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Scheme for exchange of visits between members of European local authorities

Motion for a resolution
Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities
Mr Peter SMITHERS, United Kingdom

A. Draft Resolution

The Assembly,

Desiring to promote and foster exchanges and contacts between members of European local authorities without increasing expenditure by Member States;

Believing that such exchanges will be an important factor in disseminating among local populations the idea of a European community ;

Considering also that by facilitating exchange of information and comparison of experience such exchanges may be largely instrumental in the improvement of methods of local administration;

Noting that the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities have agreed to the scheme worked out by the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs to promote the exchange of visits between local authorities in Europe;

Considering that this scheme can be put into effect without additional expenditure by the Council of Europe such as would necessitate an increase of the Budget,

1. Approves the scheme mentioned below for exchange of visits between members of European local authorities;

2. Instructs the Secretary-General to make the necessary arrangements for putting it into effect;

3. Decides to acquaint the Committee of Ministers with the scheme in the hope that Member Governments will give it favourable publicity.

Scheme for exchange of visits between members of European local authorities

I. Objects of the scheme

The purpose of the scheme is to enable persons responsible for local government in European countries to increase their knowledge and understanding of the institutions and methods in use in local government in other European countries. Whereas there is at present a considerable interchange of visits on an officiai basis between mayors, high officials of local government and other distinguished personages, there is relatively little exchange between the rank-and-file of elected members of local authorities or local authority staffs. It is desired to promote such an exchange and thus to broaden the outlook and knowledge of many people engaged in local government who would not normally have such an opportunity.

It is thought that a considerable number of people engaged in local government work who already visit foreign countries either on holiday or for business reasons might be glad, if informed of the special facilities offered by this scheme, to take the opportunity of studying local administration in other countries.

The object of the scheme is therefore to make appropriate arrangements and to bring them to the attention of the parties concerned.

II. Preliminary arrangements i " host " authorities

A numbe r of individual members of local authorities, both urban and rural, herein referred to as " host " authorities, declare their willingness to offer hospitality to visiting councillors or officials of a foreign municipality.

a. A visitor may stay for not more than three nights. Hospitality may also be extended to a wife or husband. The visitors pays their own travelling and other expenses.

b. The host undertakes to instruct his visitor in the working methods of local government in the particular area.

c. A local authority one or more of whose members are willing to act as hosts states the maximum number of visitors it is prepared to receive each year. It will also provide information regarding the dates of its sessions.

III. Development of the scheme

Once members of a number of local authorities have agreed under the above conditions to participate as hosts, the second stage will consist in bringing the scheme and its oilers of hospitality to the attention of the parties concerned, i. o. in making it known to as many European municipal councillors and local officials as possible :

a. the Secretariat-General of the Council of Europe, with the assistance of the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities, will send particulars of the scheme to the national associations of local authorities with a request that they and their member authorities participate;

b. the national associations of local authorities will bring the scheme to the notice of their members and invite them to take part as " host " authorities on the conditions specified in Section B above;

c. local authorities will send a list of their members willing to act as hosts, accompanied by a statement of the maximum number of visitors they are prepared to receive, to the national associations, which will forward them to the Secretariat- General of the Council of Europe, either directly or through their international organisation;

2. the Secretariat-General of the Council of Europe will collect the lists received from the national associations in a yearbook, which will be sent to the national associations in all participating countries. The yearbook will contain a list of the host authorities and the name of the national association to which they belong, with the number of visitors they are prepared to receive, and will be brought up to date each year;

3. the national associations will circulate the yearbook to their members;

4. a Councillor or an official of a municipality participating in the scheme who wishes to visit a municipality in another country will write to the national association of the country in question to that effect;

5. the national association will notify the municipality concerned and note on its national list that this municipality has already received a visitor.

IV. Administrative Committee

The scheme will be administered by a Committee under a Chairman appointed by the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs. The Committee will be composed of the Chairman and one representative respectively of the International Union of Local Authorities, the Council of European Municipalities and the Secretariat- General of the Council of Europe. It will present to the Special Committee an annual report on the working of the scheme and the results achieved.

