Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1638 (2003)[1]

Sustainable development of mountain regions

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Mountain regions have to contend with a set of problems stemming from their geoclimatic characteristics, such as difficulty of access, low population density and ecological vulnerability. In addition, they supply other regions with vital services and products, such as water, high-quality environment and produce, and the management of irreplaceable landscapes.

2. The specific nature of mountain regions is such that, even though some of the problems facing these regions are the same as those of rural regions, in no circumstances can they be approached in the same way.

3. Furthermore, it is indispensable that a policy for mountain regions should not only be a preservation policy aimed at protecting the natural heritage that these regions represent, but also a conservation policy which seeks to guarantee the sustainable socio-economic development of their communities.

4. For this to happen, the development of Europe's mountain regions must also be part of a strategy for achieving a better regional balance within an overall spatial planning policy for the whole of Europe.

5. Aware of this situation, the Parliamentary Assembly has, for many years, kept a close eye on the situation of Europe's mountain regions, with a view to facilitating the introduction of specific policies capable of meeting the needs and legitimate expectations of their communities.

6. In this connection, it helped to draft and gave its full backing firstly to the European charter on mountain regions, in 1995, and then to the European outline convention on mountain regions, in 2000, both put forward by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE).

7. The Assembly deeply regrets that the Committee of Ministers did not think it expedient at that time to adopt this instrument and open it for signature and ratification by member states, not recognising the merits of an instrument that could provide a framework for a pan-European mountain policy, including for the countries of central and eastern Europe.

8. It is with satisfaction that the Assembly has taken note of CLRAE Recommendation 130 (2003) to transform the two aforementioned draft instruments into a European charter for mountains, a document that has strong political ramifications but is non-binding for Council of Europe member states, and which could be the subject of a Committee of Ministers recommendation.

9. In addition, the Assembly welcomes the outcome of the conference organised by its Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs in Cavalese, Trento, from 16 to 18 June 2003, on Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions, European Transit Policy and the Challenge of Globalisation, which was a further contribution to the discussion on the major problems facing European mountains. It supports the final declaration adopted by the conference and in particular the backing given to the efforts of the Assembly and the CLRAE for a charter for mountains, which is unfortunately non-binding for member states but which sets out the basic principles for a suitable pan-European policy on mountain regions.

1. (see Doc. 9992, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Gubert). Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2003

10. The Parliamentary Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers respond positively to the initiative of the CLRAE, as laid out in its Recommendation 130, by adopting a recommendation to member states on the European charter for mountains, with a view to establishing a common pan-European policy on mountain regions.