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Special representative of the Council of Europe for national refugees and over-population

Motion for a recommendation¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population

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1. 1955 - 7th Session - First part



A. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

Having examined the Report presented by M. Pierre Schneter, Special Representative of the Council of Europe for national refugees and over-population;

Expressing its appreciation of M. Schneter's services in working out, in accordance with the desire frequently expressed by the Assembly, simple and efficacious methods of solving without delay a crucial European problem ;

Considering that, the action undertaken by the Special Representative can only be effectively continued if his term of office is extended,

Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

1. should forthwith set up a Fund, made up of recoverable contributions from the Member States, to finance the resettlement of national refugees and surplus elements of population by redeemable loans;
2. should extend the mission entrusted to the Special Representative;
3. should adopt the scheme for establishing a Co-ordinating Body as presented by M. Pierre Schneter.

B. Explanatory Memorandum (presented by M. de la VALLÉE POUSSIN, Rapporteur)

1.

Since its first Session the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe has taken an interest in the fortunes of refugees and exiles. In 1949 it approved a Resolution (Doc. 109) which clearly showed not only its determination to take action in this matter but also keen realisation of the extent and complexity of the problem. I think it is necessary to preface my Report by quoting the whole of this important text, which marked the beginning of six years of effort by the Assembly and its Committee :

" On the proposal of the Committee on Legal and Administrative questions the Assembly directs that the following preparatory measures be taken to enable the question of European refugees to be included on the Agenda next session.

1. The Secretariat of the Council of Europe is instructed to collect all necessary data in order to give the Assembly and the Committee full information on the problem of refugees and to establish, in this connection, the necessary contacts with the United Nations, and particularly with the I. R. O., with the Governments of the various European States, competent administrative services and private institutions concerned :

2. The Assembly requests the Secretariat to carry out investigations on the following questions : juridical status of the various groups of displaced persons; the eventual possibility for such displaced persons either to find employment in Europe or to emigrate; material and moral needs to be met, particularly as far as the 11 basic elements is concerned, as well as eventual overlapping of the activities of already existing organisations, and determining of such fields as are not yet covered by any administrative organisation."

At the following Session, the Assembly went more deeply into the refugee problem and adopted a Recommendation worded as follows :

" The Assembly,

Deeply moved by the situation that has been caused in Europe by the migrations of populations and by the wretched conditions under which refugees of all categories are living;

Recognising the common obligation of all members of the Council of Europe to alleviate the sufferings of European refugees;

Convinced that the solution of this problem demands the closest collaboration, on an international scale, and more particularly between the members of the Council of Europe, in accordance with the principles of European solidarity and civic morality as defined by the Statute of the Council;

Considering, finally, that the immediate establishment of a provisional service to attend to the most pressing needs is a matter of the greatest urgency,

Calls the attention of the Committee of Ministers to the urgent necessity of affording assistance to all refugees, and requests the said Committee, in the first place, to recommend the Governments of the Members of the Council of Europe to take all such measures at the national level as may be calculated, in their opinion, to improve the lot of the refugees and, secondly, to set up immediately within the framework of the Secretariat-General of the Council of Europe, a provisional service for the study of problems involved in the legal position of Refugees."

Nevertheless, between September, 1949 and 12th December, 1953, when the Committee of Ministers appointed M. Schreier " Special Representative of the Council of Europe for National Refugees and Overpopulation", more than four years elapsed during which the good intentions of the Council of Europe led to no concrete and effective action on behalf of the millions of Europeans who had been driven from their motherland and were in urgent need of assistance. In point of fact, the Council of Europe contributed nothing to the makeshift and inadequately co-ordinated efforts made at that period by the I. R. O., the United Nations High Commissioner, P. I. C. M. E.—later to become the I. C. E. M.—a number of the Governments more closely affected by this distress, and a great number of charitable organisations and private institutions.