B. Explanatory Memorandum - (presented by Mr. SMITHERS, Rapporteur)

1. While there is a constant exchange of visits between mayors, town clerks and other municipal officials, there are very few exchange visits between the rank-and-file councillors and junior officials whose journeys are not paid for out of public or other funds.

2. Some of the international associations of local authorities have set up offices where councillors can obtain the names of persons engaged in local administration in other countries, but such schemes have so far only proved partially successful.

3. There seems little hope of organising exchange visits by groups of councillors or of increasing the number of journeys undertaken by councillors with the specific object of studying methods of local administration. In the latter case, the chief difficulties are financial. It is certain, on the other hand, that a large number of people concerned with local administration do, in fact, travel abroad, either on business or on holiday, and would certainly be glad to take advantage of the special facilities for studying local administration in the countries they visit if they knew of the existence of such facilities.

4. These considerations have led to the attempt to set up a scheme aimed at increasing the number of visits of this kind, thus extending international contacts in local government into a new field.

5. At the request of the Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs a preliminary draft was prepared and submitted for comment to the associations of local authorities in various European countries as well as to the two chief international associations, the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities. The draft was accompanied by the following questionnaire :

a. Are there in your country an appreciable number of members of local authorities who might be interested in paying visits to other countries under the scheme?

b. If so, which countries would be most likely to interest them from a local government point of view?

c. Would there be an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who would be willing to offer hospitality under the scheme?

d. What percentage of members likely to participate in such a scheme speak any foreign languages, and, if so, which ones?

e. Have you any suggestions for alteration or improvement of the draft scheme?

6. All in all, the response lias been most favourable, as will be seen from extracts from replies sent in by the national associations which arc given below and from letters, also reproduced below, received from «the two international associations.

7. Union of Austrian Municipalities (Oesterreichischer Stâdtehund) " Th e Oesterreichischer Stâdtehund wholeheartedly welcomes all measures to encourage exchange of knowledge of, and experience in, the administrative practice of local authorities.

a. Are there an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who might be interested in paying visits to other countries under the scheme? " Yes , there are in Austria a considerable number of persons responsible for running local affairs who would be interested in visits abroad. "

b. If so, which countries would be most likely to interest them from a local government point of view? " Th e countries which the Austrian municipal authorities would be most interested in visiting are Britain, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. "

c. Would there be an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who would be willing to offer hospitality under the scheme? " Ther e would certainly be a number of persons or local authorities prepared to offer hospitality as suggested in your plan, particularly to members of the countries which Austrian local government officials would be especially interested in visiting. "

d. What percentage of members likely to participate in such a scheme in your country speak any foreign languages and, if so, which ones. " Onl y a small percentage of our members have an adequate knowledge of languages. "

e. Have you any suggestions for alteration or improvement to the draft scheme? " Th e principle of reciprocity on which the plan is based seems to us to be applicable only to countries at a roughly equal level of development. Visits by members of less-advanced countries to more highly-developed local administrations with better technical equipment would hardly, in our view, satisfy the reciprocity principle.

The already existing international bodies grouping municipal and local associations should be invited to participate in the administration of the proposed exchange and research scheme. (Executive Chairman) "

8. Association of Danish Municipalities (Den Danske Kôbstadforening) " Th e Danish Associations of Local Authorities hold a very favourable opinion on ihe idealistic plans to promote the exchange of visits between members of local authorities. It can be mentioned that a number of Danish municipalities are in close contact with ' vens-kabsbyer ' (friendship-towns) in other northern countries, with which they exchange visits and information. At the same time we are of the opinion that, as far as Denmark is concerned, there will hardly be any need for a further initiative in this respect. If the Secretariat-General, however, takes upon itself the task of being the administering authority of the scheme and would care to ask for our assistance in the placement of members of local authorities from outside countries within Denmark, I am quite convinced that you might count on all the facilities we are able to give. S. HJAHSOK. "

