Recommendation 525 (1968)[1]

Convening of a European Conference of Ministers responsible for regional planning

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recalling its Resolution 289 which set up the Joint Working Party on Regional Planning, composed of the rapporteurs of the committees concerned ;

2. Recalling its Recommendation 472 adopted as a result of the "Interim Report on European Co-operation in the Town and Country Planning Field" ;

3. Recalling its Recommendation 516 on the function and future of the Council of Europe, which defines regional planning as one of the Council of Europe's four most important fields of action ;

4. Having regard to the report "Regional Planning - a European Problem" prepared by the Joint Working Party on Regional Planning in the course of over three years of studies and enquiries ;

5. Congratulating the European Conference of Local Authorities on its success in highlighting the basic aspects of regional planning and so leading the Council to take up this problem which is of such importance for Europe ;

6. Observing that the increasingly rapid development of "industrial-society" confronts all countries with serious and urgent problems in the matter of land use ;

7. Observing that at all levels the local, regional and national authorities have realised that the problem of finding the rational location for all the various activities of economic, social and cultural life can be solved only in the context of a regional planning policy ;

8. Noting that the inter-disciplinary character of regional planning entails establishing bodies at all levels to coordinate the work of the various departments and services concerned ;

9. Observing chat in the general opinion, including that of several governments, it is not possible to solve all regional planning problems in the national framework alone ;

10. Observing that the first steps towards European co-operation in this field have been taken at various levels :

through bilateral contacts between several states, as may be seen from the constitution of a permanent Netherlands- German Committee for Regional Planning, a Benelux Regional Planning Committee and various committees under the Nordic Council;

through contacts established in frontier regions between local and regional groupings - contacts which, although very useful, have not yet enabled all common problems to be solved ;

1. Assembly debate on 10 May 1968 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 2382, report of the Committee on Local Authorities). Text adopted by the Assembly on 10 May 1968 (9th Sitting).

by various technical committees of international organisations, which have undertaken - within the limits of their geographical or institutional responsibilities and in accordance with their own points of view - to compare the different techniques applied by their member countries in regard to regional development and some aspects of regional planning ;

11. Being convinced nevertheless that European co-operation by regional planning is being conducted in too scattered and watertight a fashion, so that large gaps still have to be filled and there is risk of duplication ;

12. Noting, furthermore, that a European policy of regional planning should contribute to overcome the present estrangement in Europe, resulting from the political chasm between Eastern and Western countries, with due respect, on the one hand, to the unity of the main geographical features and, on the other hand, to the similarity of problems raised by the industrial society in constant evolution ;

13. Whereas, despite bilateral contacts and co-operation by technical committees, no large-scale intergovernmental cooperative action has been taken to consider the broad European choices open in the matter of regional planning,

14. Considers that, if the aim of the Council of Europe to "achieve a greater unity between its Members" is to be pursued, member states must speedily lend an ear to the pressing appeals, repeatedly uttered, that they embark on more systematic political co-operation in the regional planning field, and act upon the proposals contained in this recommendation ;

A. Recommendations on the policy of governments

15. Recommends the Committee of Ministers to invite member states to :

(a) carry out studies and take suitable measures with a view to adapting or creating administrative machinery for the implementation of a coherent physical planning policy at the national, regional and local levels ;

(b) base their regional planning policy on the following general principles :

Aims of regional planning

(i) To ensure that men and their communities are granted the best possible material and spiritual living conditions in a pleasant environment which is favourable to the free development of the person ;

Regional planning in the future

(ii) To direct regional planning policy and studies towards the society of tomorrow and the framework of human life in the year 2,000, with a view to the preparation of physical and socio-economic infrastructures suited to our civilisation and to the promotion of cultural equipment, both in town and country, commensurate with the tasks of our time ;

Balanced development of regions

(iii) To encourage the fullest development of the territory and to seek a just balance among the regions at national and European level, respecting their geographical and natural characteristics and their requirements in the matter of economic, social and cultural infrastructures ;

Developing regions

(iv) To ensure that priority be given to the development of regions where the standard of living is appreciably lower than that of other parts of the territory by means of an overall policy for developing the physical, economic, social and cultural structures of such regions ;

Rural regions

(v) To improve the development of rural areas and maintain a reasonable population density by providing sufficient suitable employment possibilities in sectors other than agriculture, such as industry, tourism and commerce, and equipping local centres with socio-cultural services so as to raise the standard of living in those areas ;

Urban regions

(vi) To restore healthier living conditions to heavily urbanised areas, by reviving ancient town centres, by creating green areas and by promoting the establishment of a network of urban centres, each of which should be equipped to perform satisfactorily its particular functions in relation to other towns in the region ;

Part to be played by the man-in-the-street

(vii) To foster participation by ordinary men and women in the preparation and application of regional planning policy through the medium of their elected representatives, whether at European, national, regional or local level, in consultation with the representatives of professional, social, economic and cultural associations ;