During these four years the whole situation has changed. Legal problems were settled at the Geneva Conference. The lot of millions of refugees was improved by emigration to overseas countries or by their final settlement in the "West. However, the sufferings of exiles have by no means been fully alleviated and, even now, tens of thousands of aged or sick persons and women in charge of children are still living in overcrowded camps, while thousands of others are still crossing the iron curtain in a steady stream to seek asylum in free Europe.

It was realised, moreover, that Europe was facing a more acute demographic crisis than that caused by the temporary influx of refugees from Central and Eastern Europe. It has, in fact, become clear that our continent is suffering from uneven distribution of population and that several nations are genuinely unable to cope with their difficulties or provide for the needs of their surplus population by their own unaided efforts.

Although the Council of Europe has not acted promptly enough to solve immediate difficulties, has abandoned the problem of the "hard-core" elements and has not called upon the European States concerned to pursue a common policy for the admission of new refugees, at any rate it has shown steady interest and determination in its study of the permanent problem of over-population.

For this purpose it created as a first step a Sub-Committee on Refugees and then a Sub-Committee on Over-population. Since these two Sub-Committees were attached to different main Committees, the Assembly decided to amalgamate them and so form the present Committee. The interest taken in its work by the Committee of Ministers, which has attached great importance to this question and desired to follow it more closely, led in time to the establishment of a Liaison Committee consisting of three representatives of your Committee and three representatives of the Committee of Ministers.

During the same period the Secretariat-General of the Council of Europe, carrying out Order No. 3 with an energy and perseverance which should receive due tribute, collected all the information requested by the Assembly. It maintained constant and valuable contacts with the international organisations concerned and submitted a very detailed and concise report to the Committee of Ministers. Having noted this Report, the Ministers adopted a Resolution, on 4th June, 1951, in which it "once more emphasized the extreme urgency of the problem" and "therefore authorised the Secretary-General to convene a meeting of Experts".

In accordance with these instructions, the Secretariat-General arranged two meetings of Experts in Strasbourg, the first in June, 1951, and the second—which was more comprehensive—in September, 1951. The final Report of the Committee of Experts was submitted to the Assembly at its 1952 Session and was favourably received by both organs of the Council of Europe. Yet two more years were to elapse before the final step was taken, for it was not until 12th December, 1953 that the Committee of Ministers "being resolved to take early and effective action" and having regard to Recommendation 13 (1951) of the Assembly and its own Resolution (51) 57, which drew attention to gaps in the system of international co-operation in the field of refugees and over-population, entrusted M. Pierre Schneider with the task of "studying the problem of national refugees and over-population in Europe". This Resolution defined M. Schneider's mission and laid down the general lines of his work.

M. Schneider has worked with great diligence. By 20th May, 1954 he had presented a preliminary report to the Committee of Ministers and, this being approved, was able to follow it up with a final report on 31st October. The Committee of Ministers duly examined this Report and resolved on 19th December, 1954 (Resolution (54) 29) :

- a. to approve the spirit enshrined in the general lines of M. Schneider's report;
- b. to extend for a further year the mission entrusted to him under Resolution (53) 35, requesting him to submit detailed proposals on the basis of his report, with particular reference to the creation of the fund mentioned therein ;
- c. to set up a Committee, composed of senior officials of the member countries who are specialists in the problem of refugees and over-population, which shall be available for consultation by, and shall be entitled to advise, M. Schneider;
- d. to authorise the Secretary-General to transmit M. Schneider's report to the Consultative Assembly.

M. Schneider's Report is divided into three parts :

1. The factual position.
2. Action in the political field
3. Financial action.

1.1. 1. The Present Situation

M. Schneider visited the countries concerned and consulted the principal international organisations working in this field in order to avoid duplication of effort between the Council of Europe and those bodies.

