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Policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation and, in particular, a common European policy towards the East

Report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

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A. Draft Recommendation²

The Assembly,

At the conclusion of the debates held in accordance with the practice instituted in 1953, at its April and October sessions, on the policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation and, in particular, a common European policy towards the East;

In reply to Resolution (55) 35 in which the Committee of Ministers requested it "to pursue its efforts to ensure that East-West problems are considered and discussed from a common European point in view";

Convinced that the international situation makes it increasingly necessary for Member States to achieve unity of action, without which the vital interests of Europe cannot be safeguarded;

Considering that the Assembly's discussions on general policy cannot be really effective unless the Committee of Ministers ensures the application of the guiding principles that emerge from the debates,

Recommends to the Committee of Ministers :

1. that it should, first of all, by more sustained action and by using more adequate machinery, co-ordinate national foreign policies and, in the second place, formulate and carry out a common policy on questions of vital importance to Europe;
2. that it should, in the present circumstances, have in mind the following principles on which this common European policy should be based.

A. East-West Relations

1. The Assembly regrets to note that no progress has been made since the 1955 Geneva Conferences towards the settlement of outstanding European problems, in particular that of the reunification of Germany. It recalls the quadripartite decision adopted in Geneva in July 1955 to the effect that " the reunification of Germany by means of free elections shall be carried out in conformity with the national interests of the German people and the interests of European security ". It asks the Governments of Member States to take all the necessary steps to reach an agreement with the U. S. S. R. on this basis and on terms which, while enabling Germany to contribute to collective security, would not affect the balance of power in Europe. The Soviet Government should realise that all the peoples of Western Europe regard German unity as a fundamental condition for the restoration of normal relations between East and West.

2. The Assembly welcomes the brave demonstrations of the unmistakeable popular desire for independence and freedom in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The economic and social structure of these countries is a matter for their own choice; but the Western Powers have the right to ask that freedom of decision by the people, guaranteed by free elections, should be restored there. The Assembly is of the opinion that full self-determination for these nations can alone ensure a lasting peace in Central and Eastern Europe, and that it is therefore desirable for the Governments of Member States to uphold firmly this principle and to raise it at the meetings of the United Nations. The Assembly asks the peoples of Europe to affirm their desire to develop their traditional relations in all fields with the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. The Assembly recalls Resolution 27 of 1954 in which the Committee of Ministers associated itself with the Assembly in reaffirming its faith in the unity of the whole of Europe.

3. The Assembly cannot regard unilateral cuts in armed forces and armaments as being a substitute for an international agreement, which alone can ensure mutual trust. It emphasises the need to reach such an agreement, which should cover both nuclear and conventional weapons, establish an effective system of control and be linked up with the elimination of the causes of political tension. The Assembly invites Member Governments to seek an immediate agreement on the control, limitation, and, finally, the prohibition of experimental thermo-nuclear explosions, the effects of which are causing anxiety to the whole of humanity. This might make it easier to reach a final agreement on disarmament.

B. Relations with " non-committed " countries

2. Unanimously adopted by the Committee.

The Assembly considers that certain countries which have decided to keep out of alliances should, nevertheless, recognise that they share a common interest with the West in preserving their freedom and in upholding in international life the principle of the inviolability of treaties.

C. Assistance to the under-developed areas

The Western countries should declare their readiness, whether funds can be released by disarmament or not, to contribute to a large scale programme of financial and technical assistance for the development of the underdeveloped countries. This assistance, a token of devotion to the cause of mankind, must be given, without regard to economic and political rivalry or interest, in such a way as to cause no interference with the internal and external freedom of the beneficiaries. The latter in turn should assume such elementary responsibilities as honouring signed agreements and putting such funds to proper use. Assistance is required in three fields: under-developed areas within Europe, overseas countries in which European States have special responsibilities, and independent countries.

The Assembly believes, moreover, that a special study should be made of the problem as a whole.

B. Draft Resolution³

The Assembly :

Notes that the attitude adopted by the Egyptian Government in the nationalisation of the Universal Suez Canal Company is incompatible with the spirit of international co-operation, and undermines the confidence essential to good relations between nations; it condemns this unilateral and arbitrary act, which was bound to lead to a serious international crisis. Any changes in the conditions governing the operation of the Suez Canal are of particular concern to the Western countries, which are strictly within their rights in demanding that Egypt should provide guarantees with regard to freedom of navigation through the Canal equivalent to those provided under the 1888 Convention and the Concession Contracts of the Universal Company;

Considers that the proposals adopted by the eighteen Powers at the London Conference constitute a just and practical basis for arriving at a peaceful settlement of the dispute;

Approves both of the Franco-British Resolution of 14th October 1956—the first part of which was adopted unanimously and the second by all members of the Security Council except for the two Communist Powers.

The system established in accordance with the principles adopted by the Security Council should include an international body compatible with the territorial sovereignty of the Egyptian State — and having the necessary powers to ensure the proper administration of the Canal and the respect of freedom of navigation without discrimination.

3. Adopted in Committee by 12 votes against 0, with 3 abstentions.

C. Draft Resolution⁴

The Assembly :

Notes that the dispute concerning the island of Cyprus constitutes a serious danger to the unity of action of the member countries of the Council, particularly in the Mediterranean area;

Urges the member countries concerned to make every effort to consult together and to arrive as quickly as possible at an agreement;

Places itself at the disposal of the Governments to assist in securing an agreement, if this is considered possible;

Requests the Bureau to bring the present offer to the notice of Member Governments .

4. Adopted in Committee by 10 votes against 3 with 2 abstentions.

D. Draft Resolution⁵

The Assembly considers it indispensable and a matter of urgency to strengthen Atlantic solidarity within the framework of the NATO Treaty, the basic aim of which is the defence of the Western countries. N. A. T. O. should be in a position to ensure permanent co-ordination between the foreign policies of the member countries on all problems of common concern arising within and outside the area of application of the Treaty. N. A. T. O. must also ensure that Article 2 of the Treaty is effectively applied. In the psychological field, every effort must be made to ensure that the people of the member countries of N. A. T. O. understand one another's views.

5. Adopted in Committee by 11 votes against 0, with 4 abstentions.

E. Draft Order⁶

The Assembly proposes that a second "Strasbourg Conference" be held in the near future, to which should be invited a delegation from the United States Congress and a delegation from the Canadian Parliament.

6. Adopted by the Committee unanimously.

F. Explanatory Note

1.

The Committee on General Affairs herewith submits to the Assembly a draft Recommendation on the general aspects of "the policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation and, in particular, a common European policy towards the East". There follow three draft Resolutions and one draft Order on certain detailed aspects of Council of Europe policy. These detailed aspects were examined as far as they affect this policy.