Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Final version

The promotion of active citizenship in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes two key developments in the relationship between State and citizen in post-war Europe, both emanating from the Council of Europe. On the one hand, the recognition of the right to individual petition before the European Court of Human Rights, which puts States and individuals on an equal footing. On the other, the Declaration adopted at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, 2005), which provided a new impulse for the reinvigoration of democracy both nationally and internationally by calling for its strengthening at local and grass-roots levels.

2. The promotion of active citizenship and the deployment of city diplomacy (when two different cities work together to address similar issues of mutual concern) as one of the means of achieving it are consistent with the Council of Europe's own continuing resolve to enhance democracy in Europe. The Assembly stresses the importance of the Europe Prize, which it created in 1955 and which has given a great incentive to numerous activities, friendships and partnerships between municipalities and their citizens all across the Council of Europe member States, and it reiterates its determination to continue to develop this successful instrument of interconnection at the level of municipalities.

3. The Assembly takes note of the ongoing discussions, under the current United Kingdom Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (until May 2012), between different bodies and sectors of the Council of Europe about better co-ordination of work on local and regional democracy. The objective is to improve visibility and impact. The promotion of active citizenship is central to this end, both as a consistent theme for now and the future, and as a reminder that the aim of more efficient and improved activities is in any case to better serve the citizen.

4. Against this background, the Assembly calls on:

4.1. the current and future chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers to build upon the ideas agreed upon during the recent Ukrainian Chairmanship for an "agenda in common" to encourage collaboration between the various actors as part of their initiative to "reinforce local democracy", and to take steps to achieve this end;

4.2. the member States of the Council of Europe to:

4.2.1. take steps to facilitate the exchange of experience between and among cities and governments, with an emphasis on examples of practical ways to enhance participation, and to promote citizenship and good governance at local level;

4.2.2. put in place, as far as possible, independent statutory or informal youth councils in connection with their local and national decision-making bodies, with a view to ensuring the possibility for young people to have a say in decisions affecting them.

1. Assembly debate on 24 April 2012 (13th Sitting) (see Doc. 12898, report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Earl of Dundee). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 April 2012 (13th Sitting).

5. Regarding the promotion of active citizenship, the Assembly notes two types of worthwhile approaches: those which function externally and those which function internally. The Assembly supports city diplomacy as part of the former, and participatory budgeting, corporate responsibility and citizen engagement as part of the latter. In this respect, the Assembly invites the governments of the member States to:

5.1. help restore confidence in democracy by encouraging the examination and exchange of best practice, particularly at local level;

5.2. reduce dependency on public services by increasing local initiatives and control.

6. In line with Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty, the Assembly:

6.1. urges the European Union to realise the ambition of citizen involvement in decision making within the European Union;

6.2. asks the European Union to broaden the focus of the 2013 “European Year of Citizens” to include issues of active citizenship, so far absent from its focus, which is restricted to the subject of freedom of movement.

7. While Council of Europe chairmanships seek to expedite a common agenda on local and regional democracy within the Council of Europe, the Assembly calls on the European Union and the Council of Europe to intensify their co-operation in their joint handling of measures in that field. This is to avoid duplication and to achieve greater efficiency, thus strengthening local democracy in Europe to the best advantage of European citizens.

8. Regarding the progress of a common agenda within the Council of Europe itself, the Assembly wishes to encourage the following five steps: implementing the Chaves report (as agreed in Kiev in 2011 by the Conference of Ministers for Local and Regional Government), agreeing priorities annually, undertaking activities efficiently and transparently, reporting annually to citizens and adopting administrative structures which support the new approach.