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Establishment of an agronomic centre of university standard for the Mediterran areas of Europe

Report
Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
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A. I. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

Noting :

that the agricultural economies of the Mediterranean countries members of the Council of Europe closely resemble each other in farming structure, climate, nature of the soil and traditional farming methods ;

that, owing to the density of the population, crops of these countries, frequently ill-suited to the soil or climate, provide a poor standard of living for farming communities;

that changes in method, organisation of markets, guidance of production, better planning of crops and stricter selection of varieties or seed would in a short time, as experiments have shown, have most beneficial effects on the economic development of these areas;

that a great effort must be. made to develop irrigation, improve soils, combat erosion and promote re-afforestation;

Believing :

h a t all member countries of the Council must work together to help these less favoured areas to raise their production to the level of t h a t of the other countries of the European continent;

that one of the surest ways of promoting productivity in the Mediterranean areas of the member countries, harmonising, guiding and controlling production methods, obviating the accumulation of surplus stocks due to uniformity of crops and facilitating the disposal of standard products is to provide additional training for agricultural experts familiar with the general problem;

Considering :

that, to attain this end, i t is advisable to set up and organise a centre or foundation which would take a limited number of graduates from leading agricultural colleges or particularly well qualified officials who, carefully chosen, would for a given period receive instruction designed to give them a general insight into the problem of the Mediterranean economy;

that such an institution would undoubtedly contribute greatly to the development of a European outlook among the rural population who, through the agricultural experts?their regular advisers?would more readily become alive to the interdependence of the agricultural economies of the Mediterranean basin;

that it is fitting for the Council of Europe, which is noted for its achievements in the university sphere, to do something for future agricultural teachers, whose influence extends over a large section of the population;

that , while it is essential to continue to increase the technical assistance supplied to the Mediterranean areas by other international organisations, including the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (F. A. 0.), the European Productivity Agency and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (0. E. E. C) , i t is equally important to take suitable political action to promote the idea of European fellowship;

that the Council of Europe is the only body capable of undertaking the necessary action in support of technical assistance and ought therefore to take the initiative by setting up a centre or foundation for the further training, in t h e framework of its member countries, of selected agricultural teachers,

Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

Resolve to set up, under the auspices of the Council of Europe and with the help and participation of t h e European Productivity Agency, F. A. 0. and the countries concerned, members of the Council of Europe, a Mediterranean centre or Mediterranean foundation for the further training of agronomists who will be required to train agricultural instructors in their own countries;

Take steps to set up this centre in a place served by a university, a Mediterranean experimental centre and an agricultural college specialising in the study of the products of the region;

Meet as much as possible of the cost of setting up the centre and invite Member States of the Council to make a useful contribution to this enterprise.

B. II. Explanatory Memorandum by M. SOURBET

1. I. Introduction

Since one of the aims of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its Members by common action in economic and cultural matters, it seemed to us essential to enlarge on the problem of fostering a European outlook in rural circles.

While cultural contacts have shown a welcome tendency to expand over the past ten years, thus imbuing the undergraduate body with a new conception of cohesion among the nations, a large?and indeed the least access-ible?section of the population has not yet fully grasped the importance of our aims.

Living isolated on his land, the farmer is slow to respond to new and important general ideas. He is, of course, vaguely aware of the need for unity. That awareness is rooted in two fundamental factors : t he constant fear of war, with its almost inevitable heavy burden on farmers, and the need to find a steady market for his products.

We believe it essential in promoting a European outlook among the rural classes, to call on those who, by inclination or profession, are the natural advisers of the farmers, namely the agricultural experts. They play a large and influential part in farming and should, in our view, be given an opportunity of becoming more clearly aware of the importance of European agricultural problems in the strict sense. We think t h a t the part played by these experts may be decisive in training the rural classes of the future. In frequent contact with farmers, they are in a position to guide them in both theory and practice. Yet, although much is now being done in universities to promote a European outlook, we may truly say that no similar steps have been taken among the local leaders of the countryfolk.

The object of our report and the above draft Recommendation is to make good that deficiency.

2. II. The present position

A few years ago, the Committee on Agriculture of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe suggested establishing a European Agricultural College. That idea, which we think sound, may nevertheless be too ambitious. For each country has its own farming customs inherent in the constitution of its soil and climate; its crops are subject to wide, regular variation according to latitude. A European Agricultural College would therefore, if it had kept its specialised character, have been in danger of failing in its purpose, or else the administrative machine composing it would have had to be top-heavy owing to the large number of subjects to be treated and the great differences due to climatic, structural and geographical conditions.

The Mediterranean region seems to offer a basis on which a homogeneous institution could be built, since all Mediterranean countries possess almost identical agricultural structures. The same crops are grown, the climate varies little from one country to another and the difficulties in finding markets are virtually the same for the Italian economy as they are for the French, Greek, Turkish, Spanish and Portuguese economies. Owing to erosion, moreover, cultivation difficulties are similar, and it is no exaggeration to say t h a t the same influences and much the same products obtain throughout the territories on the Mediterranean seaboard.

