Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 469 (1966)[1]

Evolution of local and regional structures in Council of Europe member countries, and giving an Opinion on Resolution 54 (1966) of the European Conference of Local Authorities

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Considering that local self-government is an inherent part of Western European political systems and that efficient local democracy will be of great importance in an integrated Europe ;

2. Considering that local authorities are faced with serious problems throughout Europe and that their structures need adaptation to the requirements of 20th century civilisation and of European integration ;

3. Having taken note of Resolution 54 (1966) of the European Conference of Local Authorities and the report presented to that Conference on the adaptation of local structures to the needs of European unity and modern civilisation ;

4. Greatly appreciating that the Conference has tackled the important question of re-organising local government and stressed the necessity for local authorities to take the initiative with a view to adapting their structures to modern needs ;

5. Welcoming the suggestions of the Conference that local authorities should organise widespread co-operation among themselves from municipal up to regional level, envisage federation or pooling of administrative staff and resources, joint establishment of planning and development programmes as well as grouping around central municipalities ;

6. Stressing the proposal that re-organisation of local government must be undertaken in accordance with the principles of local democracy and municipal independence, that the main object of Governments in this sphere should be to provide the traditional local authorities with the constitutional and legal means for adapting their structures to modern conditions, and that Governments should allow elected representatives to take responsibility for decisions in regional organisations ;

7. Expressing satisfaction at the possibility given to representatives of European local authorities within the framework of the Council of Europe to exchange their views and experiences and at the work done by the 6th Session of the Europe in Conference of Local Authorities as regards the adaptation of local government to modern conditions ;

8. Considering that it is expedient to add, from a parliamentary standpoint, some more considerations and recommendations to Governments concerning local government re-organisation and to raise the question whether the traditional local authorities will be capable of meeting future requirements and whether the time is ripe for a basic reshaping of local government structures ;

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1. Assembly Debate on 29th September 1966 (15th Sitting) (see Doc. 2110, report of the Committee on Local Authorities). Text adopted by the Assembly on 29th September 1966 (15th Sitting).

9. Recalling that the present local government system or at least its fundamental features date from the 19th century, that since then tasks and standards have changed greatly, that local authorities are faced with the tremendous problems of industrial civilisation and European integration and that reforms are being considered in several European countries ;

10. Considering that the future of local government depends on the retention and creation of authorities fitted to the performance of their tasks, i.e. ensuring efficient administration, and that, for the sake of maintaining and strengthening the principle of democracy, changes in the system seem to be necessary ;

11. Considering that a great number of authorities are too small to discharge the full range of local government functions,that this state of affairs has led to a scattering of functions between a certain number of intermediate, incongruous and overlapping bodies which are not directly answerable to the electorate, that there is often incongruity between local government organisation and cohering communities or areas, that the relationship between town and country is disturbed and that urban centres and big towns have become highly bureaucratic administrations ;

12. Considering that the present local government organisation does not satisfactorily meet the requirements of regional planning and that there is an interrelationship between the deepening financial crisis and structural deficiencies in local government ;

13. Considering that it is the task of Governments to establish principles and a flexible concept for re-organisation of local government and to invite local authorities to consider adaptation in conformity with governmental proposals, and that either a two or three tier local government concept would probably best suit the requirements of modern time and European unification ;

14. Considering that federation, amalgamation and merging of a certain number of small authorities will be necessary, leaving, however, to cohering member communities their identity and decentralised functions of local character, that urban centres, big towns, groups of towns and surrounding areas likewise need an organic structure consisting of a superior authority and of decentralised basic member authorities, and that the creation of a regional local government tier ought to be the consequence of modern regional activities ;

15. Considering that the regional level is of particular concern to European unification, especially as regards European regional policies, that an effort should be made to harmonise regional structures in Europe, that trans-frontier regions should have a place in a European regional concept and that such an undertaking would be an important contribution to the development of an intermediate European political and administrative structure ;

16. Considering that there is insufficient co-operation among member countries concerning the development of local and regional structures, and that therefore an impulse for co-ordination and concerted action should come from the Council of Europe,

17. Recommends the Committee of Ministers :

a. to transmit to the competent departments of their respective Governments the proposals made by the Assembly and the European Conference of Local Authorities ;

b. to invite member Governments to undertake mutual information, exchange of experience, comparison of attitudes towards local government reorganisation, joint examination of relevant problems and the need for some harmonisation of local and regional structures, concerting their action with a view to developing a future European administrative framework, taking particularly into account the regional policies of the European Economic Community and the European Free Trade Association ;

c. to charge a Committee of Government experts

to study, together with representatives of interested European organisations (Council of European Municipalities, International Union of Local Authorities etc.), the experiences and plans in respect of adapting local government to modern requirements in different European countries, as well as the expediency and possibilities of European coordination in the field of local and regional structures, with particular reference to elaborating suitable criteria for a European regional structure applicable in all European countries, as well as in trans-frontier regions ;

to put forward definite proposals to European Governments and possibly prepare a relevant European convention, and to consult the European Conference of Local Authorities on these proposals ;

d. thereafter to encourage the setting up by two or more Governments, as an experiment and in agreement with local authorities and other organisations concerned, of an institutionalised model European trans-frontier region in an area where economic integration is progressing and where there is already close co-operation between local or regional authorities of different countries.