Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1786 (2007)[1]

Towards responsible food consumption

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls the Council of Europe's revised Social Cohesion Strategy, approved by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2004, which defines social cohesion as "the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation", and recommends a human rights-based approach to social cohesion, noting that the legal protection of rights must be accompanied by determined social policy measures to ensure that everyone truly does have access to their rights.

2. While farmers in poor countries often fail to promote their products sufficiently to provide themselves with an adequate quality of life, a growing number of consumers in rich countries do not want their purchases to have ethically unacceptable effects on producers and on the environment.

3. While consumers seek definite reassurance as to the quality and healthy nature of foodstuffs, the retailing of such products on a massive scale makes a direct or close link between consumers and producers almost impossible, thereby placing small farmers in particular at a disadvantage.

4. The Assembly refers to its different work on sustainable development and in particular recalls Resolution 1292 (2002) on the World Summit on Sustainable Development: ten years after Rio; Resolution 1318 (2003) on globalisation and sustainable development; and Resolution 1319 (2003) and Recommendation 1594 (2003) entitled "Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development: a common challenge".

5. The Assembly also refers to the various texts it has issued on the production and promotion of agricultural products, particularly Recommendation 1636 (2003) on the development of organic farming, Recommendation 1575 (2002) on the introduction of a quality label for food products derived from hill farming and Resolution 1419 (2005) on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

6. Responsible consumption reflects a new awareness based on sustainable development and the ethos of responsibility in an effort to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of human beings today and of future generations, without overlooking the effects of consumer choices on society and the environment.

7. Agriculture has been and remains the most common economic activity, closely linked to a basic human need: food. Responsibility in food consumption has specific connotations and is of special importance. Numerous citizens' initiatives are being developed in this field. The consumers who are mobilising to determine where their interests and those of producers converge, and organising partnerships with them, are now recognised and in some cases even supported by the public authorities.

8. The Assembly stresses that by opting for sustainable development and an ethos of responsibility, which includes consumption, the different economic and political players are guaranteeing lasting economic prosperity and greater respect for the human right to health, an adequate income and a varied, high-quality environment.

---

1. *Assembly debate* on 26 January 2007 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 11010, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Gubert). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 26 January 2007 (9th Sitting).

9. Fair trade is also a very particular form of responsible consumption in so far as it takes the nature and characteristics of production processes into account, going beyond the intrinsic quality of the product to combine sustainable consumption, respect for human dignity and the environment.

10. The Assembly welcomes the setting up, under the Council of Europe's Social Cohesion Strategy, of the European dialogue platform on ethical and solidarity-based initiatives for combating poverty and social exclusion, to promote dialogue between public authorities and citizens' organisations engaged in ethical, responsible and solidarity-based economic initiatives.

11. The Assembly considers that citizens' involvement in economic issues is of the utmost interest to public authorities, as it is gradually changing the economic system, for example by introducing new perspectives into relations between citizens and society, citizens and the environment, citizens and the world. This approach is particularly noteworthy for the countries of Europe and for an organisation like the Council of Europe, considering the values it defends and promotes.

12. It also considers that the public authorities have a duty to alert citizens to their responsibilities as consumers, particularly of food, as well as the other partners in the agri-food sector, such as farmers, transporters, distributors, etc.

13. Accordingly, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the member states to:

13.1. support citizens' initiatives involving solidarity and partnership between producers and consumers and promote responsible consumer behaviour and commitments;

13.2. develop dialogue and co-operation between the public authorities and the various players involved in responsible consumption;

13.3. take legislative, regulatory and socio-economic steps to give a strong boost to the social commitments that drive the solidarity-based economy and develop an ethos of responsibility in economic activity;

13.4. provide for agricultural and rural subsidies that make better allowance for the economic, social and environmental consequences of the different agri-food production systems;

13.5. take into account the growing public awareness of values other than immediate economic benefit and to take steps to:

13.5.1. encourage the development of synergy between government, companies and citizens with this new awareness that is here to stay;

13.5.2. introduce fiscal incentives in favour of associations and organisations engaged in the development of a solidarity-based economy and fair trade;

13.5.3. inform consumers through information campaigns to help them make enlightened choices, and support the campaigns of non-governmental organisations in this endeavour;

13.5.4. encourage the networking of these initiatives and facilitate links with other sectors of the solidarity- or citizen-based economy;

13.5.5. facilitate the establishment of "ethical banks", more heedful of the social and economic consequences of the bank credit system;

13.5.6. encourage companies, especially major firms in the agri-food and food retailing sector, to draw up "ethical balance sheets" of their activities.

14. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

14.1. support the work of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS), and in particular that of the European dialogue platform on ethical and solidarity-based initiatives for combating poverty and social exclusion in carrying out its three-year action plan. This plan is aimed at, inter alia, raising children's awareness, improving access to responsible consumption for the poorest population groups, and developing links between solidarity and responsible consumption and product information methods;

14.2. instruct the European Youth Centre to include responsible food consumption in its efforts to develop youth participation and democratic citizenship, social cohesion and inclusion for young people.