Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1731 (2006)[1]

Europe's contribution to improving water management

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Water management is a critical element for the sustainable development of Europe and a matter for all: parliamentarians, governments, local and regional authorities, international organisations, scientists, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and European citizens at large.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly reaffirms the validity of the principles laid down in the Council of Europe Charter on Water Resources, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 October 2001.

3. Recalling its Resolution 1449 (2005) on the environment and the Millennium Development Goals the Assembly reiterates that it is unacceptable that 1.2 billion people in the world lack access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion lack access to basic sanitation. The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed in 2001, to set specific targets regarding water resources: to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. However, the 2005 United Nations progress report on the MDGs states that access to better drinking water resources has improved, but much slower progress has been made globally in improving sanitation.

4. The Assembly welcomes the commitment to achieve the MDGs made by the heads of state and government of member states in the Warsaw Declaration and Action Plan of 17 May 2005 and in particular the reference to "everyone's entitlement to live in a balanced, healthy environment" (Action Plan, IV-3). The Assembly further welcomes the commitment of member states to "improving the quality of life for citizens" through the further development and support of integrated policies on the environment, with a "sustainable development perspective" (Action Plan, II-7).

5. Recognising access to water as a fundamental human right could serve as an important tool to encourage governments to improve their efforts to meet basic needs and accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs. A rights-based approach to water would be a very important means for civil society to hold their governments accountable for ensuring access to an adequate quantity of good quality water as well as sanitation.

6. Water resources and services in Europe are interdependent. European countries should adequately integrate the management of transborder water basins and the need for co-ordinated policies, solidarity, and responsibility in their water management policies and plans. In this sense, it is urgent that member countries transfer all the appropriate water management responsibilities to local and regional authorities.

7. The Assembly recalls Recommendation 1669 (2004) on transboundary water basins in Europe and its invitation to member states to develop transfrontier co-operation regarding the integrated management and protection of transboundary rivers and lakes, in particular through bilateral and multilateral agreements, and based on sound environmental, social and economic criteria.

1. Assembly debate on 24 January 2006 (2nd Sitting) (see Doc. 10772, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mrs Papadimitriou). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 January 2006 (2nd Sitting).

8. The Assembly reiterates the recommendations to member states made in Resolution 1449 (2005) and draws attention to the urgency to take action to:

8.1. ensure access to water and sanitation for all; such access to water should be considered a fundamental human right;

8.2. address the burden placed on local and regional authorities regarding the provision of water and sanitation and improve their capacity (technical, technological and financial) to achieve this goal;

8.3. improve water management and facilitate the decentralisation of decision making by recognising the competence of local and regional authorities, including in matters of energy and sanitation;

8.4. develop integrated plans for a more efficient water resource management, including the establishment of the necessary legal and institutional frameworks;

8.5. support and fully commit to the European Union Water Initiative, designed to contribute to achieving global targets for drinking water and sanitation by mobilising a wide range of partners to increase co-ordination and co-operation on water issues at all levels, under the overarching policy framework of integrated water resources management based on a river basin approach.

9. The Assembly welcomes the results of the colloquy jointly organised with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on “Water management: a shared responsibility”, held on 20 and 21 October 2005, during the European Solidarity Week for Water. The key messages from that colloquy, together with this recommendation, will be a contribution to the 4th World Water Forum on “Local Actions for a Global Challenge” which will take place in Mexico in March 2006.

10. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to contribute to keeping the political momentum on the management of water resources before, during, and after the 4th World Water Forum by:

10.1. holding debates on water management in preparation for the forum;

10.2. participating in the multi-stakeholder dialogue that will be held in Mexico;

10.3. leading the way by ensuring that the governments of member countries take action to keep their commitments and follow-up on the ministerial declaration that will be published at the close of this forum;

10.4. co-operating with other parliaments in their geographical region, and sharing information with other assemblies such as the European Parliament and the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

11. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to:

11.1. continue the involvement of the Council of Europe in this important issue and support a rights-based approach to water;

11.2. actively participate in international efforts to take forward the water management agenda;

11.3. prepare and send a message from the Council of Europe to the 4th World Water Forum of March 2006 in Mexico;

11.4. call on member states to:

11.4.1. intensify regional efforts to improve water management, in particular regarding shared lakes and rivers;

11.4.2. develop integrated water management policies and laws and consider the adoption of framework laws that take account of the social, economic and environmental aspects of water resources and their sustainable management, such as the European Union Water Framework Directive and Water Initiative;

11.4.3. decentralise water management regimes to local and regional authorities and enable them to carry out these tasks through appropriate legislative, technical and financial means;

11.4.4. ensure that housing projects, by both local authorities and the private sector, are not built on designated flood plains.

The Assembly encourages the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to promote the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities with regard to the management of water resources, including transboundary water basins.