Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1172 (1992)[1]

Situation of the cultural heritage in Central and Eastern Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly welcomes the possibility, for the first time in its existence, of reviewing the European cultural heritage as a whole. This newly gained perspective leads directly to new opportunities for all the countries involved to enrich their horizons, exchange experience and improve local practice on a reciprocal basis.

2. The Assembly is, however, seriously concerned by the situation of the cultural heritage in Central and Eastern Europe. It recognises that this situation varies considerably, from advanced conservation practice in such countries as Hungary and Poland to the virtually undocumented areas of the eastern republics of the former USSR.

Illegal art trade

3. The Assembly regrets the massive recourse in Central and Eastern Europe to the, often illegal, sale of moveable art objects for hard currency, in particular by individuals, who by flooding the market are depriving themselves and their countries of an incalculable richness for little immediate return.

4. Along the lines of Recommendation 1072 (1988) and pending a more detailed study of this question, the Assembly would recommend that the Committee of Ministers urge all the European countries involved, including the receiving countries, to take very urgent measures to stop this drain of national resources.

Yugoslavia

5. With no less urgency, the Assembly vigorously deplores the deliberate and systematic destruction of the heritage in Croatia by the Yugoslav federal forces, in direct contravention of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict (The Hague, 1954), the European Cultural Convention (Paris, 1954), and the World Heritage Convention (Paris, 1972) to which the Yugoslav authorities acceded respectively in 1956, 1987 and 1975.

6. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers set up a body of appropriate conservation experts that may be able, in concertation with the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union and other interested parties, to intervene directly in the protection and restoration of cultural property damaged in Croatia the moment circumstances permit.

Architectural heritage

7. More generally, the Assembly notes that thearchitectural heritage itself in Central and Eastern Europe, though still extremely rich and ranging from major monuments to traditional village vernaculararchitecture, is directly threatened by decay, demolition or disinterest because of the lack of appropriate legislation and its implementation and because ofinadequate resources for conservation and repair.

---

1. Assembly debate on 3 February 1992 (19th Sitting) (seeDoc. 6538, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteurs : Mr López Henares and Mr Müller). Text adopted by the Assembly on 3 February 1992 (19th Sitting).

8. In many countries considerable expertise in conservation has been built up within the state administration. There is a real risk that this experience may be lost in changing to cheaper techniques proposed from the private sector.

9. The Assembly fully recognises the difficulties faced by the administrations involved. Following the collapse of totalitarian government, new structures and policies have to be developed for the protection of the cultural heritage and in particular new partnerships established both within government (between central and local authorities), with the general public and with the emerging private sector. Resources are inadequate and it may not be easy to establish a sufficient priority for conservation action.

10. What needs to be done immediately, however, is to seek to ensure ways of integrating conservation in overall policies for planning and social reform and to draw up lists of practical priorities for conservation. Conservation legislation is a priority and must rapidly be enacted.

11. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that no gaps or loopholes are left too long unattended in legislation regarding ownership or concerning the responsibilities that ownership might entail in the case of cultural property.

12. Above all are the principles of integrating conservation in all levels of planning as well as in fiscal, economic and social policy and in spreading the notion of a common, but shared, responsibility, involving public administration at local as well as national levels and extending to individual members of the general public.

13. Principles of conservation have been drawn up by international bodies, including the Council of Europe. These were reasserted most recently in the concluding document of the Cracow symposium on the cultural heritage.

14. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

14.1. give increased attention to the exchange of experience gained by the Council of Europe and by member states in Western Europe with those responsible for the cultural heritage in Central and Eastern Europe ; mistakes made in the West should not be repeated, just as the expertise, traditions and cultural heritage surviving in the East should not be lost ;

14.2. conduct a systematic analysis of the situation of the cultural heritage in these countries and consult them in the identification of areas for priority action ;

14.3. alert the governments of Central and Eastern Europe to the irreparable damage to the cultural heritage caused by uncontrolled planning, development and tourism unless account is also taken of conservation concerns ;

14.4. press these same governments, that are for the most part currently engaged in reforming their legislation, to ensure that properly integrated legislation is at the same time prepared and enacted for conservation ;

14.5. urge these governments to encourage private initiatives in the conservation field, in particular through the establishment of companies specialising in restoration and the official recognition of non-governmental conservation societies ;

14.6. encourage the flow of free information and all forms of co-operation, whether by the Council of Europe in policy formulation, legislation or technical assistance, by the European Community in direct subsidies for conservation projects, or through bilateral contacts with member governments, twinned towns or non-governmental bodies.

Pan-European campaign

15. In order to give a new and broader incentive to protection of the cultural heritage in Europe as a whole, and as a gesture of solidarity with Central and Eastern Europe, the Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers launch, if possible in 1993 and on lines similar to the campaign of 1975, an all-European campaign for the protection of the cultural heritage. This campaign should cover all cultural property, including art objects as well as buildings and monuments. The Assembly, the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and non-governmental organisations (in particular Europa Nostra) should be associated with the organisation of the campaign.