Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 789 (1976)[1]

Science and the future of man in European society - Outcome of the 4th Parliamentary and Scientific Conference (Florence, 12-14 November 1975)

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Having noted the general declaration and recommendations of the 4th Parliamentary and Scientific Conference :

PART 1 - on the challenge of science and technology to European society

2. Welcoming the growth of interdependence between nations, and affirming the consequent need for further cooperation between them, particularly in the fields of science and technology ;

3. Believing that no state ought to act unilaterally in areas of technology where there may be adverse repercussions beyond its frontiers ;

4. Convinced of the need for a new approach to the responsibilities of government, based on an increasingly global vision of the complexity and interrelatedness of regional and world problems ;

5. Believing that European programmes of science and technology could make a decisive contribution to solving problems in a way compatible with balanced world development,

6. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite governments of member states :

a. to take the initiative in developing global policies for science and technology, and in particular to concert their efforts through existing intergovernmental agencies, in order :

to secure the adoption of long-range energy, raw materials and food research and development programmes ;

to promote the recycling of materials as a means of conserving scarce resources and reducing pollution ;

to improve the process of technology transfer from industrial to developing countries, so that techniques and industries are implanted appropriate to the social and cultural conditions and the development aims of the receiving nations ;

to ensure that, in transferring technology, damage to the biosphere and waste of natural resources are minimised ;

to deal with problems of environmental degradation in a regional and world context, and to ensure for example that the industries of ecologically more progressive countries are not unduly penalised in competition on world markets ;

1. Assembly debate on 16 September 1976 (10th Sitting) (seeDoc. 3832, report of the Committee on Science and Technology). Text adopted by the Assembly on 16 September 1976 (10th Sitting).

b. to establish an independent transdisciplinary centre of reflection :

to study the position of Europe considered as part of a single world system, and to co-operate in world-wide programmes of research on global problems ;

to integrate technological, economic, social, political and human considerations within the context of the world problematique ;

to identify research priorities, with a view to the setting-up of international programmes which would rely on the special skills and facilities of research institutes and centres already operating in various countries ;

c. to call on the executive heads of the international organisations working in Europe in the fields of science and technology to meet for consultation at regular intervals, with a view to concerting their activities and medium-term planning (notably, for example, with respect to policies for public health and the social sciences) ;

PART 2 - on the future of the decision-making machinery of government

7. Aware of the increased scale, range, complexity and interrelatedness of the problems confronting European governments, at a time of rapid technical advance and changing public expectations ;

8. Welcoming the efforts of those governments which have taken steps to strengthen their analytical and planning capabilities (with particular reference to technology forecasting and assessment), to improve budgetary procedures, and to achieve better co-ordination of planning, budgeting and policy review ;

9. Noting, however, that analyses made as a basis of major policy decisions depend on information which is often inadequate in depth, range and quality, on the choice of particular methodologies, and sets of subjective assumptions,

10. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member governments :

a. to guard against concentrating on the technical aspects of major policy decisions to the detriment of properly presenting to parliaments and the general public the values, assumptions and estimations of risk underlying such decisions ;

b. to promote further research on the frontiers between the natural sciences and technology on the one hand, and between these and the human and social sciences on the other, with a view to casting light on the processes of change and development in European society ;

c. to develop the use of social indicators in conjunction with economic indicators, with a view to the more accurate perception and evaluation of trends and changes in society, and to facilitate the weighing of social in addition to economic costs and benefits ;

d. to ensure free access to research findings and statistical information :

so as to render the policy-making process as open as may be compatible with the need to protect the privacy of individuals ; and

so as to bring the public face to face at the earliest possible moment with the issues underlying the decision-making processes engaged in by governments and parliaments ;

PART 3 - on science, industrial society and the environment

11. Reaffirming the view expressed by the 4th Parliamentary and Scientific Conference that technological innovation should not be pursued for its own sake, but should be directed to the needs of society and to improving the quality of life ;

12. Considering that both the protection of the environment and the good husbandry of natural resources will depend not only on corrective action in respect of the functioning of national economies, but also on the careful application of policies for science, technology, industry, the environment and natural resources ;

