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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Convening of a Conference to be attended by representatives of national associations of the local authorities of member countries

Motion for a resolution[1]
Mr Jacques CHABAN-DELMAS, France

1. 1955 - 7th Session - Second part

A. Draft Resolution

The Assembly,

Reaffirming its belief in the importance of securing the close association of local authorities in the process of European unification— and particularly in the work of the Council of Europe;

Considering this need to be all the more vital at the present time when every effort must he made . to ensure a renewal of interest in the European idea;

In response to the wishes repeatedly expressed in municipal circles and given further emphasis during the impressive conferences at Versailles and Venice, to which it would pay due tribute ;

Recalling its Order 71 (1955) and ils previous Recommendation and Resolution[2], which recorded the desire of the Assembly that representatives of the European municipalities should meet in the Assembly Hall of the House of Europe in order to study such problems of common concern as the Assembly itself has included in its Agenda;

Being keenly desirous of observing and applying the principles laid down in its Recommendation 76 (1955) that no measure which commits a local authority should be taken by any central authority without prior consultation with representatives of that authority;

Wishing to open wide the doors of the Council of Europe to the qualified representatives of the municipalities and to make them familiar with its work, in the firm belief that they will pass on this knowledge to wide sections of the population;

Availing itself of its right to consult experts,

Decides :

a. to convene an annual conference attended by representatives of all the qualified national associations of the local authorities of member countries, the list of such associations being prepared by the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs after consultation with the two major international organisations of local authorities, namely, the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities;

b. to put before this Conference all questions on which the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs feels it neces- | sary to consult authorised representatives of the local authorities of member countries before submitting to the Assembly this or that draft Recommendation which may have a considerable impact upon European local government circles;

c. to instruct its Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs to make the necessary arrangements for convening this Conference in collaboration with the Secretariat-General.

2. Recommendation 53 (1953) and Resolution 37 (1953).

B. Explanatory Memorandum (submitted by M. CHABAN-DELMAS, Rapporteur)

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1. On 24th September, 1953, the Assembly, having examined a report presented by M. Ebùzziya on behalf of the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs concerning the best means whereby national or international bodies connected with local government may help in the propagation of the European idea [3], adopted Recommendation 53 and Resolution 37.

2. One of the points of Recommendation 53 was a suggestion that the Committee of Ministers should provide the Secretariat-General with the " necessary funds for the holding of periodical meetings of a permanent Working Party composed of members of the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs and representatives of the national associations of local authorities ". In Resolution 37 the Assembly expressed the hope " that the day may come when the municipalities of member countries, duly represented, may meet regularly in the Assembly Hall of the House of Europe, placed at their disposal for the purpose, in order jointly to examine the problems that concern them... ".

3. As was rightly pointed out in the Report of M. Ebùzziya, from the moment the Special Committee was set up its first concern was to establish as widely as possible ever closer contact with the associations of local authorities in order to acquaint them with the work of the Committee and, as far as possible, to associate them with that work. The Report added : " these links must now be so systematically developed as to become organic. The i Committee proposes to set up a permanent Working Party composed not only of its own members but also of representatives from the national and international local government associations. If such a Working Party were consulted upon all important questions referred to the Committee, it could establish semipermanent contacts with these associations and could effectively support the steps taken by them, without trespassing upon the territory of the international associations, by organising common action with a view to improving the prospects of acceptance of their action by the Governments. "[4]

4. Recommendation 53 having been placed before it, the Committee of Ministers, in its Fifth Report to the Assembly[5] expressed the hope that the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs—which, in its view, could scarcely hope to conclude very speedily the far-reaching task which it had undertaken—should " continue its present methods of work, for the time being, without asking for the establishment of further permanent working parties, such as might make it more difficult to co-ordinate the machinery which will probably have to be devised for implementing the Programme of Work ".

5. The Assembly, in its Reply to the Fifth Report[6], could not fail to express its deep regret at the delay—since this proposal had received a very warm welcome from the States-General of European Municipalities, which in the meantime had met at Versailles [7] —• in the creation of the Working Party in question, which, it said, " would permit the establishment on a solid and institutional basis of that close co-operation which the Committee of Ministers, like the Assembly, would wish to see developed between the Special Committee and the small associations of local authorities ".

6. Replying to the Supplementary Report to the Fifth Report of the Committee of Ministers [8] the Assembly also pointed out that the new body proposed, consisting of the representatives of all national associations as well as the associations which were members of the International Union of Local Authorities and sections of the Council of European Communes, would overcome the difficulty of the absence of a single international organisation, and would play an effective part in reconciling the views of the two organizations.

7. The Committee of Ministers did not consider that the time was ripe for the establishment of such a working party, but two years have now passed, and new circumstances militate even more strongly in favour of the establishment of closer links between the Council of Europe and the qualified representatives of the local authorities of member countries.

