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Cultural and Social Sections of the First Annual Report of the Council of Western European Union

Report¹

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

Committee on Culture, Science and Education

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A. Cultural section

1. The Assembly wishes, first of all, to say how much it appreciates the decision of the WEU Assembly to send it those sections of the First Report of the Council of W. E. U. which relate to cultural matters. This decision is in full accord with the spirit of the Cultural Convention of 19th December, 1954, Article 3 of which states that: " The Contracting Parties shall consult with one another within the framework of the Council of Europe with a view to concerted action in promoting cultural activities of European interest. " In ratifying this Convention, the signatory States which are Members of both the Council of Europe and W.E.U. implicitly recognised that cultural activities of European interest should be co-ordinated within the framework of the Council of Europe. The Convention has now been ratified by nine Member States of the Council of Europe, of which five, namely Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, are also Members of W. E. U.

2. In its Reply to the last Report of the Brussels Treaty Organisation, the Assembly expressed the view that any intergovernmental cultural activity should embrace the largest possible number of countries, since cultural questions do not give rise to the same difficulties as do political or military questions. As soon as the Council of Europe came into being the possibility might have been considered of bringing the cultural activities of the Brussels Treaty Organisation under this wider organisation, as was indeed done in the case of the Cultural Identity Card.

3. With regard to W. E. U., which has taken over the functions of B. T. O., the Assembly is of the opinion that no cultural activities should in future be undertaken in the restricted framework of W. E. U. unless it be specifically limited, in both scope and purpose, to the Member States of that organisation; in all other cases, an effort should first of all be made to deal with the matter concerned within the framework of the Council of Europe.

4. The Assembly realises that some cultural activities can only be carried out by a small number of countries. In view of this, the Council of Europe contemplates the conclusion of partial agreements among some only of its Members, for example the present Members of W. E. U. or of the Scandinavian Union.

5. The Assembly would welcome a complete merger in the near future of the cultural activities of the Council of Europe and W. E. U. The best means of achieving this would appear to be close co-ordination of the activities of the Secretariats of both organisations. The Assembly hopes that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Council of W. E. U. will at an early date take the necessary steps to ensure

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that activities which are suitable for inclusion within the framework of the Council of Europe shall henceforth be recognised de jure as the latter's responsibility. In any event, even those European cultural activities which are carried on separately should form part of a joint cultural programme.

6. The Assembly is glad to note that the Assembly of W. E. U. has shown that it shares these views by forwarding to the Consultative Assembly for opinion the cultural section of the First Report sent to it by the Council of Ministers of W. E. U. The Assembly of W. E. U. thereby recognises that cultural problems should be discussed by only one parliamentary institution, that of the Council of Europe.

7. The two Assemblies thus agree in recognising the imperative need of a single European cultural policy for the Member States of both organisations.

8. The Consultative Assembly made known its views on this subject in its Opinion No. 14 of 7th July, 1955. In addition to the co-ordination of cultural activities at intergovernmental level, such a policy would, in the Assembly's view, also entail the collaboration of non-governmental organisations of a cultural nature. The Assembly is convinced that they can play a most important part in cultural activities and proposes to do everything possible to associate itself with their efforts.

9. It would also be desirable to seek new financial resources for such activities. To this end, the Assembly, in its Recommendation 74, now before the Committee of Ministers, urged that a Council of Europe Cultural Fund be set up, which would be supported not only by governmental contributions, but also by those of private institutions and individuals. If some Member States were unwilling to take part in it, the Fund would be established on the basis of a partial agreement.

10. The purpose of this policy would be to consolidate governmental and private endeavour, which, in the Assembly's opinion, is an essential preliminary to any large-scale action. Such joint action should, in the first instance, be envisaged in those sectors in which governmental and private activities are directed towards a common goal, although undertaken separately. The desired co-ordination and cooperation might be achieved in the following spheres :

higher university education;

exchanges of persons;

dissemination of the European idea.

11. With this in mind, the Assembly was particularly gratified by the success of the Conference of Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of European Universities at Cambridge, the idea of which was conceived by the Consultative Assembly at its first Session in 1949. The Assembly was pleased to note that the universities of all Member States of the Council of Europe took part.

12. While welcoming the fact that W.E.U. is prepared to promote a university policy in the spirit of European co-operation, the Consultative Assembly would like the institution which has been set up for this purpose to be attached to the Council of Europe, as indeed it should be by virtue of the range it covers.

13. The importance of the part played by universities in European cultural co-operation is illustrated by the fact that two other meetings were held in 1955 to discuss the same problems : they were the course organised by the University of Saarbrücken under the auspices of the Council of Europe on the subject of " The university and the European idea " ; and the Congress of the Association of European University Teachers, a non-governmental organisation, held at Trieste, with the object of drawing up a programme for strengthening the European character of university teaching.

14. The Assembly is convinced that the organisation of these three conferences in such rapid succession was not due to chance but sprang from a real desire and a real need. This has caused the Assembly to reconsider the rôle which it could itself play in assisting universities in their work. The Assembly Committee on Cultural and Scientific Questions therefore proposes to examine, in consultation with the other organisations concerned, the possibility of drawing up a general programme to assist the universities in making their students more European-minded and to enable them better to accomplish their tasks in present-day Europe.

15. The Committee has decided to call a special meeting for this purpose, to which the Secretary-General of W. E. U. will be invited to send a representative.

