Recommendation 1157 (1991)[1]

Preservation and management of freshwater resources in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The recent periods of drought on the one hand and the damage caused to water by various forms of pollution on the other have highlighted the urgent need for integrated and coherent management of European water resources.

2. More efficient preservation and management of freshwater resources presuppose a better understanding of available information on the quality and quantity of this water. Moreover, new factors such as climatic changes and the greenhouse effect, through their impact on the hydrological cycle, could have as serious consequences for everyday life as, for example, the hole in the ozone layer or a rise in the level of the seas.

3. As far back as 1968 - following Recommendation 436 (1965) of the Consultative Assembly on freshwater pollution control - the Committee of Ministers adopted the European Water Charter, thereby affirming the need to devise and develop a European water policy.

4. The Council of Europe subsequently carried out various activities connected with water problems. These included the preparation of a European legal instrument for the protection of fresh water, which unfortunately did not come to fruition. The Assembly therefore particularly welcomes the Convention drawn up by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on the Protection and Use of Transborder Watercourses and International Lakes and hopes that this instrument will be quickly signed and ratified by as many countries as possible.

5. The European Community is also considering the problem of water resources preservation and management and intends to draw up, for 1993, a full-fledged integrated European water policy, in anticipation of the Single Market.

6. Moreover, the work carried out by OECD on the integrated management of water resources and Unesco's International Hydrological Programme, which focuses on scientific and technical aspects, are a valuable contribution to the discussion of this issue.

7. In view of the importance of the issue and the new geopolitical configuration of Europe, it is only natural that the Council of Europe should draw up guidelines for a pan-European policy, devised in such a way as to be in keeping with that of the EEC and be linked with it

8. The success of such an undertaking necessarily depends on the discussions which take place with those whose responsibility is to manage water resources : international organisations, governments, local and regional authorities, NGOs, specialists, the public, etc.

9. The Assembly welcomes the fact that the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe has undertaken to consider two reports on these matters in 1991.

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1. See Doc. 6452Doc. 6452, report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, Rapporteur : Mr Pistre. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 28 June 1991.

10. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

10.1. establish co-operation with the competent departments of the European Communities and the Economic Commission for Europe with a view to drawing up harmonised European policies on varying scales ;

10.2. encourage the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe to make its current activities part of concerted Council of Europe action, particularly by taking part in initiatives where the contribution of local authorities is one of the conditions for the success of the project ;

10.3. include activities in the 1992 intergovernmental work programme which also take account of the problems of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in this area ;

10.4. organise - with the Assembly - in 1992 a large-scale public campaign of short duration (three months) on water resources, aimed at inducing the widest possible awareness among the general public, representatives of local and regional authorities and of industry, specialists and NGOs ;

10.5. invite member states to support any national or international integrated project aimed at the long-term assessment of freshwater resources, which includes models simulating ecological effects and regional distribution.