

PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Recommendation 1880 (2009)¹ History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its Recommendation 1283 (1996) on history and the learning of history in Europe and reaffirms that “history also has a key political role to play in today’s Europe. It can contribute to greater understanding, tolerance and confidence between individuals and between the peoples of Europe or it can become a force for division, violence and intolerance.” Therefore, history teaching can be a tool to support peace and reconciliation in conflict and post-conflict areas as well as tolerance and understanding when dealing with such phenomena as migration, immigration and changing demographics.

2. Conflict resolution and conflict prevention take place at the political level, evolving from peacekeeping to peace-making and finally to peace-building. History teaching is a process in which teachers are consulted, trained, retrained, supported, provided with resources, encouraged and protected in the implementation of new approaches to controversial and sensitive issues. Both elements must be addressed if the political process is to attain long-term success with new generations. The Assembly therefore welcomes the work being done by the Council of Europe and other organisations in locations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus and the Black Sea region and supports governments as they strive towards mutual understanding and tolerance.

3. The answers to questions such as “what” is taught, “how” it is taught and “when” controversial issues can be addressed rely on a process of building new skills and confidence for both teachers and students. This process needs to be reinforced by new political attitudes and policies towards history in its role of reconciling differences and developing tolerance.

4. Conventional history teaching stresses a single interpretation of events as being “the Truth”, which is politically expedient. It is now internationally accepted that there can be many views and interpretations, which are based on evidence. There is validity in a multiperspective approach that assists and encourages students to respect diversity and cultural difference in this increasingly globalised world, rather than conventional teaching, which can reinforce the more negative aspects of nationalism.

5. The Assembly values the work of the Council of Europe in countries emerging from conflict to support a change in how “the other” is presented in history classes. This involves interventions relating to both what is taught and how it is taught. Considerable investment in skills building for teachers, today’s and tomorrow’s, to encourage them to move to a new style of curriculum and teaching, must continue. This process is progressive and therefore has implications for initial and in-service teacher training.

6. Recent reviews in some post-conflict countries have led to a reduction in course content. While this allows better skill development and helps motivate students to further evaluate and explore topics themselves, it must enhance, not reduce, the cross-community and cross-regional focus of the curriculum.

7. Teachers, student teachers and students who want to support the process of change are essential resources. Teachers should be at the core of curriculum development and resource designing to assist in those materials being age appropriate and interesting for the students.

8. Multiperspective teaching relies on the availability of primary and secondary material and involves interactive teaching. Project-based research and work, class debates, visits to museums, greater utilisation of primary sources and guest speakers to make modern history more relevant, work best with small classes. Education policies must reflect this change of teaching style.

9. Improving communication between students and teachers from different backgrounds and cultures opens up new potential for history projects that involve several countries. Students “solving” each other’s problems opens up new insights as “outsiders” will often see situations differently than those closest to the problem.

10. Cross-border and cross-community activities are organised in some communities. Assembly Recommendation 1283 (1996) called on governments to provide adequate and continued financing for history research, particularly for multilateral and bilateral commissions on contemporary history. There is a political onus to strengthen these opportunities and encourage those who could gain most from teaming with each other to move in that direction without fear of reprisal from any quarter. This activity should be for both teachers and students. It should have a capacity to be a long-term process, working towards tangible results, as trust is only built over time.

11. History teaching must reflect, and relate topics to, the international situation of the time period that is being taught. Events explored in isolation do not depict the full context and so do not always give a true or full picture. However, the use of local history can hold particular relevance for young students, thereby capturing their interest. Many things at local level can then be related to bigger events and topics.

12. Both education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage should be central in education policies, as is the case in the north of Ireland. History teaching support services should help teachers co-ordinate cross-curricular themes during staff planning days. Such support services should have an international mechanism to share concepts and practices.

13. Exploring the medium of gentle humour to engage student interest in elements of history is an inroad to capturing student attention that is equal to the use of films and other technologies. When we can laugh at humour directed at “us” as well as “them” we will have achieved some success in peace and reconciliation.

14. Multiperspective history teaching will give students analytical skills, (and subject knowledge), that will help them to develop more critical minds. It is therefore a subject that can assist in a very vital part of a child's development in this era of changing dynamics and, if supported, will help train potential employers and employees for those countries who most need economic development post conflict.

