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Cultural diversity of the North Caucasus

Recommendation 1751 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 984th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (17-18 January 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers welcomes Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1751 (2006) on the cultural diversity of the North Caucasus. It acknowledges the relevance of the Assembly's observations, bearing in mind that the North Caucasus represents an ethnically and linguistically very diverse region where there is a particularly strong need for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. It has therefore brought this recommendation to the attention of the governments of member states and forwarded it to the Steering Committee for Education (CDED), the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) and the Steering Committee for Culture (CDCULT).
2. Education is particularly important for making the different peoples and communities aware of diversity as a unique cultural resource and for developing and fostering intercultural dialogue and tolerance on the basis of the fundamental values upheld by the Council of Europe, namely democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
3. In this connection, the Committee of Ministers wishes to refer to the many activities carried out or planned in this field within the above-mentioned steering committees, including the CDCULT's standard-setting work, with the Declaration on Cultural Diversity (September 2001) and the Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention adopted in Opatija in October 2003. This work has inspired a number of regional co-operation activities, including the STAGE Project in the South Caucasus, which the Assembly mentions in its recommendation.
4. The CDED, for its part, has carried out activities which, among other things, have led to progress in the conceptual development and content of learning methods concerning the religious dimension of intercultural education and made it possible to propose new teaching methods and learning strategies suitable for promoting intercultural dialogue on the basis of religious diversity. Diversity issues also form part of other CDED projects such as "Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights", "Policies and Practices for Teaching Sociocultural Diversity", and the language policies programme, which is concerned with the development and analysis of language education policies designed to promote linguistic diversity and plurilingualism.
5. In the North Caucasus, the resulting action has been particularly fruitful in the field of history teaching. In the framework of a joint programme with the European Commission on the reinforcement of democratic stability in North Caucasus, five seminars were organised during the period 2001-2002 in the Republics of Karachaevo-Cherkessya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Kalmykia, as well as in the Stavropol region. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers wishes to draw attention to the programme of co-operation between the Russian Federation, the Council of Europe and the European Commission which contains a number of activities in the field of education.
6. These efforts also concerned the activities organised in the Russian Federation in the framework of the 2005 European Year of Education for Citizenship and, in particular, events which took place in this context in Moscow in November and December 2005.

7. An international conference on "Teaching history in multicultural context: how to integrate mechanisms of intercultural dialogue in school history teaching" was held in Saint Petersburg on 23 and 24 June 2006 in the framework of the Chairmanship of the Russian Federation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The participants of the event, which brought together a number of experts *inter alia* from the region of the North Caucasus, made proposals aimed at integrating a multicultural approach into the education process.

8. Regarding the recommendations made by the Parliamentary Assembly in paragraph 14, the Committee of Ministers wishes to stress that the CDED plans to step up its activities for training teachers and trainers through the launch of the "Pestalozzi" training programme, specially designed for trainers in all States Parties to the European Cultural Convention and focusing on the priorities of the Council of Europe's work in the field of education. The CDED has also strengthened the aspects relating to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in its new project on "The image of the Other in history teaching" and in its technical assistance programmes with the Russian Federation.

9. The Committee of Ministers recognises that higher education plays a key role in helping to develop and transmit to the younger generations the principles of democratic culture which are indispensable for building a sustainable democratic society. Quality assurance in higher education is therefore of vital importance and the Committee of Ministers wishes to stress the activities carried out in this connection as part of the Bologna Process, to which the Council of Europe contributes through the work of the CDESR and in close co-operation with the Russian Federation. The Bologna Process could also be the framework for initiatives focused on the North Caucasus, such as a regional conference to be organised there, dealing *inter alia* with the implementation of the Process and with issues relating to quality assurance of higher education and/or seminars or workshops to be organised at European level, with the participation of representatives of universities of the region.

10. These issues were also discussed at a seminar entitled "Making the European higher education area a reality : the role of students", organised in Moscow on 2 and 3 November 2006 by the Council of Europe and the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, as part of the Russian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

11. The CDESR also carries out work in the field of intercultural dialogue within the European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Recognition and Mobility. Discussion is continuing within this steering committee on the desirability of setting up a university network focusing on intercultural dialogue as a field of teaching, research and academic expertise.

12. The Committee of Ministers has also taken due note of the Assembly's recommendations to the authorities of the Russian Federation. It encourages them to draw inspiration from these recommendations while making full use of the expertise and co-operation programmes prepared by the Council of Europe in the relevant fields.