9. French Association for the Council of European Municipalities (L'Association française pour le Conseil des Communes d'Europe)

a. Ar e there an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who might be interested in paying visits to other countries under the scheme? " Th e interest already shown by French mayors in the " pairings " organised on the initiative of the Council of European Municipalities shows that such exchanges meet a real need in our country. There is, generally speaking, a much greater tendency.to visit neighbouring countries than there was in pre-war years. The elected members of local authorities are genuinely anxious to obtain information on the municipal experience and achievements of foreign countries such as is already supplied by the international municipal organisations; it is realised that these questions are common to all countries, as was revealed during the States-General of European Municipalities held at Versailles. This tendency should therefore be encouraged, and the facilities provided for in the scheme could contribute to this end. The Council of European Municipalities, one of whose statutory objectives is the development of the European outlook within the municipalities and local communities, should give its support to the scheme as soon as it comes into operation. It has already organised meetings of mayors, notably between those of France and Germany, and is continuing its efforts on these lines using the method of mutuaf hospitality proposed in the scheme.

b. If so, which countries would be most likely to interest them from a locaf government point of view? " Th e elected members of municipalities and departmental councils are particularly interested in countries known for :

thei r communal and regional autonomy : Switzerland, Great Britain, the Benelux countries and Austria;

th e social work done by local authorities : in particular, the Scandinavian countries ;

thei r work in the provision of housing : notably Germany, Italy and Great Britain. "

c. Would there be an appreciable number ofmembers of local authorities in your country who would be willing to offer hospitality under the scheme? " I t is difficult to give a precise reply to this question. Nevertheless, the organisation of " pairings " has shown that in France the municipalities have been able to provide hospitality for their visitors, even in the case of rural authorities with their relatively modest resources. "

d. What percentage of members likely to participate in such a scheme speak any foreign languages, and, if so, which ones? " f t is difficult to state even apprpx-imateiy the percentage of persons likely to participate in the scheme who would know foreign languages. As far as fluent practical knowledge of languages is meant, the percentage in France would appear to be small. This is a handicap in the sene that the • visitor welcomed in the bosom of the family of a colleague will not be able to take part in lively conversational exchanges. Where such language difficulties exist, however, it would generally be possible to find in the locality a willing interpreter for English in most districts, for German in the East of France, and for Italian in the South. '".

e. Hav e you any suggestions for alteration or improvement of the draft scheme? " Thes e exchanges might be developed within the framework of the towns already paired on the initiative of the Council of European Municipalities and be extended to other elements of the population such as students and young workers. As Mr. Smithers suggests, contacts might be limited, at least at the outset, to a specific number of local authorities of varying character (particularly urban and rural authorities). The Executive Committee of the French Association for the Council of European Municipalities has proposed that the central office for exchange be organised within the framework of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe and that the municipal organisations should serve as intermediaries between it and the municipalities. An organisation of this kind would reduce the cost of the central office, thanks to the co-operation of unions which by their very nature have a better knowledge of the towns and villages. The Governments might be asked to support the various organisations, particularly by according transport facilities, by the help of their consular agents abroad and of their administrative authorities at home. They should take into account the major part played by the elected members of local authorities, who have considerable influence, both on personal grounds in that the local population has given them its confidence and in view of the facilities they can supply in the extension of exchanges by helping local societies to develop their relations with similar organisations in other countries. "

10. Association of Norwegian Municipalities (Norges by-og Herredsforbund) " I n our opinion the proposed international administration of an exchange scheme should be entrusted to the International Union of Local Authorities at The Hague. I trust that the International Union will keep in close contact with all municipal institutions concerned as well as with the Council of Europe. The Norges Byforbund and Norges Herredsforbund will give the International Union all possible assistance in carrying out such a scheme as between Norway and other countries. I sould, however, like to mention that linguistic difficulties may be an obstacle for most of the local authorities in Norway. In point of fact, a highly successful exchange scheme of many years standing is already in operation between the Scandinavian countries. As you no doubt appreciate, the language question does not raise difficulties for the Northern countries among themselves. At the moment I do not think it necessary to circulate your questionnaire to our municipalities, as we feel sure that any European municipal representative who wants to study municipal life in Norway will obtain all the necessary facilities from our unions. It also feel sure that there will be a sufficient number of Norwegian host-municipalities. KJELL T. EVERS "

