will intensify our efforts to empower young people to actively participate in democratic processes so that they can contribute to the promotion of our core values. The Council of Europe Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation are important instruments to this effect. We will integrate a youth perspective in all Council of Europe activities. To promote diversity, inclusion and participation in society, we decide to launch a Europe-wide youth campaign, in the spirit of the "European Youth Campaign against racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance" (1995).

The Council of Europe will further develop its unique position in the youth field. It will continue to assist member states in developing national and local policy instruments and actively promote youth exchanges and youth mobility in Europe.

5. Protecting and promoting cultural diversity

Respect for, and promotion of, cultural diversity on the basis of Council of Europe values are essential conditions for the development of societies based on solidarity. The Council of Europe will therefore develop strategies to manage and promote cultural diversity while ensuring the cohesion of societies. We support the adoption by UNESCO of a convention on cultural diversity.

We will foster dialogue on the role of culture in contemporary Europe and define ways to support diversity and artistic creativity, defending culture as a purveyor of values. Steps will be taken to enhance access to cultural achievements and heritage by promoting cultural activities and exchanges.

6. Fostering intercultural dialogue

We shall systematically encourage intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, based on universal human rights, as a means of promoting awareness, understanding, reconciliation and tolerance, as well as preventing conflicts and ensuring integration and the cohesion of society. The active involvement of civil society in this dialogue, in which both men and women should be able to participate on an equal basis, must be ensured. Issues faced by cultural and religious minorities can often be best addressed at the local level. Therefore, we

ask the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to be actively involved in these issues and promote best practices.

We will strengthen co-operation and co-ordination both within the Council of Europe and with other regional and international institutions. To this effect, a co-ordinator for intercultural dialogue shall be appointed within the Council of Europe to monitor in co-operation with existing structures the implementation of the Organisation's practical programmes and ensure co-ordination with other institutions.

Convinced that dialogue between cultures is also fostered by accurate understanding of history, we endorse the Council of Europe's work in history teaching and related projects, and decide to intensify our efforts in this direction. We encourage more active involvement of civil society in this work.

We are committed to a new dialogue between Europe and its neighbouring regions – southern Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Asia – based on the above-mentioned principles. We recognise the role of the North-South Centre in promoting this dialogue, as well as its mission of fostering European awareness of intercultural and development issues.

7. Promoting sport

We attach great importance to the effective operation of the Anti-doping Convention and the European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches, which are reference texts in international law. In line with the Committee of Ministers Recommendation R(99)9 on the role of sport in furthering social cohesion, we recommend the continuation of Council of Europe activities which serve as references in the field of sport.

[…]