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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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Representation of local authorities in European institutions

Report

Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities

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A. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

Considering that the meeting of the European Conference of Local Authorities held on 12th, 13th and 14th January 1957 was in keeping with the principles and aims of the Council of Europe;

Noting with satisfaction that the initiative taken by the Council of Europe met with a most encouraging response from the representatives of the local authorities, as shown, in particular, by t h e large attendance at the Conference;

Having studied the work of t he Conference and appreciated its remarkable quality;

Considering that the results of the Conference make a most valuable contribution to the work of the Council of Europe;

Having regard to its Resolution 76 (1955);

Thanking the Committee of Ministers for having made it possible for the Conference to meet;

Endorsing the views expressed by the Conference in its Opinions Nos. 4 and 5 on the participation of local authorities in European institutions,

Recommends that the Committee of Ministers should :

1. Take the necessary steps to enable the European Conference of Local Authorities to meet in 1958;
2. Reconsider the reasons which prompted it, in its Resolution 12 (1956), to grant only 3,500,000 francs for the organisation of the first Conference;
3. Include in the Budget the necessary appropriation to enable the Conference to meet in 1958 under satisfactory conditions. This appropriation should amount to 8,500,000 francs.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1. The movement towards European unity has this year entered upon a new phase. The European Conference of Local Authorities had the effect of bringing the contribution of local communities, the basic units of which each nation is composed, into close association with the efforts made over the past ten years by political leaders in the various Member States. The Council of Europe, so often coming under criticism, has, thanks to its Consultative Assembly, made a far-reaching change in its methods. The Assembly has demonstrated its belief that something would be lacking in its efforts if it did not make use of one of the vigorous constituent elements of Europe, the local authorities and, most vigorous among them, the municipalities. This was the aim which the Assembly set itself on 30th September 1952, and the study of which it entrusted to its Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs.

2. The Committee is now able to present to the Assembly the positive results of its action and to suggest measures for making their effects concrete and lasting. In pursuance of its decision, the Assembly undertook on 11th May 1953 to study means of ensuring the representation of local authorities in European institutions. On 23rd September of t h a t year, the Committee, turning to account the results of its enquiries among international and national associations of local authorities, proposed to the Consultative Assembly a number of measures concerning the pairing of towns, the award of a European Prize, and close and regular consultation with national associations of local authorities. The Assembly adopted these proposals and in its Recommendation 53 to the Committee of Ministers urged the Member Governments to take steps to put them into effect.

3. Two years later, the Assembly adopted its Resolution 76, in which it was decided " to convene an annual conference to be attended by representatives of all the qualified national associations of the local authorities of member countries ". Following the Ministerial decision of June 1956, t h e participation of local authorities in the work of the Council of Europe received official sanction. The Conference of Local Authorities, which met from 12th to 14th January 1957, by its large attendance and the high level of its debates amply fulfilled the hopes placed in it by t h e Consultative Assembly. This event in the annals of the Council of Europe marks the end of a long period of preparatory work and constitutes the first step towards consolidating and strengthening links between the local authorities and the Assembly within the Council of Europe. The Committee presented to t h e Conference a report setting forth the Assembly's reasons for adopting Resolution 76 and requesting the opinion of the Conference on the participation of local authorities in the activities of European institutions. The Committee obtained confirmation of its view that local authorities could make a valuable contribution to the work of the Council of Europe and that permanent arrangements should be made for them to do so.

4. The Conference, on its side, formed a clear idea of the part it would henceforth have to play; that of giving the municipalities of Europe a voice in international affairs. The Conference was thus led to contemplate its, still uncertain future. It fully realised that opinion in many quarters was somewhat lukewarm—that there persisted an attitude of wary circumspection towards this new and ambitious enterprise. But, convinced of the worthiness of its cause, the Conference was resolved, with the concurrence of the Assembly, to enlighten and inform sceptical or hostile opinion. The delegates devoted much attention to this matter at the outset, in their desire to dispel the doubts and misgivings expressed in certain quarters. The Conference then defined its sphere of competence and special character. It was not a rival of international associations of local authorities but the adjunct of the existing international and intergovernmental organisation. Being set up under the auspices of a European intergovernmental organisation, it could authoritatively ensure t h a t the local authorities played an official role and could secure for European public opinion the widest possible representation. It would act in the capacity of a responsible expert adviser, ready to provide valuable and effective assistance. The delegates represented thousands of European municipalities and were the qualified spokesmen with whom politicians could discuss the manifold local repercussions of the problems arising in the building of a united Europe. What is more, in the responsible positions they occupied in their particular sphere they were in a position to act speedily and effectively upon European public opinion.

5. The Committee noted with satisfaction t h a t the mayors and local officials were firmly resolved to devote their considerable resources t o the cause of European unity.

6. The Committee therefore believes, on the morrow of the first meeting of the Conference, that the Assembly should take all necessary steps to ensure continuity for the work of the Conference. The Committee therefore moves to recommend that the Committee of Ministers should allow the necessary credit of 8,500,000 francs for the meeting of the Conference. The Conference will meet, in this case, under satisfactory conditions. The Committee noted, in particular, that, at its first session, the Conference had achieved a great deal, considering the small time granted for its meeting. It was necessary, incidentally, for the delegates to work in night sittings. All things considered, in spite of t h e very small appropriation decided by the Committee

of Ministers, it was possible for the Conference to be held under reasonably decent conditions, thanks, mainly, to the generous contribution of the staff of the Secretariat-General and of the interpreters, and also to the valuable contribution by Local Authorities associations. For the sake of its dignity, the Council of Europe must not be required to subordinate its function to the possibility of having to rely on external aid.

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