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3. Doc. 210.
4. Doc. 210, paragraph 32.
5. Doc. 237, paragraph 66.
6. Reply to the Fifth Report of the Committee of Ministers Doc. 261, Section II, Chapter VII.
7. October, 1953.
8. Reply to the Supplementary Report to the Fifth Report of the Committee of Ministers.

8. The usefulness of such links has already been recognised by the Committee of Ministers. In its Fifth Report the latter pointed out that " to call on the services of the local authorities to instil the European idea into the minds of the general public might provide the Assembly, as the guide of public opinion, with an effective means of securing more lasting publicity for its debates ".

9. Similarly in a declaration intended, inter alia, for the national associations of local authorities, and reproduced in the Sixth Report of the Committee of Ministers, the latter, after having noted with interest the concern of the Consultative Assembly with the contribution which local authorities can make to the development of a European consciousness, states that " the Committee of Ministers believes that the local authorities, being placed in close contact with the population, are in an advantageous position to inform and enlighten public opinion in the member countries of the Council of Europe ".

10. In these circumstances how is it possible to ignore the immense value, in this connection, of manifold organised and indeed organic links between the Assembly and the most qualified representatives, in each of our countries, of our municipalities and regional councils, namely the national associations of local authorities? Does not this constitute a means of opening the doors of the Council of Europe to large sections of public opinion, such as has often been called for in the Assembly, and of perhaps even ensuring a return to favour of the European idea and European institutions at a time when interest in them appears to some extent to be on the wane.

11. In any event, there is no doubt that the periodical holding of a conference at Strasbourg, within the very walls of the House of Europe, of the heads of national associations of local authorities, to consider those questions dealt with by the Assembly which arc of interest to local authorities, would have the effect of making the leading circles among local authorities more familiar with our activities, the resulting publicity penetrating to the most remote corners of European political society. This would be no small advantage.

12. The investigations of the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs have also helped the Assembly to realise the advantages of such a conference, not only from the point of view of furthering the European idea, but in the immediate and practical interests of the local authorities themselves.

13. The Report by our colleague M. Radius on the measures to be recommended to enable local authorities to meet the new responsibilities arising from the establishment of the E. C. S. C.[9] led the Assembly last July to adopt two new texts, certain points of which stress with renewed force the need to establish organic links between the Council of Europe and the national associations of local authorities (see Recommendation 76 and Order 71).

14. Recommendation 76 raises a fundamental principle, the detailed implementation of which your Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs proposes to examine in the near future, namely, that no measure should be adopted by any central authority whatsoever which in any way commits one or more local authorities without prior consultation with the representatives of these authorities. The formulation of this principle by an official organisation like ours has already had considerable repercussions among the local authority associations of our Continent, particularly the municipal circles of coal and steel areas. The second States-General of European Municipalities held in Venice welcomed this declaration as an event of deep significance. It is now for the Consultative Assembly to give it practical effect so far as lies within its competence.

15. It is the Assembly's duty, and indeed to its own advantage, to consult the leading-representatives of the local authorities before taking any decision which may seriously affect local interests. At present these representatives must necessarily be the national associations of .local authorities. This need for consultation could be met by an annual European conference of the heads of these associations, as suggested in the draft Resolution mentioned above, which your Committee has the honour to submit unanimously to the Assembly.

16. Lastly, such a conference would also meet the requirements of Order 71 in which the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs was instructed to take steps, through the permanent Working Party advocated in Recommendation 53 (1953), " to inform the local authorities concerned of the possible consequences of establishing the common market and of the assistance which, with the consent of their Governments, they could obtain from the High Authority with regard to the new tasks devolving upon them as a result of the actrvities of the European Coal and Steel Community ".

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9. Doc. 318.

17. To place all the factors of this new problem at the command of the local authorities concerned is indeed a practical, necessary and indeed urgent task of this Assembly which, in appointing a Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs, thereby acknowledged its comjjetence to deal with all matters affecting our municipalities in the task of working for European unity. As M. Radius said : "These authorities must, first of all, be informed of the facilities afforded to them under the ECSC Treaty and, secondly, of the action they might usefully take within the framework of such prerogatives ". And he went on to say : " this problem might be considered in the course of a session of the permanent Working Party... the establishment of which was advocated by the Assembly in its Recommendation 53 (1953). Such associations could then inform their members of what they had learned and of the solutions then proposed. "

18. Since this permanent Working Party has never been established, it is up to the Assembly to fill the gap by acceding to the unanimous request of its Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs that it should avail itself of its right to consult experts by convening a conference of representatives of national local authority associations of Member States.

19. This conference, which might be held each year, would be required to deal with questions on which the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs wished to consult it. Its composition would be determined by the Committee, by agreement with the two leading international organisations of local authorities—the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities.

20. In convening this conference the Assembly would fulfil the immense hopes engendered in the minds of thousands of local government officials, and thereby gain the support of a large number of sagacious and influential allies whose support would be of inestimable value.