Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 91 (1979)[1]

Texts adopted at the 13th Session of the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Having seen the texts adopted by the conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe at its 13th Session (Doc. 4263), and the report of its Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities (Doc. 4273) ;

2. Observing that the new simplified arrangements, whereby the conference can engage in dialogue with the Assembly and with the Committee of Ministers, are of a nature to improve the climate of co-operation between these bodies ;

3. Noting with satisfaction that the debates at the 13th Session demonstrated that the conference, an assembly representative of the local and regional authorities of Europe, did indeed reflect the desires and interests of local communities in the context of European unification ;

4. Pointing in this connection to the high level of the political debate on the progress of European integration, in which representatives of the highest political authorities of the emerging Europe had taken part ;

5. Stressing the effort made by the conference to concentrate on major current issues, such as the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities in cultural matters and in regard to civil protection, the problems of regional imbalances in Europe, and citizen participation in local public life ;

6. Considering that subjects as important as citizen participation in public life and the cultural responsibilities of local and regional authorities merit more thorough study, and should consequently remain on the conference's agenda for its coming sessions ;

7. Aware of the difficulties the conference has experienced in constituting itself, in pursuance of Resolution (75) 4 of the Committee of Ministers, as an assembly representative of regional authorities just as it is of local authorities ;

8. Repeating its firm conviction that there can be no opposition between local government and regional government, which stand together and complement one another, regional government being local authorities' best defender of municipal freedoms against excessive centralisation ;

9. Convinced that many questions vital for contemporary European society, such as regional planning and the protection of the environment, can no longer be debated properly unless the regional authorities have been consulted and their assistance secured,

1. Assembly debate on 30 January 1979 (21st Sitting) (see Doc. 4273, report of the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities). Text adopted by the Assembly on 30 January 1979 (21st Sitting).

10. Expresses its opinion concerning the various texts adopted in the course of the conference's 13th Session as follows :

a. with regard to Resolution 95 (1978), on the amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the conference : - takes due note of this text which, on the model of similar amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly, is designed to achieve a better distribution of seats in the plenary Assembly and proper representation of the new members in the Standing Committee and the other conference committees ;

b. with regard to Resolution 96 (1978), on amendments to the conference Rules of Procedure on the attendance of observers at sessions and committee meetings :

1. considers, after consulting the legal department and hearing the representatives of the Conference of the Council of European Municipalities (CEM), of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), and of the United Towns Organisation (UTO), that this resolution is incompatible with the letter and spirit of the Charter of the conference, and also with other statutory texts governing Council of Europe action, and more particularly with Resolution (72) 35 of the Committee of Ministers (Regulations on Consultative Status), governing the relations between the Council of Europe and international non-governmental organisations ;

2. considers, in particular, that it would prejudice the coherence of Council of Europe action if the consultative status conferred on international non-governmental organisations were to be interpreted differently by the different organs and institutions ;

3. admits, nevertheless, that the presence of too many observers at meetings of the conference's steering bodies or subsidiary bodies (Bureau, Standing Committee, committees) would raise delicate problems and might be incompatible with the confidential nature of some proceedings ;

4. suggests accordingly that the conference adopt the system in force in the Parliamentary Assembly, whereby all organisations with consultative status may send observers to public sittings, international organisations with consultative status having moreover additional privileges by virtue of Article 2.h of the conference Charter ; but on the other hand there should be no permanent observers attending meetings of the steering bodies or of the conference committees, which could nevertheless consult the organisations concerned on matters of mutual interest and invite their representatives to their meetings for the discussion of those matters only ;

5. considers that the Committee of Ministers should ask the conference to suspend the application of its Resolution 96 (1978) until the Ministers have formed a judgement on this opinion ;

6. believes that in any case the conference ought to reconsider the part to be played in its proceedings by international organisations of regional and local authorities which have consultative status with the Council of Europe ;

