Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 247 (2003)[1]

Public ethics at local level – model initiatives package: request by the Committee of Ministers for opinion

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that public ethics is a very important political aspect of democracy. It also believes that the active and responsible involvement of local elected representatives, local government employees and citizens in the democratic process is a prerequisite for the proper functioning of democratic systems. Voters' lack of confidence in their elected representatives and the resulting lack of interest in public affairs pose a threat to the legitimacy of universal suffrage and to the credibility and the very functioning of our modern democracies.

2. In this context, the Assembly recalls in particular its Resolution 1121 (1997) on instruments of citizen participation in representative democracy, in which it stated that "a truly living democracy depends on the active contribution of all citizens. Their participation in political life and their co-operation within political institutions are thus a decisive factor for the smooth functioning of democratic institutions.".

3. The Parliamentary Assembly, which was invited by the Committee of Ministers to give an opinion on the Handbook of good practice in public ethics at local level prepared by a group of experts appointed by the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy, supports both the initiative and the proposals made.

4. The Assembly particularly supports the package's aim of pooling the best practices identified in the area of local democracy. This work is part of the Council of Europe's activities to combat corruption in its member states.

5. It notes with great interest the examples of good practices in different countries described in the handbook and believes that they can and should help local and regional players to devise reforms or policies aimed at ensuring higher standards of public ethics and combating corruption.

6. The Assembly also believes that the package of initiatives deals with an issue that is fundamental to democracy. It welcomes the initiative of the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy and encourages it to continue this work.

7. The Assembly is therefore able to give a favourable opinion on the handbook of good practice and recommends that the Committee of Ministers adopt it. It also wishes to support the launching of the handbook at the international conference on public integrity to be held by the Council of Europe and the Netherlands Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations in The Hague in March 2004.

8. The Assembly wishes to give concrete political support to the handbook and is ready to contribute to the debate on public ethics at local level that will be launched by the model initiatives package. It stresses that such a tool can only be useful if member states make a substantial effort to disseminate the handbook among national parliaments, regional parliaments where these exist, and local elected representatives themselves.

9. The Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to support member states' efforts in the dissemination of the handbook and ensure that appropriate and efficient follow-up be given to this initiative.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2003(see Doc. 9991, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Masseret).