15. Recommendation 1283 (1996) underscored that people have a right to access their history, whether they then embrace or reject it. Students' right to examine critically, through school resources, what they see and hear around them in the various media available, has only become more vital with the passage of time and the development of new technologies. Understanding complexity can help them appreciate diversity and, in being objective, they recognise the distortions that stereotypes bring.

16. The Assembly acknowledges that, in curricula reviews, there has been recognition of the need for controversial, sensitive and tragic events to be balanced with more positive and inclusive topics that are not exclusively political in nature and which extend beyond national boundaries. The move towards the inclusion of cultural, philosophical and economic elements, as well as the role of women and minorities is to be welcomed and encouraged.

17. The Assembly draws the attention of the Committee of Ministers to recent research which indicates that there needs to be special prioritisation of schools that have been at the intersections of conflict in terms of confidence-building measures for both teachers and students, of primary and secondary resources and Internet access and student exchanges. Coming out of conflict is a slow and individual challenge faced by every teacher, student, school and community.

18. Dissemination of information has increased through the globalisation of various media forms which are all instantaneous conveyors of current events or "history". The education system in each member state should support students in their development of analytical skills that critically explore media studies and thereby help them understand that messages can be delivered both overtly and subliminally.

19. In moving towards peace, or out of conflict, influential personalities in various walks of life, and in particular religious leaders may play a role within communities to create an atmosphere either to support or to undermine the process. Positive direction on an inter-religious basis provides an important signal to those who look to embrace "the image of the other" for the first time in education. The Assembly welcomes the positive role religious leaders and influential personalities have played in some countries and calls on all religious leaders to embrace new initiatives that work towards a peaceful co-existence of citizens now and in the future, thus supporting new initiatives in the classroom.

20. The Assembly calls on all states signatories to the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18) to:

20.1. ensure that necessary technologies and opportunities to support both teacher and student interactions within and between states are put in place, including access to written

resources and sources in their own language for minority communities;

20.2. provide adequate and ongoing financing for history research, particularly for multilateral and bilateral commissions on contemporary history;

20.3. as a subject, focus history teaching more on socio-economic, cultural, artistic and heritage elements and less on politics;

20.4. pursue a ten-year project that would encourage primary school children to keep a diary tracking their reaction to contemporary events, which could be examined and exchanged with other member states at the end of the project;

20.5. ensure that teacher-training programmes have a balance of two distinct elements: the development of the expertise within the subject area ("what" to teach) and the skill building for motivating students to engage with the subject ("how" to teach);

20.6. address resistance to a new curriculum or pedagogy change where it exists as a result of deeper political issues;

20.7. research, on a regular basis, teachers' and students' views on new concepts in, challenges of and approaches to history, pertaining to curriculum size, content, relevance, delivery and how it is examined;

20.8. facilitate teachers' duties in terms of curriculum timing to allow them to disseminate new ideas outside the classroom and to encourage them to try out new practices;

20.9. reduce the size of classes whenever possible;

20.10. encourage teachers to join associations of history teachers and attend events such as those run by EUROCLIO (European Association of History Educators) in order to help develop confidence, experience and expertise;

20.11. support teachers in the use of personal development opportunities to keep updated on practices and priorities abroad and vice versa;

20.12. consider a reward system within the pay-scale structure to encourage the commitment, in a meaningful manner, of all history teaching sectors to keep filtering fresh pedagogical approaches both up and down the system;

20.13. give all schools the capacity to access primary and secondary source information, including broadband for Internet accessibility.

21. The Assembly calls for the full implementation of the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity" (launched in May 2008), to assist the development of guidelines for teachers on issues concerning tolerance and intercultural dialogue.

22. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

22.1. continue to support the work of the Council of Europe, in co-operation with other institutions, such as the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research,

in conflict and post-conflict areas, on the revision and development of textbooks and teacher manuals, the organisation of teacher seminars and source material identification;

22.2. research best practices and share them between countries that have experienced conflict in the past and assist all those engaged in such processes, regardless of the stage they are at currently;

22.3. continue to provide support for the implementation of the Council of Europe project “The Image of the Other in History Teaching”;

22.4. enhance co-operation with the European Union within the framework of joint programmes and projects in the area of history teaching and make the best possible use of European Union funds where appropriate.

1. *Assembly debate* on 26 June 2009 (26th Sitting) (see Doc. 11919, report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mrs Keaveney). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 26 June 2009 (26th Sitting).