13. Believing that the integration of policies in these different sectors will depend on the support of an enlightened public opinion, which depends in turn on better mutual understanding between politicians and the scientific and technological communities ;

14. Believing, moreover, that no state should act unilaterally in such a way as to harm the environment of its neighbours,

15. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

a. request its Council for Cultural Co-operation to consider :

the need to encourage an awareness on the part of scientists and technologists of the broader social and economic significance of their activities, and of the expectations and anxieties of the general public in regard thereto ;

the need to encourage a wider awareness in the general public of progress in science and technology, and of their potential contributions to solving social and economic problems, and to counteracting the hazards involved in certain technological developments ;

the experience so far gained, within and outside Europe, in developing programmes of education specifically designed to meet the above needs ;

b. transmit the general declaration and recommendations of the 4th Parliamentary and Scientific Conference to the committee of senior officials responsible for preparing sessions of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, with a view to their presentation to the ad hoc Conference on Attitudes to the Study of Science and Technology ;

c. call on the governments of member states to undertake to engage in international consultations in the appropriate regional or world contexts before embarking on major technological ventures liable to have an environmental impact beyond their frontiers ;

PART 4 - on rationalising European co-operation in scientific research

16. Sharing the regret expressed by the 4th Parliamentary and Scientific Conference at the slackening of research efforts in European countries, and deploring the fact that there is still no effective research and development policy for Europe as a whole ;

17. Believing that rationalisation of European co-operation in scientific research depends on a better exchange of information between European countries and on a better co-ordination of the activities of international organisations ;

18. Noting with satisfaction the development of the activities of the European Science Foundation in the field of basic research ;

19. Convinced that, in applied research, joint transnational action on the part of European countries should be viewed not merely in terms of specific objectives, but as part of a policy for strengthening Europe's potential for technological innovation,

20. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

a. invite member governments to call on the executive heads of the international organisations working in Europe in the fields of science and technology to meet for consultation at regular intervals, with a view to concerting their activities and medium-term plans ;

b. invite member governments to provide incentives for the setting-up of federations of applied research laboratories in particular industrial sectors, with a view to enlisting the efforts of these laboratories in joint European projects ;

PART 5 - on the role of the social sciences

21. Sharing the views expressed by the 4th Parliamentary and Scientific Conference on the growing contribution of the social sciences to political and administrative decision-making ;

22. Believing that, if they are to be responsive to the needs of the whole of society and not just to the requirements of government, the social sciences should have a diversified base of financial support ;

23. Noting, however, that nine tenths of the research done in Europe is state-financed, which entails a risk that scientific concerns and values may become subordinate to the interests of dominant political and economic groups ;

24. Noting, moreover, that work done in the social sciences in North America continues to provide a basic frame of reference for European scholars, whereas work of equal merit in Europe often remains unknown in neighbouring countries ;

25. Welcoming therefore the decision of the European Science Foundation to establish a standing committee for the social sciences,

26. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the governments of member states :

A. with regard to support for the development of the social sciences

i. to safeguard the autonomy of universities and other institutes of advanced learning, so as to provide a firm basis for reflection and experimentation in the social sciences ;

ii. to maintain an adequate level of funding for scholar-initiated basic research, so as to provide for the training of new generations of researchers and foster the development of new theories and concepts ;

iii. to strengthen the role of national social science councils and similar bodies, and to encourage funding from independent agencies ;

B. with regard to the application of the social sciences

i. to encourage research on the frontiers between the natural sciences and technology on the one hand, and between these and the human and social sciences on the other, with a view to casting light on the processes of change and development in European society ;

ii. to ensure that new research methodologies do not infringe the personal rights and privacy of individuals ;

C. in respect of access to research findings

i. to provide the widest and freest possible access to research findings and statistics, so as to render the policy-making process as open as may be compatible with the need to protect the privacy of individuals, and to preclude delay in the testing of new theories and concepts ;

ii. to promote a broader diffusion throughout society of the knowledge and understanding derived from the social sciences, with a view to securing wider and better-informed public participation in the decision-making processes of all institutions and organisations.