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**Prov. Addendum 1**

2005 ORDINARY SESSION

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(Fourth part)

REPORT

Twenty-seventh sitting

Tuesday 4 October 2005 at 3 p.m.

**ADDENDUM 1**

**Education and religion**

The following texts were submitted for inclusion in the official report by members who were present in the Chamber but were prevented by lack of time from delivering them.

## Education and religion

Mrs DAMANAKI (Greece) – The report refers to a crucial issue that is being discussed throughout Europe. The separate role played by the Church and the state is generally accepted, which helps a lot, but there are still social problems to be discussed. The issue of women is very important.

Mrs HURSKAINEN (Finland).- Cultural and religious differences are often considered as a reason for conflicts and wars between the nations. The substance and the manners of one religion might be unknown to people living with other religious values. Religious education can offer a respectful and a fact-based approach in taking a view on the dissimilarities in belief systems. Knowing the facts is significant for the process of understanding “the other”. Knowledge of religions gives children the basic tools for ethical thinking; it also makes the past, the present and the potential vision of future more understandable. Schools naturally have a key role in this matter. I am very pleased with the conclusion of the report, because it notes how it is important for children to be familiar with the different religions. By teaching children about religions with objectivity and respect, we can, to some degree, prevent potential crises.

According to statistics, almost 85% of the population are registered as members of the Lutheran National Church. The proportion of the Finnish population involved in the Greek Orthodox Church is 1.1% and 0.2% of the population are registered as members of the Roman Catholic Church in Finland. 13.5% of the Finnish population do not officially practice any religion. At school it is possible for children to choose religious education or philosophically oriented teaching about the different views of life.

Respect is a precondition for recognition of human dignity, and respecting other religions is a significant part of it. Practising any religion does not justify favouring one at the expense of the other. Neither does not practising any religion make negative views of any religions acceptable. Therefore, neutrality is a reasonable demand for ethical teaching in genera. This concerns teaching religion as well as teaching the different views of life. This demand for neutrality should be especially taken into consideration in teachers' education. There should be a special emphasis on the fact that teachers' personal religious attitudes and values must not affect their teaching by preferring one religion at the expense of the other religions. This is extremely important because a biased attitude to religions by teachers would significantly harm the quality and the ultimate goal of religious education at schools.

Mrs DAMANAKI (Greece).- The report of Mr Schneider deals with education and religion, both of which are very important and delicate subjects. Their combination increases the importance and delicacy of the problem, which is why I would like to congratulate Mr Schneider on this well-balanced work.

Religion is an issue that is discussed all over Europe and all over the world. During our discussion in the Assembly we have admitted that religious traditions cannot interfere and lead to a relativism in the implementation of human rights.

I think that this is a good path to approach the subject of relations between religion and education. I think that we all agree that religion is an important aspect of European culture, tradition and history, and we can also agree that general knowledge of religions is essential to the exercising of democratic citizenship. It helps to eliminate situations that can lead to religious extremism.

When it comes to the reality, we face certain problems. We have to insist on general comparative knowledge of religions and not on teaching only one religion. Today, in many schools all over Europe we face multi-cultural circumstances, so we have to make clear that the school is the place for learning and not praying. The children who want to pray can go to the church of their choice. The role of teachers is therefore very critical. They need to have specific training for children. All children have the right to feel good during the religious courses.

I would like to support the report and draft recommendation as a serious step to tolerance and co-existence of all religions.