



Recommendation 1617 (2003)¹

Civil service reform in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Mindful of the Council of Europe's particular role in Europe's new institutional architecture and the Laeken Declaration of December 2001 calling for greater democracy, transparency and efficiency on the part of European institutions, the Parliamentary Assembly asks the European Union's Convention on the Future of Europe to include an article laying down fundamental principles for European and national public officials, such as universal and fair access to such functions, equal opportunities for women, integrity, loyalty, objectivity and probity – in consideration of the fact that a high-quality civil service is a vital precondition for strong democracy and the rule of law.
2. The Assembly invites Council of Europe member states to engage, where necessary, on reforms to modernise and streamline public administrations, in particular by introducing e-administration so as to give citizens easier access to information, eliminating obsolete or inefficient services, and introducing effective and clear administrative procedures that define the boundaries of unlawful behaviour and ensure compliance with principles of ethics. Such an approach would render European public administrations in need thereof more transparent, efficient and responsive both to changes in citizens' concerns and to an evolving international environment characterised by rapid technological progress and growing economic interdependence.
3. The Assembly, recalling that the Council of Europe was established to foster pluralist democracy, the respect for human rights and the rule of law, invites its member states to place the interests of their citizens and Europe's common values at the heart of administrative reform as outlined above. Such a move, far from diminishing the essential qualities of public institutions, namely efficient operation and popular confidence, would in fact achieve quite the opposite. These reforms, guided by the general public interest, should be based on commonly shared ethical principles and flexible human resources management methods.
4. In view of the unique role and contribution of public administrations to social cohesion and employment, the Assembly encourages Council of Europe member states to consider carefully all possible consequences before introducing new, private sector-oriented management methods.
5. Council of Europe member states should devolve wherever possible administrative responsibilities to local authorities so as to bring public institutions closer to citizens and to streamline organisational structures.
6. The Assembly considers it necessary to develop, where necessary, a clearer demarcation between the political sphere and public administration, for the purpose of ensuring the independence of national public officials and defining better their tasks and responsibilities.
7. Member states should increase the financial resources devoted to the professional training of officials at national, European and international level in order to ensure that they possess the skills needed to perform their functions. National civil services should actively recruit in institutions of higher education to attract talented people for employment.
8. Finally, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers ask Council of Europe member states to shape their civil service legislation in such a way as to facilitate exchanges between the public and the private sector of, in particular, highly talented and internationally experienced staff.

1. (see [Doc. 9711](#), report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Crema). Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 8 September 2003