7. invites the Committee of Ministers - after having heard the representatives of the conference - to review the whole question of relations between the conference Charter and Rules of Procedure and to define on this occasion the "international organisations of local and regional authorities" referred to in the first paragraph of Article 2 of the Charter ;

c. with regard to Resolution 97 (1978), on the role and responsibility of local and regional authorities in cultural matters :

1. shares the conference's view that the European cultural heritage, in the wealth of its diversity, must be protected by responsible regional authorities with means enough to pursue an active cultural policy in close co-operation with local authorities ;

2. supports the conference's proposal regarding the framing by the Council of Europe of a European Charter of the Cultural Rights of Minorities, to which the bodies representing local and regional authorities should be associated, and repeats in this connection its opinion expressed in its Recommendation 814 (1977) that cultural diversity is an irreplaceable asset that justifies the active preservation of linguistic minorities in Europe ;

3. welcomes the possibility of closer co-operation between the committees of the conference and of the Parliamentary Assembly competent in cultural matters ;

d. with regard to Resolution 98 (1978). on the work of the Standing Committee and the conference organs during the 1977-78 recess :

1. urges the conference to develop its role as adviser to the European Community and the European Parliament on regional questions in particular, and recommends that the Committee of Ministers help the Council to assume that important function ;

2. believes that in this way the conference can contribute to bringing about closer relations between the Council of Europe and the European Community, by facilitating contacts between local and regional representatives of states not members of the Community and the institutions of the Nine ;

e. with regard to Resolutions 99 and 100 (1978), on the regional policies of the member states of the Council of Europe and the European institutions, and on imbalance in Europe, respectively :

1. shares the conference's opinion that regional imbalances in Europe are worsening, and stresses the dangers that economic recession presents for regions already in difficulty ;

2. urges governments to direct their economic recovery and major infrastructure financing efforts towards regions in difficulty, in recognition of the capital importance of not upsetting any further the balance between the different parts of their national territory ;

3. believes with the conference that it is important to augment the resources of the Council of Europe Resettlement Fund considerably and to use them systematically for projects forming part of a coherent regional development programme ;

4. endorses the conference's assertion that no truly European, and hence Community, regional policy can be drawn up unless the regional and local authorities, being the bodies most directly concerned, are regularly consulted ;

5. approves the suggestion of participants in the Council of Europe's Bordeaux Convention that a summit meeting of the heads of government of the twenty-one Council of Europe states be called, to study "the problems facing European unity because of the growing imbalances between backward regions and wealthy regions, between peripheral regions and central regions" ;

6. invites the Committee of Ministers to approve the principle of holding such a summit meeting and to consult the subsidiary bodies concerned, on the basis of Resolution 100 (1978), with a view to the preparation of the working papers ;

7. points out that it will again be taking up the question of imbalances in Europe on the occasion of the debate on North-South relations at its coming plenary session ;

f. with regard to Resolution 101 (1978), on the participation of the individual in local public life :

1. considers that this question should remain on the conference's agenda for discussion in greater detail in the light of the studies and enquiries carried out by the Steering Committee for Regional and Municipal Matters and of the conclusions of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local Government, held in Stockholm in September 1978 ;

2. supports the conference's request regarding its participation in the ad hoc Conference of Ministers responsible for Migration Problems proposed by the Swedish Government ;

3. hopes that the next session of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local Government, which is to be held in Madrid, will give representatives of the Assembly and of the CLRAE an opportunity to engage in a colloquy with the ministerial representatives on the subject of immigrants' rights ;

g. with regard to Resolution 102 (1978), on powers and responsibilities of local and regional authorities regarding civil protection and mutual aid in the event of disasters occurring in frontier regions :

1. calls to mind its recent Recommendation 847 on European action to prevent oil pollution of waters and coasts, and its proposals concerning the organisation of civil protection along seaboards ;

2. considers that the recent disasters affecting the environment have shown clearly the inadequacy of present arrangements to counter their effects and the need to organise transfrontier co-operation in the matter of civil protection ;

3. strongly urges the Committee of Ministers to open the draft European Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation to signature by member governments without delay, appending to it model agreements on transfrontier co-operation in the matter of civil protection and in the event of disasters.