Co-ordination of field work

(viii) To promote co-ordination, by the bodies responsible for regional planning, of policies for nature conservation, water and air pollution control, water supply, the antinoise campaign, the protection of historical or artistic sites and monuments, and coastal protection ;

Regional planning on the European scale

(ix) To take into account the European aspect of regional planning and so contribute to a better organisation of the continent's territory and facilitate the creation of conditions favourable to the process of European unification ;

Co-operation in frontier regions

(x) To promote the solution of common problems of regional planning which arise in the numerous frontier regions shared by two or more states, through contacts between the representatives of regional authorities on both sides of the frontier, who should be provided with the legal and administrative machinery necessary to the conclusion of appropriate technical arrangements ;

(c) organise bilateral governmental collaboration with neighbouring states in order to discuss common problems of regional planning and if possible to co-ordinate specific plans and establish trans-frontier regional plans on the basis of common problems ;

(d) promote better co-ordination at European level of countries' regional development policies by intensifying technical cooperation on this subject within the various international organisations, and by the study and definition, at European level, of the broad choices confronting regional planning in Europe ;

(e) extend the international cooperation in this field, to European non-member countries.

B. European Conference of Ministers responsible for regional planning

The Assembly,

16. Convinced of the need for regular contacts at the level of the ministers responsible for regional planning, in order to permit the discussion of the principles and methods reflected in the relevant national policies and enable the broad choices facing the planners to be worked out at the appropriate time ;

17. Convinced of the need to set up a political organ capable of enhancing the authority enjoyed by technical cooperation programmes in various international organisations concerned with regional planning ;

18. Believing that among the European organisations, the Council of Europe is at present the most suitable framework for such an initiative, both because of its geographical scope and because of the varied competences it possesses in the political, social, cultural, local authority, public health, and nature conservation fields ;

19. Considering that within the Council of Europe framework there are opportunities for discussion with representative political bodies, such as the Consultative Assembly and the European Conference of Local Authorities, both of which are aware of the part they should play in regional planning,

20. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

a. convene, within the Council of Europe framework, a European conference of ministers responsible for regional planning, whose first meeting should in particular deal with the following points :

Exchanges of information on the present state of regional planning policy in the various member states, based on standardised reports from each country under the following main headings :

competent bodies,

basic laws and regulations,

principles and aims,

methods of application,

characteristics peculiar to each country,

long-term forecasting,

bilateral and multilateral co-operation;

Regional planning activities in the Council of Europe ; statement on current activities in the intergovernmental sector, the Consultative Assembly and European Conference of Local Authorities ;

Arrangements for regular and systematic exchange of documents on regional planning, centralised by the Council of Europe Secretariat and relating chiefly to laws and regulations at central and regional level, national and regional plans or programmes, progress reports, forecasts, studies on special subjects etc. ;

Institution of the European Conference of Ministers responsible for regional planning on a permanent basis, with special reference to the following points :

organisation,

future programme,

frequency of meetings,

participants,

co-operation with other international organisations,

association with non-member states ;

b. Convene initially a committee of senior officials from the ministries responsible for regional planning, with instructions to prepare the first meeting of the ministerial conference, taking as a working basis the proposals put forward by the Consultative Assembly ;

21. Suggests that a European conference of ministers responsible for regional planning, the scope of which might expand in proportion to the progress made by European co-operation in this field, should take account, when establishing its programme, of the following aims :

to pave the way for encounters between those responsible at the highest level for national regional planning policies and organise exchanges of experience and documentation ;

to compare the underlying aims of different countries' regional planning policies with the object of arriving at a definition of the general principles accepted by all states (possibly in the form of an outline convention) on the basis of the principles contained in this recommendation ;

to facilitate co-operation in frontier regions by working out means of co-operation, possibly in the form of agreements ;

to ensure better co-ordination of regional planning work, which today is scattered among too many watertight compartments by the various international organisations ; the conference would have the authority to draw up a general balance-sheet of European co-operation in this field and, if necessary, to make proposals with the object of avoiding duplication and filling in any gaps ;

to define long-term objectives and the broad options of what must become tomorrow's European planning with the utmost regard of its geographical integrity ;

generally to ensure that national regional planning policies are better coordinated in the following sectors, for some of which efforts should be made to lay the foundations of a common policy :

adaptation of urban structures to modern life ;

rural revival, in particular farm modernisation and policies for developing industry or tourism in rural areas ;

structural reorganisation of declining regions ;

preservation and improvement of natural resources, in particular of water and forests in industrial urban areas ;

long-term policy for public utilities and the socio-cultural equipment necessary to a "society of leisure" ;

co-ordination of the main communication networks, and of the transport and equipment infrastructure, to form a coherent European whole ;

collaboration by operational research bodies in urban and regional development ;

co-ordination of statistical and cartographic terminology and methods in the regional planning field.