Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1173 (1992)[1]

Preservation of libraries and scientific archives in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The democratic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe affects all society. The political opening offers a wide scope to free thought and exchange of opinion and the acceleration of scientific work. In spite of this, scientific research and development are struggling for survival, together with the public scientific collections which serve as their basis.

2. The current lack of financing in Central and Eastern Europe does not only mean that a smaller stock will be purchased at present but leads to gaps that cannot be compensated in the future. In the long run this situation might endanger the quality of scientific and educational work, and therefore affect the education of future generations and their supply of information.

3. Scientific research and development are a long-term investment, indispensable for all societies, and cannot function without a wide range of libraries, archives, museums and other centres to collect and provide information.

4. Central and East European countries have inherited public collections that are both economically and politically different. Nowadays this is compounded by differing economic potential.

5. From the beginning of the changes, a positive development has been observed: library workers have started to save and to reorganise the collections.

6. The first and most serious problem is that the measures taken by the new regimes to fight economic recession have reduced central support for public libraries and archives.

7. With the reorganisation and decentralisation of the network of libraries and archives, control has passed to the newly-formed local authorities which do not yet have the resources necessary even for their own maintenance expenses.

8. Due to lack of money, the libraries and archives have reduced the development of their stocks, and can only preserve them with considerable difficulty. In the economically underdeveloped countries, the most basic technical facilities are lacking.

9. Only those libraries and archives which have broad international connections have a chance of maintaining their standards and certain of them have had to close.

10. The integration, into the present structures, of the libraries, archives and collections of the institutions of the former communist party regimes is giving rise to professional and political problems.

11. The situation is especially difficult in eastern Germany, where the previous personnel and material stock are seriously reduced, but it is rapidly deteriorating also in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

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1. Assembly debate on 3 February 1992 (19th Sitting) (see Doc. 6545, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteur: Ms Szelényi). Text adopted by the Assembly on 3 February 1992 (19th Sitting).

12. Privatisation and reprivatisation affect the buildings of several libraries and scientific archives, so that many institutions are threatened with eviction. Due to the compensation laws, the archive workers have to face huge burdens when the available resources are lessened.

13. The contradictions arising from the change of regime are not of a political character. Due to the general economic recession and the rearrangement of the network, the fate of libraries and scientific archives is uncertain. The network of libraries and archives which serves as the background to educational and scientific activity might be treated as economically marginal, and this might cause irreparable damage to the quality of scientific and educational work.

14. The deterioration of the scientific archives represents also a serious loss for the European cultural heritage, as the creation of archives of the documents of this unique political transformation will later be impossible.

15. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

a. call upon governments of the democratising Central and East European countries :

i. to act responsibly in the case of every investment affecting the future of high-level educational and research work and the network of libraries and archives serving the relevant institutes;

ii. to pass legislation concerning museums and archives as soon as possible and with a view to facilitating research while protecting the personal rights of victims;

b. call upon its committees and the professional organisations in member states to organise expert conferences, seminars and exchanges to contribute to the professional training of their Central and East European colleagues and to the application of the latest technology;

c. call upon the Council of Europe member states:

i. to make possible the development of the necessary infrastructure for libraries and archives;

ii. to invite their national scientific and university institutions to contact their East European partner organisations and to encourage exchanges with them;

iii. to put pressure on the publishers and foundations sending aid to institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, so that they ask the opinion of these institutions on their needs and give assistance accordingly.

16. The Assembly calls on the International Federation of Libraries and Archives (IFLA), the League of European Research Libraries (LIBER) the Council of National Archives (CNA), the International Association of Labour History Institutions (IALHI) and other similar institutions to encourage actively their contacts with other organisations which are not yet members.

17. It also calls on the European Conference of Rectors (CRE) and other European university institutions to include the preservation of libraries and archives in their programmes of co-operation with Central and Eastern Europe.

18. The Assembly emphasises:

a. that the treasures of the Central and East European countries' libraries and archives are organic parts of the European cultural heritage, the responsibility for which is shared by all member states;

b. that the mechanism of European integration can be effective and successful only if collective action and collaboration develop among the partners from the outset;

c. that the availability of libraries and archives to the general public and to journalists and researchers in particular is essential for the free flow of information and will be indispensable for writing the recent history of Europe.