

# Press Release

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## Religious sensibility should not restrict freedom of expression, according to PACE

Strasbourg, 28.06.2006 – "Freedom of expression should not be further restricted to meet the increasing sensitivities of certain religious groups". This was the position taken this morning by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) at the end of a debate on freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs, in which the Turkish Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took part.

On the basis of the proposals of the rapporteur, Sinikka Hurskainen (Finland, SOC), the adopted text says that there cannot be a democratic society without the fundamental right to freedom of expression. "This freedom is not only applicable to expressions that are favorably received or regarded as inoffensive but also to those that may shock, offend or disturb the state or any sector of the population, in accordance with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights", the text states.

While underlining its commitment to ensuring that cultural diversity becomes a source of mutual enrichment, not of tension, PACE encouraged religious groups in Europe to discuss the issue within their own communities and "to pursue a dialogue with other religious communities in order to develop a common understanding and a code of conduct for religious tolerance".

The Assembly also invited journalists to discuss media ethics as regards religious beliefs and sensitivities. It encouraged "the creation of press complaints bodies, media ombudspersons or other self-regulatory bodies, where such bodies do not yet exist, which should discuss possible remedies for offences to religious persuasions".

Parliaments in member states should also hold debates on freedom of expression and the respect for religious beliefs, PACE said.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).