The Conference of Directors-General for Agriculture and Directors of Agricultural Advisory Services in the Mediterranean area, organised by the European Productivity Agency of 0. E. E. C. in Paris from 3rd to 8th November 1958 and attended also by a number of Directors from non-Mediterranean countries, took up, in a somewhat modified form, the idea launched by the Council of Europe six years ago. Several delegates at the Conference stressed the importance to all countries on the Mediterranean of enabling specialists, after completion of their studies (and even if already holding responsible posts in their own lands), to take courses which would provide a common training in the technical and economic aspects of Mediterranean agriculture. The period spent at a European agricultural seminar after their studies would be devoted to completing their general education and to providing a clear insight into the problems encountered in every Mediterranean country. In this way work in the technical spheres of agriculture would proceed along generally uniform lines and eventually make it possible to standardise methods of cultivation, production and marketing and to guide research and experiment.

3. III. Establishment of the centre

The discussions on this subject at the Conference of Directors of Agricultural Services drew the attention of OEEC departments, in particular the Productivity Agency, to this question. The Council of Europe and O. E. E. C. have together considered the best way of putting the idea into practice. All these discussions have revealed that a number of international organisations are likely to take an interest in the prospect. Similar, localised, schemes are to be tried out in Italy over a short period; they will, however, concern agricultural instructors not agronomists.

A centre of the kind advocated in this report must go further and cover much more ground. We do not wish to confine ourselves to purely technical questions, but to provide, too, an intellectual and economic background t h a t will enable students of the European Mediterranean Centre to approach, objectively and systematically, the problem of creating a true sense of unity among our countries in agricultural matters. In order to carry out the plan successfully, certain fundamental problems must be settled.

The first thing to do is to find a suitable place. The choice will have to be determined by the following factors :

a. there must be a university nearby, so that the agronomists can follow the courses necessary for their intellectual training;

b. there must be a large agricultural college specialising in Mediterranean products;

c. there must be an experimental centre in the neighbourhood, where students can follow the latest tests with up-to-date equipment.

There is, too, the question of the length of the courses. If they are too short, students will derive only limited benefit from them, and it is in that case to be feared that the seminar will not leave a strong enough impression on young people. For that reason, in the talks at 0. E. E. C. it was thought essential to propose a period of at least a full academic year?about 8 months, from November to the beginning of July.

A diploma would be issued on completion of the studies.

4. IV. Organisation

To fulfil its purposes, the Centre should take the form of what is commonly called a "seminar" and be residential. The authorities responsible for running it might be as follows :

a. a Board of Governors, comprising leading figures in the political, academic and agricultural worlds and representatives of the States concerned, and responsible for laying down the general lines which the studies should follow;

b. a smaller Executive Board, which would draw up the programmes and supervise the administration proper;

c. an administrative body responsible to the Board of Governors and directly concerned with management, material organisation and superintendence. Here, the Council of Europe's help might be particularly useful in providing staff.

The courses should cover most of the subjects relevant to the development of agriculture in the Mediterranean areas, including agricultural instruction, farm management and economies, irrigation, anti-erosion measures and the market for Mediterranean products?in a word, the main principles of a general agricultural economy.

Simultaneously with the courses of the seminar, students could follow others at the university, the agricultural college or the experimental centre. In addition, in order to provide students with a European outlook in politics, carefully chosen political figures might give a series of lectures during the academic year on matters of common interest.

5. V. Financial implications

The organisation of such a centre would undoubtedly raise serious financial problems. It is important that the students should be neither too few nor too many : if too few, the scheme would not be worthwhile; if too many, they would probably not have the homogeneity desirable in an enterprise of this kind. The optimum strength would no doubt be 50 to 60 students a year, and consist fo three groups, namely :

a. exhibitioners from the various Member States;

b. government-selected students paying for their board and lodging;

c. students sponsored by private foundations interested in the scheme and bearing the cost of the students' board and lodging.

d. Assuming the cost of supporting a student for 8 months to be about 500,000 French francs, the college budget would amount to some 30 million francs. That sum could be cut down by about half, if only half the students were supported by the institution. To these figures should be added teaching costs and administrative expenses, which might come to an equal amount. Without having worked out the exact cost of running such a centre, we may assume that it would not be less than 40 million French francs.

6. VI. Sources of finance

Funds to finance the scheme may be forthcoming from several sources. We believe t h a t to carry out the project adequately a number of organisations would have to take a part. The following bodies might be approached :

a. F. A. O.;

b. the Council of Europe;

c. OEEC European Productivity Agency;

d. certain wealthy professional organisations;

e. provincial authorities, the Minist r y and Chambers of Commerce of the host country ;

f. the Governments of countries interested in the scheme;

g. various foundations interested in fostering a spirit of European co-operation.

The European Productivity Agency, which has the matter under consideration, suggests appointing a consultant to draw up a report setting forth the precise conditions in which the Centre could be set up. The report should provide a reliable estimate of the expenditure involved.

The Council of Europe, whose effective work and achievements in the cultural sphere are already apparent, ought to be able, in a matter in which unanimity can be quickly reached, to assist financially in instituting a centre likely to be of unquestionable value in fostering a spirit of European co-operation.