Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1342 (1997)[1]

Parliamentary Assembly contribution to the Second Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Just a few days before the start of the 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the Assembly wishes to stress the overwhelming importance for the continent's peace and stability of strengthening European construction, extended to the whole of Europe, and answering the new challenges that European society has to face.

2. The summit's first priority must be to give fresh political impetus to the Organisation. The Assembly, which was the first to propose the summit, has already made concrete and detailed proposals in its Recommendations 1303 (1996) and 1324 (1997).

3. Based on the information so far available to it, the Assembly considers that the final declaration and plan of action to be submitted to the summit should be strengthened.

4. The second summit must be used as an opportunity to confirm the Council of Europe's special role in its new pan-European dimension and the commitment to using the Organisation's potential to the full.

5. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers bring to the attention of the heads of state and government the following considerations and proposals:

5.1. despite the decision of the Vienna Summit to confer on the Council of Europe the task of welcoming the countries of central and eastern Europe, the Council has so far been unable to develop the political dialogue which a greater Europe needs. Meetings of the Committee of Ministers should focus on events and issues of concern to member states' governments;

5.2. the Committee of Ministers' decision-making system should be improved to make it more suited to the need for rapid action which the member states are entitled to expect from an executive body, particularly in crisis situations. In practice, the more the Organisation expands, the more its decision-making machinery becomes diluted;

5.3. in this context, the official visits undertaken by the presidency of the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General should in future be widened to all member states, rather than being confined to applicants for accession. Such a practice would emphasise the Organisation's political nature and make its activities more visible;

5.4. in general, the Council of Europe must be more active on the ground, in order to offer a more direct response to practical needs. This calls for a change in its working methods. To ensure that contracted commitments and obligations are respected, the heads of state and government should formally undertake to co-operate with the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly in implementing the monitoring procedures;

1. Assembly debate on 24 September 1997 (28th Sitting) (see Doc. 7921, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Martínez). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 September 1997 (28th Sitting).

5.5. the political aspects of the quadripartite European Union/Council of Europe meetings must also be strengthened. The European Union made a commitment, at the tenth meeting held in Brussels on 15 September 1997, to improve co-ordination between the two European institutions, particularly in crisis situations;

5.6. the European Union, which expressed its readiness to co-operate in this aspect at the Brussels meeting, should also contribute to the implementation of the action plan to be adopted at the second summit;

5.7. the new Amsterdam Treaty will bring the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms into the sphere of the European Union's competence. It will also open the way to the enlargement of the European Union to countries that are already Council of Europe members. The Luxembourg European Council will reach a decision before the end of the year on the enlargement process, based on the European Commission's Agenda 2000;

5.8. consequently, the European Union should take systematic account of the results of the monitoring procedures and make full use of the Council of Europe's expertise when examining compliance with human rights standards and the rule of law in its member states, and when examining accession applications;

5.9. the proposals made by the Assembly's colloquy on social cohesion held in Bratislava (16-17 September 1997) should be reflected in the draft action plan. The heads of state and government should:

a. pledge to give as high a priority to social rights as to human rights, recognising the importance of social inclusion and citizenship;

b. identify a minimum core of fundamental social rights as an indispensable condition of harmonious co-operation between the member states of the Council of Europe, and to support, in this connection, the campaign for ratification of the European Social Charter and its protocols, launched recently by the Parliamentary Assembly;

c. take steps in order to improve the participatory process and the civil dialogue between the state and community authorities on the one hand, and neighbourhood self-help associations on the other;

d. create a new tool in the framework of the Council of Europe, in a form to be determined once the "Human Dignity and Social Exclusion" project reaches its final stage, with the view to developing strategies, standards and policies as regards social cohesion, monitoring changes in different countries, exchanging experience and sharing conceptual and practical progress;

5.10. as the only pan-European organisation, and as a guardian of democratic values, the Council of Europe must increase its relations with the rest of the world in a spirit of interdependence, solidarity and respect for the rule of international law;

5.11. equality between men and women, and parity at large, need to be promoted as a basic element of democracy;

5.12. the action plan should be consistent with the principles of the declaration to ensure that the proclaimed intentions be translated into pratical measures.