Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1616 (2003)[1]

The Council of Europe's North-South Centre and its contribution to development co-operation in the 21st century

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Council of Europe's European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity in Lisbon, commonly known as the North-South Centre, is a noble expression of Europe's desire to assist the world's poorer countries in their development, and to spread the Council of Europe's universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law beyond the continent's confines. Following the events of 11 September 2001, the centre's unique mission of fostering European awareness of development issues and of the root causes of world poverty, as well as the need for a genuine North-South dialogue on these issues, has taken on added urgency.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly, against this background, welcomes the holding, in 2002, of a Europe-wide Global Education Congress in Maastricht (The Netherlands), which established parameters for education in schools on development issues for the coming decade, and recalls the need for the centre's work to focus on its unique calling to raise awareness in this field in Europe, basing itself additionally on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals established in 2000 and the Implementation Plan on Sustainable Development adopted at the United Nations World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002.

3. The Assembly also recognises, however, that especially since 11 September 2001, the centre can make an important contribution in its contacts with developing regions close to Europe, such as North Africa and the Middle East, in order to build a new dialogue based on an assertive and undiluted promotion of Council of Europe values and policies. It welcomes the efforts made by the centre under its Trans-Mediterranean and Policy Dialogue programmes to engage these regions, and recommends that it essentially limit its extra-European activities to these nearby regions, which are of such immediate importance to Europe.

4. Considering that the centre forms an integral part of the Council of Europe in its capacity as one of its Partial Agreements, it is essential that it follow strictly the goals and policies pursued by the Organisation, and that it remain in close operational contact with the Council's various parts under the guidance of the Directorate General for Political Affairs. The Council and centre member states should also become more active in using the centre's potential to further various of their projects that have, or could be given, a North-South dimension.

5. The Assembly is also aware of the symbolic importance of the centre's annual North-South Prize. It believes that the prize should in future be awarded in the first place to individuals who are little known or unknown, and who in their personal capacity have made extraordinary chievements in the field in developing countries or, in the second place, to those who have made major contributions to furthering European awareness of North-South relations, rather than to persons widely known and honoured.

6. In order to ensure the future of the centre, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe urge the centre's member states to undertake the following reforms:

6.1. render the centre's objectives more operational and concrete;

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1. (see Doc. 9879, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Frey; and Doc. 9893, opinion of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Braga.) Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 8 September 2003

6.2. reduce the number of projects engaged in by the centre while making them more focused and better co-ordinated internally;

6.3. revise the centre's statute with a view to defining more clearly the responsibilities of the centre's various organs and the decision-making procedure to be followed, including the timing of budgetary and project planning, and the implementation of decisions;

6.4. have the centre observe greater precision and concreteness of language, as well as economy of expression, in its written output;

6.5. ensure that the centre engages in working relationships with outside interests only after express approval by the competent bodies.

7. The Assembly, against this background, welcomes recent initiatives by the committee of representatives of the member states of the centre in this direction and its intention to accompany the centre's work more closely. It looks forward to learning about the results of their work in this regard.

8. The Assembly notes with regret that, over a decade into the centre's existence, only twenty of the Council of Europe's forty-five member states have chosen to join this Partial Agreement. Taking into account the clear will to undertake the necessary reforms, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge remaining countries to join as early as possible, and recommends that annual financial contributions by the least wealthy among them be made more modest.

9. The Assembly regrets even more that over the same decade not one country from the south has joined the Partial Agreement, and considers that this situation must be changed. It calls on the North-South Centre to encourage the accession of countries from the south and in particular those from the south Mediterranean.

10. The Assembly, recalling its own determining role in creating the centre in 1992 and its numerous resolutions devoted to it, states its conviction that a reformed centre will be able to make an important contribution to a Europe more aware of global relationships, and to a fairer and more equitable world made more receptive to European values.