11. Union of Netherlands Communes (Vere- niging van Nedeiiandse Gemeeten)

a. Are there an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who might be interested in paying visits to other countries under the scheme? " Experienc e has shown that many members of Dutch local authorities are interested in visiting other countries to increase their knowledge of local government institutions and methods abroad. The main problem in preparing schemes for promoting such exchanges will be that of travelling expenses; the scheme in its present version does not yet contain concrete suggestions to meet this difficulty. "

b. If so, which countries would be most likely to interest them from a local government point of view? " Dutc h local government officials would be most interested in visiting Great Britain, Scandinavia, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria or Germany. "

c. Would there be an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who would be willing to offer hospitality under the scheme? " I f preparations could be made well in advance, many local authorities in the Netherlands would be willing to offer hospitality for a limited period to local government officials from abroad. "

d. What percentage of members likely to participate in such a scheme in your country speak any foreign languages, and, if so, which ones? " Mos t of the Dutch officials likely to participate in an exchange scheme would speak English, German or French (in this order of likelihood), or even more than one of these languages. "

e. Have you any suggestions for alteration or improvement of the draft scheme? " A s all Dutch municipalities are members of our Union, we gladly offer you any assistance you may wish in the preparation and execution of such a scheme. The international administration of such exchanges should, in our opinion, be entrusted to the International Union of Local Authorities, which has member organisations in 15 European countries and to which the Netherlands Union has been affiliated for over 40 years. N. AKKEMA "

12. British Committee of the International Union of Local Authorities

a. Are there an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who might be interested in paying visits to other countries under the scheme? " Yes . "

b. If so, which countries would be most likely to interest them from a local government point of view? " Al l countries. For the most part they will be interested in a particular function of local government •—• such as refuse disposal, or housing — rather than in the local government system itself. "

c. Would there be an appreciable number of members of local authorities in your country who would be willing to offer hospitality under the scheme? " I do not know. We have no experience to judge by. "

d. What percentage of members likely to participate in such a scheme in your country speak any foreign languages, and, if so, which ones? " Abou t half would speak one language—usually French, sometimes German, occasionally Italian or Spanish. "

e. Have you any suggestions for alteration or improvement of the draft scheme? " I suggest an extension to the scheme. Many of our people go abroad for holidays and would gladly spend a day learning about the local authority. The question of hospitality, except for lunch, would not arise in these cases. All that is needed is a simple method of providing introductions. B. BLIGH "

13. Urban District Councils Association " Withou t making full enquiries of urban district councils throughout England and Wales, of which there are 571, the Executive Council are unable to give a categorical reply to the questions set out in your questionnaire, but I am instructed to suggest that, within the knowledge of the Executive Council, they are of the opinion that local authorities generally might be interested in the scheme for the exchange of visits between members of European local authorities, and that there will be an appreciable number of members of local authorities in this country who would be willing to offer hospitality under this scheme. H. S. HASLAM Secretary " A subsequent letter added : " In the view of the Executive Council, the members of local authorities in this country would be most likely to be interested from the local government point of view in the Western European and Scandinavian countries. "

14. Letter from the International Union of Local Authorities to the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe " Sir , Representatives from our member-unions in Europe discussed during a recent preparatory meeting of the European Affairs Committee of the International Union of Local Authorities (held at The Hague, January 22nd, 1954) your circular letter A. 13.850, asking for comment on a draft scheme for promoting exchange visits between local authorities in Europe. Your initiative was welcomed by the meeting and it was decided to ask all European member-Unions of the I. U. L. A. to reply to your questionnaire on this problem. The secretariat of the 1. U. L. A. was instructed to communicate with you to offer any support which our organisation might be able to give in the further elaboration and subsequent execution of this project. In particular the 1. U. L. A. offers to take in charge the whole international administration of this scheme. We are ready to co-operate fully with the Council of Europe in this matter and we hope that the necessary close contacts between the Council and our Union will be established in order to elaborate, in common, the detailed working procedure of this project and the methods of further cooperation with regard to its execution. Hoping that our support will prove to be a useful contribution towards the realisation of this important European project, we sign ourselves, N. ARKEMA General Secretary "

15. Letter from the Chairman of the Council of European Municipalities to the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe " Sir , As International Chairman of the Council of European Municipalities I have taken note of the questionnaire of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe concerning the scheme for exchange visits between members of local authorities in Europe. Having studied this scheme most attentively, f feel that it merits wide support by all organisations working on the municipal and European plane, particularly by the Council of European Municipalities.

