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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Recommendation 1630 (2003)[1]

Erosion of the Mediterranean coastline: implications for tourism

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Among European coastlines and their hinterlands, those of the Mediterranean region are home to a unique natural and cultural heritage, apart from being highly coveted areas for human habitats and activities. Current demographic trends and development patterns in the Mediterranean region do, however, present a clear threat to the delicate and already disturbed balance between humans and their environment. The Mediterranean coastline needs to be better protected from the multiple and mounting pressures that result from industrial, urban and other human-induced development of coastal areas in general and from poorly planned mass tourism development in particular.

2. Coastal erosion, which affects about half of the Mediterranean shoreline, is only part of this bigger challenge and is to some extent a natural occurrence that can never be completely controlled. It is also a problem affecting other coastal regions in Europe. Coastal erosion can and must be managed in a manner that better reconciles economic development and environmental protection. The Parliamentary Assembly in this context recalls its Recommendation 1594 (2003) on the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development: a common challenge, and reaffirms its commitment to promoting institutional reforms and parliamentary involvement in favour of sustainable development.

3. The Assembly – building on the conclusions of its Seminar on Erosion of the Mediterranean Coastline: Implications for Tourism, held in Lido di Camaiore (Italy) in May 2003 – notes that the modern approach to the problem of coastal erosion recognises the dynamic nature of coastal regions by emphasising flexible or "soft" strategies for coastal protection over an exclusive reliance on "hard" engineering solutions trying to "force" nature to comply. Moreover, a comprehensive assessment of the expected impact, as well as the costs and benefits of coastal protection measures, may lead to the selective protection of only certain shorelines, or even no protection at all, in order to avoid a situation where new measures may lead to even worse complications.

4. The above should not, however, exempt policy makers from the duty of challenging certain environmentally harmful land-use practices relating to human settlements, farming, shipping, industry and tourism along the coast, or from calling into question ill-considered regulation of river flows via dams or water reservoirs for electricity production, protection against flooding or for irrigation purposes. Good management of coastal resources and landscapes goes hand in hand with a systematic environmental quality assessment of projects, real-time monitoring of shorelines and coastal zones, concerted planning, follow-up to implementation measures and rehabilitation of sites where necessary.

5. The Assembly considers that political, cross-sector and scientific co-operation and action on a Mediterranean-wide scale – through the exchange of information, experiences and "best practices" – are essential to avoid overlaps and repeating errors. To this end, readily available know-how should be better exploited and any new initiative should be smoothly integrated into the existing framework via networking and partnerships.

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2003 (see Doc. 9981, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Rigoni).

6. Recalling its Resolution 1285 (2002) on tapping Europe's tourism potential, which pointed to the potential damage that mass tourism can cause to the natural and cultural environment, the Assembly renews its call for the development of balanced, quality-oriented tourism "emphasising preventive planning, the rehabilitation of sites and monuments, and the diversification of tourism offers".

7. Tourism could be associated with specific development projects through national or regional schemes designed to pool financial resources in favour of coastline protection and restoration. Agreements could be put in place between local authorities and tourism service providers to transfer a symbolic sum to a "project fund" for every tourist staying in a given area. The Assembly believes that such solidarity schemes would be particularly suitable for less wealthy regions in the southern Mediterranean which are hard-pressed to provide tourist facilities for better-off travellers from outside the area, and where population growth will lead to further urbanisation pressure on the coastal environment.

8. Considerable responsibility for the distribution of competences and tasks in adopting and implementing sustainable development policies lies at national level. It is the duty of national authorities to reinforce the legal basis for coastal protection on the basis of scientific evidence and after appropriate consultation with the citizens and local authorities concerned. The Assembly therefore asks the Committee of Ministers to urge, firstly, the competent authorities of the Council of Europe member states concerned – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey – and, secondly, all other Council of Europe member states with vulnerable coastlines:

8.1. to strengthen national legislation and administrative mechanisms for coastal protection, by implementing the concept of "integrated management" pursuant to the Committee of Ministers' Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent (Rec(2002)1), the Model Law on Sustainable Management of Coastal Zones and the European Code of Conduct for Coastal Zones;

8.2. to incorporate the "polluter pays" principle and the interaction between coastal erosion and tourism into local and national tourism development strategies, as well as long-term territorial planning;

8.3. to accelerate the procedure for signing or ratifying, as appropriate, the European Landscape Convention, in order to permit its entry into force;

8.4. to give more publicity in their countries to the initiatives of the World Tourism Organisation, such as the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and the newly launched International Network on the Sustainable Development of Coastal Tourism Destinations;

8.5. to pay special attention to the preservation of fragile coastal areas, where no commercial activities should be allowed and – following the example of the French Coastal Conservatory (Conservatoire du littoral) – to consider the possibility of protecting the so-called "wild third" of shorelines through the gradual acquisition of outstanding sites and by prohibiting construction on protected land while leaving it open to the public;

8.6. to pursue close intraregional co-operation with countries including those of the southern and south-eastern Mediterranean, through existing co-operation structures, networks and partnerships;

8.7. to encourage further research and the experimentation of innovative solutions for the prevention of coastal erosion, not least by promoting quality-oriented tourism and resource management.