Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1668 (2004)[1]

Management of water resources in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Recommendation 1669 (2004) on transboundary water basins in Europe.

2. The Assembly reaffirms the validity of the principles laid down in the European Charter on Water Resources, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 October 2001 which replaces the 1968 European Water Charter. The charter draws governments' attention to the need to manage and protect water resources by adopting a common and integrated approach.

3. The Assembly recommends avoiding any interpretation of the charter resulting in limiting the traditional use of water resources (drinking water and agriculture), particularly in mountain regions, increasing their financial and administrative costs or disregarding the rights of mountain communities to use water resources on their territory for the generation of energy.

4. It reiterates its commitment to the protection and proper management of fresh water resources in Europe and in some specific regions such as the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea basins. In this respect, the Assembly welcomes the creation of the Hydrotechnical Euro-Mediterranean Institute (water technology and management), which was established under Council of Europe auspices further to Recommendation 1471 (2000).

5. Since the adoption of Assembly Recommendation 1224 (1993) on the protection and management of freshwater resources in Europe, the Council of Europe has welcomed thirteen new member states, mainly from central and eastern Europe. However in these countries, economic developments coupled with poor water management and protection have led to growing pressures between water supply and demand.

6. The Assembly stresses that water management, in the perspective of sustainable development, is a matter for all: governments, parliaments, territorial authorities, representatives of business, science and technology, non-governmental organisations and the people themselves. For this reason, co-operation must be encouraged between administrations and between the private sector and the public authorities, who should retain a leading role in water management.

7. The key concept for sustainable development is integration. Integrated water management is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development and for the future of the European continent and the planet, with implications in all aspects of human life including drinking water supply, sanitation, agriculture, industry, urban development, hydropower, fisheries, transportation, recreation and land management.

8. The Assembly reiterates its commitment to the Rio and Johannesburg process and welcomes the commitments to achieving the goals contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation and Agenda 21. In this respect, the Assembly especially welcomes and supports the objective of a significant reduction in the number of persons without access to safe drinking water or sanitation.

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1. Assembly debate on 25 June 2004 (24th Sitting) (see Doc.10132, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Velikov). Text adopted by the Assembly on 25 June 2004 (24th Sitting).

9. The Assembly draws attention to the European Union's Water Framework Directive which establishes a precise framework for water management by defining catchment areas as the only management and planning unit and by giving territorial authorities wide-ranging responsibilities in management of water resources.

10. The International Year of Freshwater 2003, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in recognition of the central importance of water resources, provided the international community with an excellent opportunity to raise awareness globally, promote best practices, motivate people and mobilise resources in order to meet basic human needs and manage water in a sustainable way.

11. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the creation of the Unesco-IHE Institute for Water Education, jointly established by the Government of the Netherlands and Unesco and inaugurated at Delft (the Netherlands) in March 2003.

12. The Assembly supports the United Nations General Assembly's proposal to proclaim the period from 2005 to 2015 as the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", starting on World Water Day, 22 March 2005, and invites member states to consider a contribution by the Council of Europe to the decade. The Council of Europe should continue to mobilise the international community towards reaching the water-related goals in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation and Agenda 21.

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

13.1. encourage member states to support and develop scientific research programmes so as to develop reliable integrated observation and monitoring systems and create comprehensive, easily accessible databases, thereby improving knowledge of the status of water resources, particularly groundwater;

13.2. encourage member states and members of the Open Partial Agreement "EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement" to include water issues on their list of priorities;

13.3. organise an educational programme including a comprehensive awareness-raising campaign, to mobilise and educate European policy makers and the public towards sustainable water management, at individual and group level;

13.4. consider means to allow member states of the Council of Europe to benefit from the Unesco-IHE Institute for Water Education through a specific agreement between the institute and the Council of Europe;

13.5. invite member states to develop their co-operation with the Hydrotechnical Euro-Mediterranean Institute.

14. Considering the multi-sectoral nature of water resources development and management, the Assembly invites the Secretary General to launch a "Euro-water" integrated project for sustainable water management in Europe, aimed at assisting member states in the implementation of water policies and also in the development of practical tools for the different actors concerned. Such an integrated project could include in particular:

14.1. dissemination of good water practice and experience, including existing know-how;

14.2. implementation of the existing legal framework;

14.3. co-ordination of water initiatives, projects and programmes, with particular emphasis on groundwater;

14.4. international co-operation for improved management of shared water basins;

14.5. integration of all the interested parties and civil society in global sustainable water management;

14.6. establishment of partnerships with other international organisations as well as with representatives of civil society;

14.7. adequate training and reliable information exchange;

14.8. a European Water Award to honour the most successful water initiatives in Europe.

15. The Assembly calls on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to promote territorial authority involvement and responsibilities in the management of water resources.

16. The Assembly also invites the European Parliament to speed up the adoption of the directive on the protection of groundwater against pollution.