The conclusions he has reached as a result of these investigations and contacts are as follows :

- a. The Netherlands have reached saturation- point. The only remedy to the surplus manpower situation is the emigration of 50-60,000 persons annually;
- b. In the German Federal Republic, given sufficient capital, it will be possible to absorb into the national economy the refugees so far received. But there are 60.000 families of farmworkers without land and without work whose only hope lies in emigration;
- c. In Italy, by further land improvements in the south and with the help of foreign capital, it would be possible to absorb a part, of the excess population. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to provide for the emigration of 300,000 persons per year in the course of the next ten .years.
- d. Greece suffers from industrial under- . equipment and cannot provide a livelihood for her 40,000 refugees and her annual population surplus of 30,000. Provision must bo made in the next few years for the annual emigration of about 35,000 Greeks.
- e. Turkey has made a magnificent effort in settling the majority of the 150,000 refugees from Bulgaria. The process of absorption could be speeded up still further if the efforts of the Turkish Government were supported by international capital;

1.2. 2. Political solutions

The Special Representative recommends measures both inside and outside Europe. A European co-ordinating authority would be set up to ensure their implementation.

1.2.1. (a) Measures within Europe

According to M. Schneiter the absorption of the surplus elements of population in tbe areas in which they reside is insufficiently developed owing to lack of capital. Action in this field may therefore be assimilated to the economic development of the country in general. As most of the countries concerned lack adequate financial resources, foreign aid is essential to finance the absorption of redundant populations locally.

A second method of absorbing refugees or surplus elements of population would be to 1 step up ' intra-European migration. The Special Representative recommends that the present administrative regulations should lie made more flexible to correspond with the pace of European economic integration. He stresses particularly the need for an information campaign among the general public of less populated countries, in order to bring home to them the fact that by increasing the number of direct producers they would also strengthen their home market and economic potential.

Lastly, the Special Representative examined the possibilities of emigration to Africa. He proposed that this question should be examined by the Co-ordinating Body in conjunction with the competent European and African authorities. The Committee further considers that special efforts should be made to obtain the full consent of the native populations concerned.

1.2.2. (b) Measures outside Europe

Those measures call for greater coordination of the hitherto scattered policies of the European Governments. By bringing the respective positions of the immigration countries into line with one another and proceeding by stages, the European co-ordinating authority might gradually secure the conclusion of agreements between emigration and immigration countries. This increase in emigration outside Europe would naturally require greater financial resources than are now forthcoming.

1.3. 3. Financial solutions

Greater European solidarity is needed in this respect. Member Governments of the Council of Europe should undertake to set up a European Fund which would grant reimbursable loans to assist the settlement of national refugees and surplus population. This Fund, the creation of which was demanded by the Consultative Assembly as early as 1951, might be administered by an already existing international banking institution.

M. Schneiter suggests that the Fund should consist of repayable contributions from all Member Governments of the Council of Europe up to an equivalent currency total of 10 million dollars.

2. CONCLUSION

For the execution of his programme M. Schneiter proposes that a European coordinating authority be established, without the creation of any specifically new posts. This authority would be assisted by a Committee of senior officials specialising in this field, in which member countries of the Council and of 1. C. E. M., the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the international organisations concerned would be represented. The task of this authority would be to co-ordinate and expedite the decisions taken and to provide the necessary political impetus ; for M. Schneiter noted in the course of his mission that some political authority was essential if really effective and concrete results were to be achieved.

From this brief analysis of M. Schneiter's substantial Report it is clear that his views accord with those already repeatedly expressed by the Committee.

The Committee cannot but express its satisfaction with the practical and effective manner in which the Special Representative has discharged his duties. The success of this venture confirms the view expressed by the Consultative Assembly in its Recommendation 13 (1951). It shows that if the Council of Europe wishes to take effective action in a specific field it might do well to entrust certain tasks, not to Committees or officials of the Council itself, but to independent persons invested with the necessary authority.

I propose that the Assembly should approve the conclusions of the Special Representative and prolong his mandate, at the same time making it clear that he will be able to acquit himself of his task in full indépendance and invested with the necessary powers to enable him to take the initiative without being obliged to refer in every detail to the Controlling Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The Special Representative will furthermore be able, as he proposed, to benefit by the opinions of a co-ordinating body composed of competent officials of the countries concerned and of qualified representatives of the great social and economic institutions.

In response to the Report of M. Schneiter transmitted to the Consultative Assembly by the Committee of Ministers, I beg to propose the preceding draft Recommendation.