

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

**RECOMMENDATION 1291 (1996)¹
ON YIDDISH CULTURE**

1.

The Assembly is concerned at the critical situation of the Yiddish language and culture in Europe. It has barely survived the Holocaust of the second world war and victimisation by communist totalitarianism.

2.

Yiddish was once a cross-national culture in Europe, a mediator for intellectual advance and also a component of local national cultures. Yiddish artists, novelists, poets and dramatists made a rich contribution to the development of modern European art and literature, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But too few have survived to continue this cultural tradition.

3.

From over 8 million Yiddish speakers in Europe in 1939 there are now only about 2 million worldwide. The majority of these are old people. As a minority language Yiddish is at risk.

4.

The extent of this problem has been brought into the open with the enlargement of cultural co-operation to the countries of central Europe, the Yiddish homeland. Though it has been discussed in Israel and in Unesco, the first occasion for the Council of Europe to consider the subject was at the colloquy held in Vilnius in May 1995 by the Assembly's Committee on Culture and Education.

5.

In the holding of this colloquy and in the subsequent report, the Assembly welcomes the opportunity it has had to provide a forum for the Yiddish academic network in Europe.

6.

It is a matter of regret that at present the main centres for Yiddish culture are outside Europe: in Israel and the United States of America. For historical and cultural reasons, Europe should take steps to encourage and develop within Europe centres for Yiddish culture, research and language.

7.

The fate of the Yiddish language and culture is analogous to that of many lost or disappearing cultures in Europe. However, stability in Europe depends on acceptance of a pluralistic system of cultural values.

¹ Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 20 March 1996.

See Doc. 7489, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur: Mr Zingeris.

8.

The Assembly recalls the texts that it has adopted on related issues and in particular Recommendation 928 (1981) on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe, [Resolution 885](#) (1987) on the Jewish contribution to European culture and [Recommendation 1275](#) (1995) on the fight against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance.

9.

The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

i.

ask member states to give consideration to the returning of Yiddish cultural property to Jewish Yiddish academic institutions from which it was taken during the second world war or to give to these institutions adequate compensation for the furtherance of Yiddish studies;

ii.

because of the closeness of Yiddish to German, invite German-language member states to act as trustees for the Yiddish language, for example by the creation of university chairs in the subject and by the dissemination to Europe in general of the finest products of Yiddish culture by means of translations, anthologies, courses, exhibitions, or theatrical productions;

iii.

establish scholarships for artists and writers who are descendants of Yiddish minority groups throughout Europe, so that they may be able to work purposefully and creatively in the field of Yiddish language and culture;

iv.

ask the Council for Cultural Co-operation to establish a mechanism for co-ordinating the activities of Yiddish academic centres throughout Europe and to convene in the near future a conference on this subject, if possible involving the European Union (Commission and Parliament);

v.

invite Ministries of Culture of member states to help Jewish and non-Jewish cultural institutions concerned with the Yiddish cultural heritage to reconstruct in publications and ethnographic and art exhibitions, in audiovisual records, etc., the full picture of the pre-Holocaust Yiddish cultural landscape that is today scattered throughout Europe;

vi.

invite Ministries of Education of member states to include the history of European Jewish culture in manuals on European history;

vii.

set up under the auspices of the Council of Europe, a "laboratory for dispersed ethnic minorities" with a mandate, inter alia:

- a. to promote the survival of minority cultures or their memory;
- b. to carry out surveys of persons still speaking minority languages;

- c. to record, collect and preserve their monuments and evidence of their language and folklore;
- d. to publish basic documents (for example the unfinished lexicon of the Yiddish language);
- e. to promote legislation to protect minority cultures against discrimination or annihilation;

viii.

commission, for the 50th anniversary of the end of the second world war, and in order to commemorate the virtual annihilation of the Yiddish civilisation in Europe, a suitable monument to Yiddish culture to be set up in the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg;

ix. seek also the co-operation and partnership of interested organisations, trusts and other bodies in the private sector to carry out these recommendations.