Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1472 (2000)[1]

Sharing water resources management data on Internet: role of the Council of Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Fresh water, a vital resource for mankind as well as nature and a crucial factor of economic development, represents a mere 3% of world water resources.

2. Furthermore, in certain regions the uneven distribution of this resource is a cause of political instability that may even escalate into armed conflict.

3. Its comparative scarcity and heavy use mean that fresh water is exposed to all kinds of stresses, whether of domestic, industrial or agricultural origin, which can seriously and sometimes irreversibly impair both its quality and quantity.

4. Indeed, contamination, impoverishment and ultimate exhaustion of underground or surface water can cause major soil degradation resulting, for instance, in high salinity of the ground water, which can be largely responsible for turning certain regions into wasteland.

5. Agriculture consumes far more water than any other sector and, at least in certain countries, is responsible for significant pollution, particularly contamination by nitrates and fertilisers.

6. As regards distribution of water resources, a large proportion of them is formed by major international rivers. The fact that they constitute virtually the sole source of fresh water for certain countries clearly indicates what important issues their water quality and quantity can represent, as well as the need to ensure effective international co-operation.

7. However, water can also be a destroyer and the prime cause of very serious natural disasters. Europe, like other parts of the world, has experienced torrential rains and very extensive floods in recent years, which have focused international attention on the need to ensure integrated management of water resources allowing all available knowledge to be turned to account.

8. Integrated management of water resources thus calls for programmes in all sectors where it is relevant, whether in spatial planning, the preservation of biodiversity, transport, energy policy, industrial policy, agriculture, civil defence, or elsewhere.

9. For this purpose, there must be ready access to all the appropriate technical, scientific and legal instruments, the relevant knowledge, programmes and projects, the work in hand, and any other facility conducive to better management of water resources.

10. In this connection, it is gratifying to note the large number of Internet sites created at the instigation of national or international organisations, non-governmental organisations or research institutes, and their valuable contribution to knowledge-sharing.

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1. Assembly debate on 25 September 2000 (25th Sitting) (see Doc. 8820, report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, rapporteur: Mr Diana; and Doc. 8837, opinion of the Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Food, rapporteur: Mr Goulet). Text adopted by the Assembly on 25 September 2000 (25thSitting).

11. Here the Assembly particularly commends the exemplary action of the European Environment Agency, one of whose aims is to build a network of the knowledge held by its twenty-eight member countries concerning the environment, in particular, water.

12. The agency's action is all the more important in that the data gathered by it are used for preparing environmental monitoring reports and framing the environmental policies of its member countries.

13. Regarding Council of Europe action in this field, the Assembly would recall the adoption as far back as 1968 of the European Water Charter, still considered today as a reference text, the Council of Europe action programme, Freshwater Europe, organised by the Assembly from 1992 to 1993, and the various awareness-raising campaigns conducted by the Naturopa Centre.

14. The Assembly furthermore considers that the Council of Europe has a duty to continue contributing, as far as its capabilities and specialities will allow, to optimum management of its member countries' water resources.

15. Where the Parliamentary Assembly is concerned, it has always supported and encouraged the initiatives taken and the proposals put forward by the various interested committees, being convinced of the role which it can perform not only within the Council, but also in relation to national parliaments.

16. As far as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the intergovernmental sector are concerned, both of which are also involved in this domain, the Assembly considers it important to use first the existing means and acquired expertise.

17. It stresses in this connection the importance of action by the Council of Europe under the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Open Partial Agreement.

18. It welcomes the recent establishment, in this context, of a European Centre on Flooding Problems in Chişinău, thanks to the commitment of the Moldovan Government, and the forthcoming project on the Danube.

19. It considers that a specific activity dealing with hazards created by accidental pollution or flooding of major rivers could be developed in that context, in particular through an attempt to facilitate access to information as complete and up to date as possible.

20. To this end, an Internet site could be used for collecting data in this field and for real-time information exchange, and be operated as a combined prevention and monitoring instrument and disaster intervention facility.

21. Moreover, having regard to the experience of the Council of Europe in public information and awareness-raising, the Assembly is of the opinion that the creation of an interactive site on the Internet aimed at alerting, informing and educating young people would meet a need not only for them, but also for various education systems, which could use the site as a teaching aid.

22. An Internet site especially for local and regional elected representatives and administrative officers, providing them with information or giving them access to other specialised sites, could be helpful in enhancing integrated water management by local and regional authorities, and facilitate an exchange of information and experience among elected representatives of the different Council of Europe member states.

23. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

23.1. invite the governments of member countries of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Open Partial Agreement to consider the feasibility of a scheme on the situation of major rivers, including pollution and flood risks, to support in particular the efforts of the Moldovan Government, and to envisage creating an Internet site in this context;

23.2. look into the possibility of creating, in the context of the Naturopa Centre, an interactive Internet site in order to raise young people's awareness of, and inform and educate them on, water issues;

23.3. make the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) aware of the need to consider closely the responsibilities of local and regional bodies in respect of integrated water management, and to envisage the creation of an Internet site in order to build a network for the exchange of knowledge and experience.