Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1242 (1994)[1]

Common European policy for the polar regions

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly is seriously concerned by the growing threats to the natural environment of the polar regions.

2. Various types of pollution such as the leakage or discharge of radioactive materials or waste, industrial pollution, oil spills, acid rain and even the effects of tourism are threatening to cause serious -and sometimes irreversible -damage to the ecosystems of our planet's last intact regions.

3. The danger is all the more serious since the low level of biological energy makes polar ecosystems particularly sensitive to disturbance, and pollution levels not considered especially dangerous under other climatic conditions can have, therefore, a much more serious and lasting impact in these areas of the globe.

4. Apart from the pollution caused by activities in the polar regions themselves, in particular those connected with the exploitation of natural resources, these regions' environmental problems are largely the result of external factors.

5. In this connection, the Assembly points to the responsibility of European states whose industrial activities have a direct impact on the polar environment through long-distance cross-border pollution.

6. Collective action is therefore essential because only joint efforts will enable us effectively to preserve these regions of our planet.

7. The ending of the cold war, and the opening up of these regions that were dominated for decades by the superpowers' strategic interests, have allowed closer co-operation among the states concerned, which has already led to a large number of initiatives to protect the polar regions.

8. Unfortunately, although international agreements have proved to be one of the most effective means of protecting the polar regions, their practical impact is often limited by a failure to implement them properly and uniformly, and by the many reservations entered in respect of the texts in question.

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

9.1. in the case of the Arctic, support the efforts of the Nordic Council in areas that are of common interest;

9.2. study to this end the possibility of implementing, as part of the Council of Europe's intergovernmental programme, activities concerning:

a. the reduction of air pollution and its impact on the climate, as well as the consequences of the depletion of the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect;

b. the boosting of co-operation on the conservation and management of species, in particular through the Bern Convention;

c. the development of scientific research in fields affecting the ecological situation in the Arctic;

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1. See Doc. 7042, report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, Rapporteur: Lord Newall. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 18 May 1994.

d. investigation and fact-finding studies regarding the nuclear contamination of the Arctic region, including impact assessment and programmes for the prevention of further pollution of the natural environment;

9.3. urge all Arctic states to increase their co-operation in the Arctic region and invite them to draft, sign and ratify a framework convention for the protection of the Arctic region along the lines of the Antarctic Treaty system already in place;

9.4. in the case of Antarctica:

a. invite those Council of Europe member states which have signed and ratified the Washington Treaty and the 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to take all possible legislative, administrative and technical measures to ensure that the commitments they have entered into are implemented properly and uniformly;

b. urge the parties to the Antarctic Treaty to negotiate, as soon as possible, regulations covering the activities of non-governmental organisations, limiting tourist activities and making the ban on mineral exploitation in Antarctica and its surrounding waters permanent;

c. request the parties to the Antarctic Treaty to consider freezing the territorial claims on Antarctica for another thirty years to stabilise the treaty system;

d. invite any member states which have neither signed nor ratified these instruments to do so at the earliest opportunity.