1. Value of cisits abroad to local representatives

I a m sure the plan will be warmly welcomed by local government officials. Despite the many obstacles imposed by the national authorities, tourism is more popular than ever in Europe. This fact surely testifies to the keen interest felt by the European peoples in each other's countries and to the bond of sympathy existing between them.

Local representatives, moreover, have repeatedly given proof of this spirit of solidarity, in adversity no less than in happier times. The Council of European Municipalities has taken care to associate itself with this movement, and indeed to encourage it by developing the " pairing " scheme and organising inter-municipal meetings, which have enabled the mayors to compare their own particular problems and achievements with those of their colleagues.

2. Particularly interesting countries from the point of view of local administration

Whatever the municipal system of a country, it is to be observed that it can derive great benefit from contacts with others. Those countries where centralisation is carried to extremes will find it especially useful to establish links with countries in which municipal freedoms have been most carefully preserved. On the other hand, each country has something of value to offer, and exchanges should not be confined to a single country or a small number of countries on the ground that their municipal system is one of the most highly perfected. On the contrary, such exchanges should be varied in character. Some countries may have forged ahead on town-planning, others made special efforts in connection with agricultural equipment; some may have developed an unusually strong.civic spirit, while others may have shown outstanding initiative and resourcefulness with very limited means, etc. Europe's main potentialities derive from its diversity. Each of our countries, respecting the traditions and methods of its neighbours, will thus learn to draw on this inexhaustible wealth.

3. Are the mayors prepared to offer hospitality to their colleagues?

European mayors have repeatedly proffered such hospitality to their colleagues from other lands. In some countries, however, there are obstacles which sometimes make it impossible for the mayor of a municipality to show the true sympathy he feels towards a Europea n colleague. The Council of Europe should do its utmost, not only to secure the removal of these obstacles, but also to persuade Governments to encourage exchanges between local representatives.

4. Proportion of persoiis speaking a foreign language

The language problem should present no real problem. English is widely spoken in Western and Northern Europe. German is spoken in Austria, Switzerland and often in the Netherlands, Luxembourg, etc.

Wherever permanent contacts are established between two towns the mayor and inhabitants display a great co-operative spirit; where necessary they take the trouble to learn the language of their foreign correspondent or find a friendly interpreter in the neighbourhood.

5. Suggestions

This scheme for the exchange of visits between the members of European local authorities will have the wholehearted support of the Council of European Municipalities. The Executive Committee of our Association is convinced that the organisations already existing in other national administrations can effectively contribute to the success of this scheme proposed by Mr. Smithers and adopted by the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. As observed under II, Europe's wealth derives from its own diversity. Exchange visits between local representatives may give them some idea of the varied problems confronting our Continent and the novel methods devised to solve them. Europe is at one and the same time the Europe of the Scandinavians, the Mediterraneans, the West and of the Continent as such. Europe is both rural and urban. This whole community must gradually learn to live at the same pace and strive for the same ideal. We must do our utmost to remove mutual misunderstandings and work together for a better Europe. The Council of Europe can do much in this field, with the help of the municipal associations, by keeping in direct touch with the local authorities.

In so doing it can count on the support of the Council of European Municipalities.

I am, etc.,

E. HAMILIUS

Burgomaster of Luxembourg

Chairman of the C. E. M. "

16. 16. It is now for the Assembly to agree to give its patronage to the scheme which we submit to it in the name of all members of the Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs and, taking into consideration that the scheme does not involve any increase in the budget of the Council of Europe, to instruct the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps to implement it.

17. The Committee also hopes that the Committee of Ministers, which the Assembly will no doubt wish to inform officially of the implementation of the scheme, will agree to share the patronage, and that the Governments of the Member States will do everything in their power to give it the necessary publicity.