

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

**RECOMMENDATION 1283 (1996)<sup>1</sup>  
ON HISTORY AND THE LEARNING OF HISTORY IN EUROPE**

**1.**

People have a right to their past, just as they have a right to disown it. History is one of several ways of retrieving this past and creating a cultural identity. It is also a gateway to the experiences and richness of the past and of other cultures. It is a discipline concerned with the development of a critical approach to information and of controlled imagination.

**2.**

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.

**3.**

Historical awareness is an important civic skill. Without it the individual is more vulnerable to political and other manipulation.

**4.**

For most young people, history begins in school. This should not simply be the learning by heart of haphazard historical facts; it should be an initiation into how historical knowledge is arrived at, a matter of developing the critical mind and the development of a democratic, tolerant and responsible civic attitude.

**5.**

Schools are not the sole source of historical information and opinion. Other sources include the mass media, films, literature and tourism. Influence is also exercised by the family, peer groups, local and national communities, and by religious and political circles.

**6.**

The new communication technologies (CD-I, CD-ROM, Internet, virtual reality, etc.) are gradually extending the range and impact of historical subjects.

**7.**

A distinction may be made between several forms of history: tradition, memories and analytical history. Facts are selected on the basis of different criteria in each. And these various forms of history play different roles.

**8.**

Politicians have their own interpretations of history, and some are tempted to manipulate it. Virtually all political systems have used history for their own ends and have imposed both their version of historical facts and their definition of the good and bad figures of history.

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<sup>1</sup> Assembly debate on 22 January 1996 (1st Sitting) (see Doc. 7446, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur: Mr de Puig).  
Text adopted by the Assembly on 22 January 1996 (1st Sitting).

**9.**

Even if their constant aim may be to get as close to objectivity as possible, historians are also well aware of the essential subjectivity of history and of the various ways in which it can be reconstructed and interpreted.

**10.**

Citizens have a right to learn history that has not been manipulated. The state should uphold this right and encourage an appropriate scientific approach, without religious or political bias, in all that is taught.

**11.**

Teachers and research workers should be in close contact to assure the continued updating and renewal of the content of history teaching. It is important that history keep pace with the present.

**12.**

There should also be transparency between those working in all areas of history, whether in the school classroom, television studio or university library.

**13.**

Particular attention should be given to the problems in central and eastern Europe which has suffered from the manipulation of history up to recent times and continues in certain cases to be subject to political censorship.

**14.**

The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage the teaching of history in Europe with regard to the following proposals:

**i.**

historical awareness should be an essential part of the education of all young people. The teaching of history should enable pupils to acquire critical thinking skills to analyse and interpret information effectively and responsibly, to recognise the complexity of issues and to appreciate cultural diversity. Stereotypes should be identified and any other distortions based on national, racial, religious or other prejudice;

**ii.**

the subject matter of history teaching should be very open. It should include all aspects of societies (social and cultural history as well as political). The role of women should be given proper recognition. Local and national (but not nationalist) history should be taught as well as the history of minorities. Controversial, sensitive and tragic events should be balanced by positive mutual influences;

**iii.**

the history of the whole of Europe, that of the main political and economic events, and the philosophical and cultural movements which have formed the European identity must be included in syllabuses;

**iv.**

schools should recognise the different ways in which the same subjects are handled in different countries, and this could be developed as a basis for interschool exchanges;

**v.**

support should be given to the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, and Ministries of Education and educational publishers in member states should be asked to ensure that the institute's collection of textbooks be kept up-to-date;

**vi.**

the different forms of history learning (textbook study, television, project work, museum visits, etc.) should be combined, without exclusive preference to any of them. New information technologies should be fully integrated. Proper educational (and academic) standards must be ensured for the material used;

**vii.**

greater interaction should be fostered between school and out-of-school influences on young people's appreciation of history, for example by museums (and in particular history museums), cultural routes and tourism in general;

**viii.**

innovatory approaches should be encouraged, as well as continued in-service training, especially with regard to new technologies. An interactive network of history teachers should be encouraged. History should be a priority subject for European teachers' courses organised within the framework of the Council for Cultural Co-operation in-service training programme for teachers;

**ix.**

co-operation should be encouraged between teachers and historians, for example by means of the Education Committee of the Council for Cultural Co-operation's new project on learning and about teaching the history of Europe in the 20th century;

**x.**

government support should be given to the setting up of independent national associations of history teachers. Their active involvement in the European history teachers' association Euroclio should be encouraged;

**xi.**

a code of practice for history teaching should be drawn up in collaboration with history teachers, as well as a European charter to protect them from political manipulation.

## **15.**

The Assembly supports freedom of academic research but would also expect professional responsibility as in the parallel field of broadcasting. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

**i.**

ask governments to assure continued financial support for historical research and the work of multilateral and bilateral commissions on contemporary history;

**ii.**

promote co-operation between historians so as to help encourage the development of more open and more tolerant attitudes in Europe by taking account of different experiences and opinions;

iii.

ensure that the right of historians to freedom of expression is protected.

**16.**

European collaboration should be encouraged in the field of history. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

i.

study the basic elements of the different histories of the peoples of Europe which, when accepted by everyone, could be included in all European history textbooks;

ii.

consider the possibility of establishing in member states an on-line library of history;

iii.

encourage member states to establish national history museums on the lines of the German "House of History" in Bonn;

iv.

promote multilateral and bilateral projects on history and history teaching and in particular regional projects between neighbouring countries.