Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1461 (2000)[1]

Council of Europe's role in regional planning

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Council of Europe was the first international organisation to consider regional planning at European level and to organise the European Conferences of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (Cemat), the first of which was held in Bonn in 1970.The next conference, the twelfth of its kind, will take place in Hanover on 7 and 8 September 2000.

2. This work has yielded texts, such as the European Charter on Regional Planning (Torremolinos, 1983) and the European Regional Strategy (Lausanne, 1988), for example, which remain authoritative in this field.

3. In the early 1990s the Parliamentary Assembly felt it essential that regional planning deliberation take proper account of geopolitical changes in Europe since 1989, on the one hand, and of the growing importance of regional planning in the development of an overall policy aimed at consistency in economic, environmental and localgovernment matters and social cohesion on the other.

4. At the 10th Cemat (Oslo, 1994) the Assembly accordingly put forward proposals for updating the European Regional Planning Strategy adopted at Lausanne and defining the Council of Europe's new role in that field.

5. The proposals were based on three main lines of action: creating the conditions necessary for sustainable development by building environmental concerns into sectoral policies; through the wide involvement of local authorities and, consequently, the extensive application of the subsidiarity principle; and, lastly, economic and social cohesion;

6. Given, also, the growing significance of globalisation and its consequences, it is essential that European planning policy anticipate their impact regionally in order to deal appropriately with the effects on social cohesion.

7. For its part, the European Union decided in the early 1990s to draw up a European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) providing a set of guidelines and a framework for Community regional development policy. Like the proposals put forward by the Assembly, the ESDP aims at consistency of economic policy, social cohesion, sustainable development and a regional competitiveness which is kept in check by solidarity.

8. Finally, at its 11th session (Limassol, Cyprus, October 1997), the Cemat likewise decided to draw up a set of guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent, which would be submitted for adoption at its next conference, in Hanover in September 2000.

9. The Assembly welcomed that decision as, in part, meeting its own concerns and as an opportunity to stress the contribution which the Council of Europe can make to a spatial development policy for greater Europe, an area in which the Organisation has the capacity to develop action commensurate with both its responsibilities and expertise and with the requirements of its member countries.

1. See Doc. 8733, report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, rapporteur: Mr Hoeffel. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf ofthe Assembly, on 17 May 2000.

10. While welcoming the fact that European Union member states were taking an active part in drawing up the guiding principles, the Assembly insisted that proper regard be given to the Council of Europe's role and resources in the matter, so that action by the two organisations develops within a single coherent framework.

11. In particular it is important that the guiding principles submitted to the Cemat should refer explicitly to Council of Europe activities and instruments which can make a tangible contribution to spatial development in greater Europe and meet the specific needs of some of its member countries, particularly in central and eastern Europe.

12. In this connection, moreover, it stressed that the guiding principles should pay closer attention to the special problems of some regions, such as mountain regions, border regions and river basins.

13. With regard to mountain regions the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, with considerable support from the Assembly, has submitted to the Committee of Ministers a draft European convention on mountain regions aimed at helping to devise a policy for the sustainable development of such regions.

14. To facilitate adoption of the convention, the Congress and the Assembly have agreed that it should take the form of a framework convention which, although less binding, would allow for a more flexible response – in the form of special protocols – to the needs of some regions;

15. Deploring that the guiding principles make no explicit reference to the draft convention while extensively drawing on its content, the Assembly invites the Cemat to request that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe respond to the stated needs of mountain regions and consider adopting the draft convention in the form of a framework convention as soon as possible.

16. It is equally regrettable that the Guiding Principles make no mention of the draft European Charter on the Danube basin, which it is important that the Committee of Ministers reconsider for adoption.

17. In addition, the guiding principles do not give sufficient prominence to transborder co-operation, in which the Council of Europe has extensive experience and to which the second summit of heads of state and government attached clear importance;

18. In view of the foregoing, and anxious to assert the Council of Europe's role in regional planning, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

18.1. step up co-operation with the European Union with a view to coherence and complementarity of action;

18.2. develop relations with other sub-regional intergovernmental organisations working in that field, such as Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC) and the Central European Initiative;

18.3. develop sectors of activity, such as transborder and interregional co-operation, which are among the Organisation's priorities and which contribute to the development of pan-European regional-planning policy;

18.4. adopt the framework convention version of the draft convention on mountain regions in order to cater for the requirements of mountain regions, in particular those in central and eastern Europe;

18.5. reconsider the draft European charter on the Danube Basin with a view to adopting it.