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Global warming and ecological disasters

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 1823 (2008)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully considered Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1823 (2008) on "Global warming and ecological disasters".

2. It has taken due note of the Assembly's analysis of the environmental situation and its impact and of the measures it recommends to the decision makers and players concerned, at all levels of governance. It has brought Recommendation 1823 (2008) to the attention of member states' governments and forwarded it to the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) and to the Committee of Senior Officials of the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT).

3. The Committee of Ministers shares the Parliamentary Assembly's concerns about climate change, which is now a threat to people and the environment worldwide and requires an urgent, responsible and global response. The Committee of Ministers therefore supports the comprehensive, integrated approach recommended by the Assembly. In this connection, it draws attention to the Council of Europe's commitment to sustainable development, as expressed by the Heads of State and Government of member states at the Third Summit in Warsaw.

4. In reply to the suggestions made by the Assembly in paragraph 24 of its recommendation, the Committee of Ministers wishes to underline the work done by the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning. In particular, it draws attention to the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent adopted at the 12th Session of the CEMAT in 2000. The Committee of Ministers endorsed these principles and recommended them to member states in Recommendation Rec(2002)1. The CEMAT has considered the issues regularly since then and is continuing its efforts here: the 15th Session of the CEMAT to be held in the Russian Federation will focus on "Challenges of the future: Sustainable spatial development of the European continent in a changing world" (see Appendix 1 – Comments of the Committee of Senior Officials of the CEMAT). The Committee of Ministers will carefully consider the conclusions of the conference.

5. With the support of its network of specialised centres, the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) already addresses, within its 25 member states, prevention and education issues related to natural and technological risks. These activities were recently extended to the specific effects of climate change on risk exposure for the public. The Committee of Ministers draws the Assembly's attention to the comments made by the Partial Agreement's Committee of Permanent Correspondents on Recommendation 1823 (2008) (see Appendix 2).

1. adopted at the 1044th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (10 December 2008)

Appendix 1 – Comments of the Committee of Senior Officials of the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT) of the Council of Europe on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendations 1823 (2008)

The Committee of Senior Officials:

Aware of the need for urgent, responsible and comprehensive action in response to the challenges of global warming, in order to alleviate its ill-effects on the natural and cultural heritage;

Concurring with the Parliamentary Assembly that the question of climate change should be taken into account in spatial planning, water resources management, land use and agricultural policies to counter flood and drought risk;

Decides that this question will be discussed at its next meeting, in order to develop and promote a common policy under which all spatial planning, development and management instruments would incorporate climate change into their “mitigation and adaptation” dimension, and the appropriate processes of “multi-level” territorial governance.

Appendix 2 – Comments of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1823 (2008)

After careful examination of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1823 (2008) on "Global warming and ecological disasters" at its meeting in Paris on 24 and 25 April 2008, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA):

1. Shares the concern of the Parliamentary Assembly concerning the challenges that Europe will have to face due to the expected changes in temperature and rainfall while noting that climate change should be taken into consideration in the context of global change which also includes changes in urbanisation, agriculture and forestry or spatial planning that may increase the vulnerability of populations.

2. Notes that present available knowledge predicts that climate change will intensify climate threats and will most likely cause more frequent disasters related to meteorological phenomena and will certainly increase coastal and marine risks, as well as forest fires, drought or heat waves.

3. Recalls that the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement, jointly with its network of specialised centres, is already working within its 25 member states on prevention and education issues related to natural and technological risks (in such diverse fields as forest fires, landslides or radiological risks) and starts to consider the specific effects of climate change on risk exposure for populations.

4. Notes that, while the reduction of greenhouse gases is a necessary action to minimise the extent of global warming in the long term, adaptation to climate change to reduce risks in the medium term should receive appropriate attention by governments and the civil society. A reinforced effort in preparedness of societies will be essential to curb increasing risks, investing in risk-related sciences (geosciences, meteorology, oceanography, ecology, etc.), in developing early warning systems and more efficient response in cases of emergency.

5. Suggests that the Committee of Ministers and the governments of member states increase their efforts in protection of people from risk, by increasing resilience, promoting risk awareness through education and reducing disaster risk, integrating global change into their predictions and plans.

6. Suggests that the Council of Europe becomes more involved in the action against climate change and prevention of its effects and provides appropriate funding for the necessary programmes and activities related to early warning, risk education and post disaster assistance under the EUR-OPA Partial Agreement.

7. Suggests the Committee of Ministers encourages member states which are not yet parties to the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement to consider joining this co-operation structure so as to reinforce their action to combat the effects of climate changes.