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Work of the European Conference of Local Authorities

Report[1]
Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities
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1. 1957 - 9th Session - First part

A. Draft Resolution

The Assembly,

Having examined the Report of its Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs on the European Conference of Local Authorities held in Strasbourg from 12th to 14th January 1957,

1. Notes with satisfaction that this first Conference has been held, in pursuance of Resolution 76 of 14th October 1955 3;

2. Warmly congratulates the Conference on its excellent work;

3. Thanks the international and national organisations of local authorities for their generous and effective contribution to the implementation of Resolution 76;

4. Decides to secure that all measures are adopted which may ensure that the Council of Europe derives the maximum benefit from the Conference's participation in its work.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1. By its Resolution 76, adopted on 14th October 1955 during its 12th Sitting, the Consultative Assembly, had decided to convene a Conference of representatives of the national associations of the local authorities of member countries. In view of the importance of securing the association of local authorities in the work of the Council of Europe and the need to arouse renewed interest in the European idea, the Assembly decided on this means of examining jointly with the representatives of European municipalities those problems on its Agenda which were of interest to them.

2. In that Resolution the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs was instructed to organise the Conference and to consult it on behalf of the Assembly.

3. The Committee held a large number of meetings to prepare the Conference, in close co-operation with the two leading organisations of local authorities, the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities.

4. On 9th June 1956, the Committee of Ministers decided to make a special appropriation of 3,500,000 francs to cover the cost of the Conference. This appropriation, however, was less than one-third (31.25 %) of the 11,200,000 francs, which, according to the very modest estimate of the Committee, was the sum required.

5. In spite of this, it proved possible to hold the Conference under reasonably satisfactory conditions, thanks to the valuable help afforded by local authorities' associations and by the Secretariat-General of the Council of Europe, in particular its interpreting, translating and general services. With this loyal assistance the Committee was able, after all, to ensure that the Conference should meet.

6. The first step was to draw up the Agenda and Rules of Procedure of the Conference. On the Agenda the Committee placed the four major questions referred to it : municipal credit, local problems arising from the work of E. C. S. C, participation of local authorities in the spreading of the European idea and the building of Europe and, lastly, the defence and development of local autonomy. The Rules of Procedure were, with a few changes, patterned on those of the Consultative Assembly.

7. Preparatory to the Conference the Committee carried out an extensive exchange of information with the national associations of local authorities. Here, too, the Committee was greatly assisted by the Council of European Municipalities.

8. On 9th November 1956, the Chairman of the Committee officially invited the national associations of the local authorities of member countries to participate in the Conference, to be held on 12th, 13th and 14th January 1957. In the letters of invitation the associations were informed of the Agenda, the distribution of seats by country and other arrangements that had been made. The national associations of local authorities in non-member countries were invited to appoint observers. On 27th November, the Secretariat informed the associations of the order of business and of the practical arrangements for setting up committees, appointing delegates, allocating seats, interpreting speeches into non-official languages, for subsistence allowances, travelling allowances, reservation of hotel rooms etc.

9. The Conference was attended by 124 delegates. Greece and Ireland were not represented. Several delegations included substitutes; these numbered 37 in all. There were also five Swiss observers. There was thus a total of 166 representatives of European local authorities.

10. On 12th January 1957, at 10 a. m., the Conference opened in the Assembly Hall of the Council of Europe. The Chairman of the Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs was unanimously appointed President. Your Committee, which was closely concerned with the Conference, very soon realised the worth of the national delegations and the quality of their work. The debates and, in particular, the meetings of the committees confirmed this view. The delegates were grateful for the encouragement and guidance given them by the opening address of the President of the Consultative Assembly. The regular attendance of the Deputies of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs added to the importance of the Conference and to delegates' confidence in the value of their work.

11. The Conference met for three days. On 12th January the reports submitted by the Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs on behalf of the Consultative Assembly were explained and were publicly debated. On Sunday, 13th January, the Committees were engaged on the often difficult work of preparing the draft Opinions which the Conference was to present to the Consultative Assembly. On 14th January the Conference debated and voted on the various draft Opinions and Resolutions. The same day the Conference paid a solemn tribute to the town of Budapest and the heroes of the Hungarian resistance.

12. What was the net result of the Conference's work? By its serious work and the high level of its debates, in plenary sittings and during the meetings of its Committees, the Conference amply justified the hopes placed in it by the Consultative Assembly. Keeping prudently within the sphere of their competence, the delegates contrived to dispel any misgivings expressed before the Conference. The opinion had been voiced in certain quarters that a Conference on such a scale might be usurping the place of the International Congress of Local Authorities : and, if that were so, it appeared that a small group of experts should take the place of the proposed Conference. The local representatives and administrators have proved that they are the best experts to co-operate with the Consultative Assembly. The European press was unanimous in appreciating the important effects of the work of the Conference in the member countries, in all towns and municipalities. The Council of Europe, through the Conference, is undoubtedly benefiting from the impact on public opinion, which has also derived valuable information from the reports made by the delegates on their return in their respective local assemblies. The effort must be maintained.

13. Your Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs, which has instructed me to present this Report, is submitting to the Assembly the various texts adopted by the Conference. It is now for us to take action. The Committee will submit to the Assembly for a vote at its next part-Session, three draft Recommendations arising from Opinions adopted by the Conference. The Committee will later submit the texts arising from the other Opinions.

14. I am directed by your Committee to inform the Assembly of its feeling that it has acted in the best interests of the European cause, in accordance with the letter and spirit of Resolution 76 (1955), and its hope that it will therefore have the approval and encouragement of the whole Assembly.

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Appendix APPENDIX

RESOLUTION 76 (1955) on the convening of a Conference to be attended by representatives of national associations of the local authorities of member countries

The Assembly,

Reaffirming its belief in the importance of securing the close association of local authorities in the process of European unification—and particularly in the work of the Council of Europe;

Considering this need to be all the more vital at the present time when every effort must be made to ensure a renewal of interest in the European idea;

In response to the wishes repeatedly expressed in municipal circles and given further emphasis during the impressive conferences at Versailles and Venice, to which it would pay due tribute;

Recalling its Order 71 (1955) and its previous Recommendation and Resolution, which recorded the desire of the Assembly that representatives of the European municipalities should meet in the Assembly Hall of the House of Europe in order to study such problems of common concern as the Assembly itself has included in its Agenda;

Being keenly desirous of observing and applying the principles laid down in its Recommendation 76 (1955) that no measure which commits any municipal body should be taken by any central authority without prior consultation with representatives of that body;

Wishing to open wide the doors of the Council of Europe to the qualified representatives of the municipalities and to make them familiar with its work, in the firm belief that they will pass on this knowledge to wide sections of the population;

Availing itself of its right to consult experts,

Decides :

a. to convene an annual conference to be attended by representatives of all the qualified national associations of the local authorities of member countries, the list of such associations being prepared by the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs after consultation with the two major international organisations of local authorities, namely, the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities;

b. to put before this Conference all questions on which the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs feels it necessary to consult authorised representatives of the local authorities of member countries before submitting to the Assembly this or that draft Recommendation which may have a considerable impact upon European local government administrations;

c. to instruct its Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs and its Committee on Budgetary Affairs and Administration to make the necessary arrangements for convening this Conference in collaboration with the Secretariat-General.