



## „RECALL: A Study of Central European Places of Memory for Collective Remembrance”

2023-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000154286

**Module Title:** Religious Tolerance and Intolerance - The Contested Freedom of Faith (*Topic 10*)

**Target Duration:** 28 minutes (video) + 15-20 minutes (e-learning tasks)

**Target Audience:** University students, researchers, and history enthusiasts

This module explores how ideas of religious tolerance and intolerance developed, clashed, and changed in Central Europe from the late Middle Ages to the early modern period and beyond. It connects changes in religious beliefs with politics, social order, and collective mindset, showing how reform movements—Hussitism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Catholic renewal—reshaped faith and power. Learners will engage with the process of confessionalization, where states aligned their institutions with a dominant church. They will examine where tolerance appeared unexpectedly, as in parts of France, the Dutch Republic, or England, and where it failed. The module highlights that “tolerance” was not obvious or neutral; it triggered fears of social breakdown, was often selective, and coexisted with the persecution of Jews, Muslims, and dissenting Christians.

A comparative regional focus highlights three key case studies. In Hungary, students analyze the 1568 Edict of Torda as an early legal framework for multi-confessional coexistence. They contrast this with the brutal trials and forced labor of Protestant preachers in Pressburg under Habsburg control. In the Czech lands, the Letter of Majesty (1609) is presented as both a major milestone for legally guaranteed religious freedom and a shaky compromise. Its incomplete implementation helped spark the Bohemian Estates’ Uprising and the trauma of White Mountain. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, learners follow the Warsaw Confederation (1573) as a high point of religious peace among nobles in a “state without stakes.” They then trace how war, confessional policy, and the expulsion of the Polish Brethren revealed the limits of this model. Through these examples, the module teaches students to distinguish between legal rules and everyday practices, between inclusion and exclusion, and between tolerance as an idea and tolerance as a political strategy.

Finally, the module looks at how these events have been remembered, mythologized, and used in modern national narratives. Learners will see how the Edict of Torda, the Letter of Majesty, and the Warsaw Confederation became symbols of “ancient” tolerance in Hungary, Czechia, and Poland. Each history, however, includes episodes of violence, coercion, and marginalization. By linking historical documents, commemorations, and UNESCO heritage with contemporary debates about pluralism, the module encourages students to think critically about the uses of the past. Overall, it treats religious tolerance not as a stable achievement but as a contested, revisited, and often fragile effort—one that continues to influence how Central Europeans discuss identity, minority rights, and civic equality today.



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### Primary Goals of the Module:

- **Situate** religious tolerance and intolerance within the broader political, social, and confessional history of Central Europe.
- **Explain** how Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and confessionalization reshaped relations between churches, states, and local communities.
- **Examine** key legal milestones of tolerance and intolerance (Edict of Torda, Letter of Majesty, Warsaw Confederation, Pressburg trials) in their historical context.
- **Explore** how religious diversity interacted with ethnicity, social hierarchy, and power in Hungary, the Czech lands, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
- **Analyze** how selective tolerance functioned in practice—who was included, who was excluded, and on what terms.
- **Investigate** how modern national historiographies and public memory have mythologised these acts as symbols of “ancient tolerance.”
- **Connect** historical debates on freedom of conscience and pluralism to contemporary discussions about minority rights, democracy, and civic equality.

### EU Key Competences Addressed in This Module:

- **Cultural awareness and expression** – Religious practices, confessional conflicts, and commemorations as part of Central Europe’s shared cultural memory.
- **Critical thinking and digital literacy** – Evaluating historical documents, images, and modern narratives (including national myths and simplified stories about “tolerance”).
- **Social and civic competence** – Understanding the links between historical experiences of coexistence/persecution and today’s democratic values and human-rights norms.

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Define religious tolerance and intolerance in early modern contexts and distinguish them from contemporary understandings of pluralism and human rights.
- Describe the main features and limitations of the 1568 Edict of Torda and explain why it was exceptional in 16th-century Europe.
- Summarise the Pressburg trials of Protestant preachers and assess how they became a symbol of Habsburg coercion and Protestant martyrdom.
- Explain the contents and aims of Rudolf II’s Letter of Majesty and analyse why its practical implementation fell short of its ideals.
- Outline the origins and provisions of the Warsaw Confederation and discuss why the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was later portrayed as a “state without stakes.”
- Compare how legal frameworks of tolerance operated in practice for different groups (Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Unitarians, Jews, and others).





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- Analyse how confessionalization shaped state–church relations and everyday life in Hungary, the Czech lands, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
  - Interpret primary sources (edicts, confessional acts, trial narratives, later commemorations) as evidence for both coexistence and persecution.
  - Identify and critically evaluate national myths surrounding “ancient tolerance” in Hungarian, Czech, and Polish historiographies.
  - Relate historical patterns of selective inclusion, forced conversion, and expulsion to modern debates on religious freedom, minority protection, and secularism.
  - Reflect on how memories of both tolerance and intolerance can support responsible citizenship and a commitment to pluralism in contemporary Europe.
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