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

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1394 (1999)[1]

Europe: a continental design

Parliamentary Assembly

1. As we approach the year 2000, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) invites European peoples to draw lessons from the tragedies which have affected their interlocking destinies and caused periods of peace to be no more than interludes.

2. More recent factors, added to these lessons, have bestowed on the grand design for Europe a continental dimension because of:

2.1. the globalisation of trade and the constitution of continent-wide groupings whose objective, at this point in time, is economic: Nafta,[2]Asean[3]and Mercosur;[4]and the development of sub-regional organisations throughout the European continent;

2.2. growing difficulties in adapting to the rapid changes in education and employment systems, resulting in variations in income, unemployment and social marginalisation;

2.3. migration, which will give rise to regional imbalances affecting the whole of Europe while at the same time enriching it with new cultures and opportunities for solidarity;

2.4. interaction between the increasingly frequent cyclical crises affecting the economy and democratic malfunctioning throughout the continent, which mean that European peoples and their democratic institutions must assume their responsibilities towards society;

2.5. upheavals affecting societies in terms of individual as well as collective behaviour, for example, the legal nature of links between partners and of their children's situation; the impact of inactivity resulting from the radical social changes mentioned in paragraph ii. above, of greater longevity or of the decrease in the birth-rate.

Meeting the challenges of the third millennium

3. As its fiftieth anniversary (5 May 1999) approaches, the Council of Europe must rise to meet these major challenges of the third millennium so as to safeguard the fundamental values it endeavours to uphold within all the countries of Europe and to adapt them to a rapidly changing situation. This is particularly true in the case of representative democracy, which must become more participatory. This entails strengthening civil society, giving citizens greater responsibility and extending their rights in terms of equality between men, women, races, religions and cultures.

4. As the longest-standing European organisation, bringing together almost all the countries in Europe, the Council of Europe can legitimately take stock of the political integration of the continent and draw the necessary lessons with a view to strengthening the bonds uniting its peoples. Following the end of the cold

1. Assembly debate on 26 January 1999 (2nd and 3rd Sittings) (see Doc. 8278, report of the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations, rapporteur: Mr Staes). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 January 1999 (3rd Sitting).
2. Nafta: North American Free Trade Agreement.
3. Asean: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
4. Mercosur: Mercado común de América del Sur (South American Common Market).

war, which obscured the vision of the Organisation's mission expressed by certain of its founding fathers – a far broader unifying vision than the current one – consideration must once again be given to their pan-European ideal of a transnational political power based on a European constitution.

5. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), while acknowledging the progress made by the European Union, observes that the difficulties encountered in the enlargement procedure involving those countries currently seeking membership mean that other candidatures will not be envisaged for many years. Without a framework within which all European countries can enter into dialogue and form institutionalised political links, co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe becomes uncertain.

6. This co-operation, which is vital to Europe's future, must take into account each institution's own identity, even if it means that duplication of effort is inevitable: the economy, industry and finance in the case of the Union; democratic values, social cohesion, the fight against poverty, protection of landscapes and defence of minority cultures in the case of the Council of Europe.

7. The Parliamentary Assembly wishes to point out that the Council of Europe, whose political goal is set forth in its statute, provides this framework, which is confirmed in the Declaration adopted at the first summit (Vienna, 9 October 1993): "The Council of Europe is the pre-eminent European political institution capable of welcoming, on an equal footing and in permanent structures, the democracies of Europe freed from communist oppression. For that reason the accession of those countries to the Council of Europe is a central factor in the process of European construction based on our Organisation's values."

8. The Declaration adopted at the second summit (Strasbourg, 10-11 October 1997), however, simply redefines the Council of Europe's main tasks. If the Council of Europe is not to become simply a specialised agency in certain fields, this rationalisation, whose efficiency is highly commendable, must take into account the Organisation's decisive political role in the process of European construction.

9. The Parliamentary Assembly nevertheless observes that, in order to be lasting, the new-found continental unity within the Council of Europe must be part of a process of European integration based on:

9.1. the peoples' acknowledgement of a European identity – complementary to their national identity – which places ethical principles at the heart of political action. Such an identity can only become palpable if it is embodied in a European institutional charter serving as a template for a European constitution. Without this fundamental text, the peoples of Europe will be unable to appreciate the ties which join them to a single European entity;

9.2. the democratic functioning of peoples' representative systems so that all strive towards the same goal by adapting to new challenges and by promoting more direct participation of citizens in public affairs with a view to strengthening civil society, while taking account of specific national systems;

9.3. an area of social justice and solidarity;

9.4. a joint security policy capable of protecting common values and individual and collective rights.

10. In order to be able to fulfil its political role, the Council of Europe must make internal reforms commensurate with this role, taking into account the ways in which Europe has evolved over the last fifty years;

Preparing for a third summit of the Council of Europe

11. For these reasons, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

11.1. consider the Council of Europe as a forum capable of meeting the global challenges of the third millennium, such as the need to develop civil society, and not as an antechamber of the European Union;

11.2. foster the idea of a third summit of heads of state which would focus on a continental approach to European integration and which would, in particular:

a. establish a link between the political vision of the Council of Europe's role, as defined by the first summit, and the operational guidelines laid down for its activities by the second summit;

b. make the Council of Europe, in the light of its contribution to achieving peace and security, a place of political dialogue for the member states of the European Union and for Council of Europe member states which are not members of the European Union, in the context of the summit of heads of state and government;

c. entrust the Council of Europe with the tasks corresponding to its objective of European unification, in particular the drafting of a European institutional charter bringing together the principles and values that have been laid down by the Council of Europe, particularly in the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

d. associate the European Union with the drafting of such a text to ensure the development of a Europe in which the enlargement of the Union is a coherent process of evolution, within a single frame of reference.

11.3. make the Council of Europe a think-tank for a continent seeking a social model based on a European institutional charter which means continuing work on:

a. the various instruments used in representative systems for consulting citizens;

b. the responsibilities and prerogatives of local and regional authorities;

c. co-operation between the Council of Europe and non-governmental organisations — an important aspect of the functioning of participatory democracy;

d. the quality of life, the introduction of a right to a healthy environment and of a code of conduct for businesses and the adoption of a global strategy for European spatial development;

11.4. prepare, on the subject of social rights, an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights reflecting the priority given by the second summit to activities concerned with social cohesion;

Enhancing the Organisation's resources

12. promote reforms which would help the Organisation to better fulfil and publicise its role, in particular by:

a. granting the Parliamentary Assembly budgetary autonomy;

b. acknowledging the indispensable role of the Parliamentary Assembly in monitoring the enforcement of the judgments handed down by the European Court of Human Rights;

c. enabling the Secretary General to intervene in situations of conflict that need to be immediately resolved so as to safeguard the values upheld by the Council of Europe;

d. improving the decision-making procedure of the Committee of Ministers by making wider use of the qualified majority voting system;

e. developing a spirit of openness and democratic transparency at all levels of the Organisation by improving the Council of Europe's information policy and not seeking to disguise differences of opinion that emerge during the debates or hearings that usually precede the conclusion of agreements.