Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1398 (1999)[1]

Situation of children in Albania

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Albania is undergoing a serious social and economic crisis. The atmosphere of insecurity has persisted since the disturbances of 1997. Widespread corruption and the inertia of the political class due to its fruitless divisions are not conducive to the development of society. Unemployment is rife. Education is a low priority. Family ties and the fabric of society are disintegrating.

2. The victims of this state of affairs are children: young people emigrate illegally in an illusory quest for a better future, child labour is exploited, young Albanian girls are victims of trafficking and prostitution in Italy and Greece, many children are abandoned and dubious adoptions take place, there are rumours of trafficking in babies and their organs, violence and juvenile delinquency are on the increase, ever-younger children are turning to drugs, the compulsory schooling requirement is disregarded, and so on. Albania has the highest infant mortality rate in Europe.

3. The country faces many challenges due to transition and therefore does not pay the requisite attention to the situation of children, who do not take priority in the eyes of the policy-making class. Albania does not know exactly how many children it has. Admittedly, responsibility for caring for them rests primarily with Albania itself, which must develop a genuine culture of children in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including awareness-training and information on the facts of children's rights for all professionals in contact with them.

4. Albania cannot cope alone with all these problems, which often involve other European states. It is part of Europe and the solutions lie in European solidarity and co-operation. Its membership of the Council of Europe means that the member states and the Committee of Ministers have a duty to provide urgent assistance.

5. The Assembly welcomes the co-operation established between Albania and Italy on the alleged trafficking in children's organs reported by the Italian press; it earnestly hopes that this affair will be fully elucidated and that the findings of the current investigation will be widely published in due course.

6. The Assembly also considers that European co-operation should focus on the prevention of juvenile delinquency and the functioning of the judicial system with regard to minors, concentrating in particular on setting up separate prisons for minors and on training professionals in contact with children (in particular social workers, community supervision officers, police and judges). Other areas for priority action are drug control, identifying and rehabilitating young drug addicts and promoting education. In this connection, the Assembly supports the efforts of the European Community to set up a centre specialising in treatment and rehabilitation of young drug abusers.

7. Sustainable development in Albania will be possible only if it is coupled with resolute action against corruption, steps to promote civic responsibility and a greater role for civil society. Support should be given to all the various international organisations working on the spot, such as Unicef, in their ongoing projects, and the Albanian non-governmental organisations should be helped to build up their own potential.

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1. Assembly debate on 29 January 1999 (8th Sitting) (see Doc. 8284, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mrs Pozza Tasca). Text adopted by the Assembly on 29 January 1999 (8th Sitting).

8. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers help Albania carry out a census of the whole population as soon as possible and devise a system for the reliable and compulsory registration of all births, deaths and disappearances of children.

9. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member states to design aid programmes for Albania in order to:

9.1. develop and reinforce family planning services aimed at preventing unwanted pregnancies, especially among very young girls, and avoiding recourse to abortion wherever possible;

9.2. adopt a health care and welfare policy for mothers and children, including medical supervision of pregnancies;

9.3. introduce a policy designed to prevent children being abandoned, set up a legal framework for such cases based on respect for the mother's and child's rights and develop alternatives to orphanages such as foster families and small care units.

10. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite Albania to make the higher interests of the child the criterion for adoption and to surround international adoptions with all the safeguards provided for by the 1993 Hague Convention. In fact it also wishes all the Council of Europe member states concerned to ratify and apply this convention so as to put an end to the current excesses and abuses.

11. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite and assist Albania to draft an institutional act on minors' rights and establish a specific judicial structure, including in particular the creation of a juvenile court.

12. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the member states directly affected by the trafficking in and prostitution of young Albanian girls, chiefly Italy and Greece, to demonstrate their genuine resolve to fight this scourge and take concerted action with Albania to decide together on the urgent measures required in order to:

12.1. dismantle prostitution networks;

12.2. set up information and support facilities for victims wishing to be freed from this form of slavery;

12.3. offer them opportunities to return home and regain a place in society.

13. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the member states directly concerned by the phenomenon of illegal emigration of Albanian minors, chiefly Italy and Greece, to co-operate actively with the Albanian Government to:

13.1. i. identify minors without families and repatriate them to Albania;

13.2. aid Albania in setting up a specialist reception centre for the rehabilitation, education and integration of repatriated minors before they re-enter family and community life;

13.3. monitor the situation of minors being held in foreign penal establishments pending their transfer to Albania.

14. Lastly, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

14.1. invite member states to work together with the World Health Organisation with a view to reorganising the Albanian health system and above all offering the entire population a supply of drinking water and viable, renovated hospitals;

14.2. as a provisional emergency measure, provide the budgetary resources required for the maintenance of the various facilities in Tirana Children's Hospital so as to prevent them deteriorating and allow the hospital to perform its tasks until the Albanian authorities are in a position to take over.