1. Social section

16. The Assembly wishes to record its conviction that the action of the WEU Assembly in referring to it the report of the Council of W. E. U. represents an important step in securing co-ordination between the work of the two Organisations and in avoiding possible friction and duplication. Now that Western European Union is established as an expanded and developed version of the former Brussels Treaty Organisation, the Assembly believes that the time will soon be ripe for revision of the agreement concluded between the Secretaries-General of the Council of Europe and Brussels Treaty Organisation in April, 1952; such a revision should take account of developments over the last four years while maintaining the same principles of close collaboration.

17. By requesting the views of the Consultative Assembly before themselves expressing an opinion on the report in question, the members of the WEU Assembly have given a notable example of the European spirit, in that they have shown in the most practical way possible that they are willing to take into account the attitude of the Representatives from the Member States of the Council, which are not members of W. E. U., when reaching their own conclusions.

18. In the past, relations between the Brussels Treaty Organisation and the Council of Europe have, as a basic principle, taken account of the fact that it was possible for the five Brussels Treaty Powers, as being more homogeneous in character than the fifteen member countries of the Council, to make greater progress in collaboration and in harmonisation of their social and cultural policies than the Fifteen. Nevertheless, whenever possible, arrangements have been made to extend suitable projects from the narrower basis of the Five to the wider domain of the Fifteen. Thus, certain of the arrangements made by the Brussels Treaty Powers in 1949 to extend the benefits of their social security legislation to all their nationals were extended to a Fifteen- Power basis in 1953 when the members of the Council concluded the Interim Agreements on Social Security and the Convention on Social and Medical Assistance.

19. The Consultative Assembly believes that the same basic principle should continue to apply in the future and expresses the hope that Western European Union will in appropriate cases invite the Council to take up and extend to a wider field suitable projects which have already been realised between the seven member countries of W. E. U. As a corollary the Council of Europe should invite W. E. U. to examine the possibility of putting into action certain projects launched at Strasbourg. One might cite, in the social field, the harmonisation of social charges : this has important economic repercussions which are felt most strongly in the countries that are members of W. E. U. It would therefore seem a subject which could be properly tackled on a seven- Power basis, and if, as a result, solutions are found, an attempt might then be made to extend them into a wider framework.

20. Apart from these cases where there will be advantage in one organisation referring a project to the other, there may also be cases in which collaboration is desirable in joint enterprises. An example of this is the creation of the European Civil Service, which the Consultative Assembly has advocated on several occasions. If European organisations are to be successful in the discharge of their tasks it is essential that they should be assisted by competent officials with the necessary qualifications and experience. For this purpose it is desirable to set up a European Civil Service in which suitably qualified staff could make an effective contribution to the work of all European organisations and pass from one to another as opportunity offered, without losing their acquired rights. Such a system already exists between the United Nations and the Specialised Agencies, and it would be natural for the Council of Europe, Western European Union and O. E. E. C. should take the lead in bringing it about in Europe.

21. In the social field, the Assembly believes that the programmes of the two organisations are complementary rather than competitive. Both derive from the same basic principles : to bring social conditions up to uniformly high standards and to secure equality of treatment for their nationals in other Member States, though it is clearly possible to make speedier progress towards achieving these goals among the Seven than among the Fifteen. Yet the achievement of the smaller group should not be considered an infringement on the rights of the larger, but rather as an example to be followed as soon as circumstances permit. This was illustrated in the cases already mentioned of social security and social assistance; a further example is in the field of public health, where the Council, following in the footsteps of the Brussels Treaty Organisation, has recently been able to develop its own programme of health activities, in collaboration with W. H. O. The Assembly is impressed with the extent and variety of the activities in the field of public health undertaken by the Brussels Treaty Organisation and W. E. U. and hopes that the Council can profit therefrom and select appropriate projects which might be applied on a wider basis.

22. The Assembly has been interested to learn of the work of W. E. U. for the prevention of food-poisoning; it is itself examining the wider problem of measures to be taken for the protection of consumers in general, in order to enable them to be fully informed about the quality of products on the market and to exercise a wide discrimination when making their purchases.

23. The Assembly has been particularly impressed with the machinery developed by W. E. U. for implementing its programme of social co-operation. The close network of administrative contacts in national departments appears to give excellent results and, as pointed out in Recommendation 14 of December 1951, might be copied with advantage by all members of the Council of Europe.

24. In the social as in the cultural field, regular inter-secretariat meetings should assist in maintaining liaison and co-ordination between the two organisations.

25. The two most important items at present in the social programme of the Council of Europe are the European Code of Social Security and the European Social Charter. In both of these the Members of W. E. U. will have a particularly important part to play. As regards the Code of Social Security, the Assembly hopes that they will agree to accept the obligation of ensuring higher standards of social security than is possible for some other members of the Council, possibly by subscribing to a Special Protocol; in relation to the Social Charter, the Assembly counts on their support, based on their wide experience and developed social systems, in bringing to fruition a project to which it attaches great importance.

26. The Council of Europe in its social programme has been greatly assisted by the International Labour Organisation and believes that W. E. U. is similarly placed in this respect. The Assembly hopes that the Council of W. E.U. will do all it can to stimulate its members to ratify the greatest possible number of International Labour Conventions. The Assembly is also concerned to develop and extend its contacts with non-governmental organisations, including particularly the great trade unions, whose co-operation is essential in all matters of social policy. It hopes that the links established with them through its own consultative arrangements will be of real assistance not only to the Council of Europe but also to Western European Union in carrying out a co-ordinated programme of social advancement for the benefit of the population of all Member States.