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## **FIRST SESSION**

**(Strasbourg, 31 May - 3 June 1994)**

## **REPORT**

**ON PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES -  
AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT FOR CO-OPERATION IN GREATER EUROPE**

**(Rapporteur: Mr Josef HOFMANN, Germany)**

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**EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM**

### **An idea with a long history**

For more than four decades, twinings have been making a decisive contribution to the development of friendship and co-operation in Europe and encouraging the process of integration of the states of Western Europe. Western Europe now has over 6,000 twinning schemes which have enabled hundreds of thousands of Europeans to meet and get to know and understand each other better. They have brought peoples closer together and thereby enabled considerable progress to be made towards a People's Europe.

In the aftermath of the second world war, the importance of twinning schemes was self-evident. Today, when borders are open and foreign travel is becoming common, it is sometimes fashionable to think that twinning is no longer necessary.

Yet there is still a good deal to be done! Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the resurgence of nationalist, xenophobic and racist movements in a number of European countries and the outbreak of the war in the former Yugoslavia, we are coming to the painful realisation that the process of European unification is incomplete and under constant threat.

### **The basic idea behind twinings**

The aim of twinning is to enable citizens to get to know each other better by meeting at local level, to bring prejudices and stereotypes into contact with reality, to develop friendly relations and understanding of the ideas advanced by other nations. These direct contacts, which ought ideally to involve as many people as possible, promote citizens' awareness of the common European cultural heritage and civilisation, the convergent interests of European nations and the stakes involved in European construction.

It is sometimes said that it is always the same people, official municipal representatives, who travel in connection with twinning. This is indeed sometimes the case, but this vision is a caricature of the majority of twinning schemes. When the European Commission asked a panel of European MPs to select the ten best twinning events carried out in 1992, the members of the panel had difficulty in reaching a decision. In fact, it is not unusual for over one hundred visitors to take part in a meeting. Moreover, most of these are not limited to official ceremonies and sporting events, but also enable the participants to exchange opinions on current issues connected with their everyday life. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is trying to pass on the best and most original ideas with a view to wider public participation, via its publications, conferences and information days.

The "common European home" must rest on firm foundations. The twinings movement is one of the most important of these. Its scale can be illustrated in figures: in 1993, 2,442 European cities and municipalities were involved in the twinning meetings sponsored by the European Community. These figures only show the tip of the iceberg, since only a small range of twinning events are eligible for Community aid. Moreover, the conditions for eligibility are becoming tighter year by year, under the constraints of the extremely limited budget. Meetings are increasingly involving three or more municipalities, in such a way as to make European diversity perceptible at municipal level.

## **New tasks**

Since the democratic reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, the twinnings movement has been faced with the new challenges involved in reuniting the two parts of our continent which were separated by the Iron Curtain for half a century. We must accomplish between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe what has already been accomplished within Western Europe since the last war. Twinning has a key role to play in this process. By enabling wide citizen participation in meetings, twinnings have an essential role to play in the unification of Greater Europe.

If every pair of municipalities or cities in Western Europe looked for a partner in Central or Eastern Europe, we could respond to the strong, and as yet unsatisfied, demand from the East. We would then already be closer to the objective of transcending the rifts in Europe.

## **Twinnings and partnerships**

The development of the single market has, over the past few years, heightened awareness of the immediate utility of twinning and what it represents in economic terms. International relations between municipalities and cities encourage economic exchange, since they open up possibilities for contacts between the whole gamut of professional groups. EC programmes for inter-municipal co-operation and exchanges of experience between municipalities and cities have helped to strengthen this tendency still further and have enabled predominantly economic partnerships to be developed.

Twinnings and partnerships therefore complement one another. In the context of a twinning scheme, the confidence and mutual understanding which are key to economic co-operation, the exchange of experience between professional groups and the success of a partnership, are able to develop over the years. On the other hand, a partnership can also lead to the emergence of a twinning scheme in the broader sense. Partnerships and projects carried out jointly by two or more cities have more chance of succeeding if they are incorporated into an existing twinning scheme, but they develop according to their own criteria and can even be successfully carried out between local authorities who do not have a history of co-operation but only a shared problem.

## **Partnerships with cities in Central and Eastern Europe**

Partnerships have a fundamental role to play in responding to the challenge linked to the differences in living standards and development between Western and Eastern Europe. Municipalities and cities in central and eastern European countries have great need of practical help, technical assistance and transfers of knowledge and know-how. Technical co-operation and the exchange of experience in the context of partnerships can satisfy this demand. They can contribute towards the socio-economic, administrative and political development of central and eastern European cities and municipalities and also strengthen local autonomy and respect for human rights.

Partnerships are an exception to the rule that "good advice is expensive". They are not costly, either for those giving advice or those receiving it. In fact, these two roles cannot be clearly delineated, since all the parties involved in the exchange of experience can draw useful lessons from it. Those involved in a partnership are not in it for profit. Only the direct costs have to be met, since these partnerships come into the category of solidarity between towns, and these costs are often offset by the advantages brought about by the relationship in the medium term.

"Good advice is valuable" - indeed! Meetings between experts from the various sectors of local government provide an opportunity to compare experiences and to identify the solutions most appropriate to a given problem. This exchange of experience makes it possible to avoid costly mistakes. Direct contacts between municipal administrators, budget planners and implementors and those in charge of administration of the heritage, municipal services and public works, town planning and regional development, make it possible to improve the quality of the decisions taken and to reduce the cost of investment.

The advantages of this direct support are obvious: it avoids lengthy bureaucratic procedures and focuses on concrete projects. The various partners are on an equal footing and can make sure that the solutions applied are appropriate to needs.

### **The example of the ECOS/OUVERTURE programme**

It is not surprising therefore that the programmes for exchanges of experience between local authorities to promote inter-municipal co-operation, launched by the European Community, received an extremely favourable response. In the face of the needs of cities and municipalities in central and eastern Europe, this approach was subsequently broadened, with the creation of the ECOS/OUVERTURE programme, to include partners in central and eastern Europe. The pilot stage of this programme, lasting three years, will be completed at the end of December 1994. In the context of this programme, some 500 projects, involving around 2,000 towns, have been submitted to the CEMR responsible for the ECOS branch of the programme. In view of the extremely limited financial resources, it has only been possible to select 200 projects. These cover all areas of municipal responsibilities: administration, management of local finances, transport and urban traffic, regional planning, cadastral surveys and registry offices, the management and development of urban networks and local services (water, gas, electricity, energy, waste), town planning, enhancement of the heritage, action in the fields of health, housing and welfare, protection of the environment, control and reduction of urban pollution and the rehabilitation of urban neighbourhoods.

Local authorities in central and eastern Europe are facing serious difficulties. They are particularly interested in technical help which will enable them to improve the organisation of local government, especially in the fields of health, hygiene, public transport, urban planning, the safeguarding and enhancement of the cultural heritage, protection of the environment, combating crime and drugs, the management of municipal property and local finances.

Partnerships enable solutions to be found to these problems, through the exchange of experience and the implementation of joint projects. The CEMR which runs the ECOS programme provides assistance in the search for appropriate partners. It is currently campaigning for the programme to be continued beyond the pilot stage on a wider scale.

However, several weaknesses have come to light during the pilot stage. Hitherto, only local authorities in the European Union have benefited from co-financing and consequently it has often been difficult for their partners in central and eastern Europe to make staff available. It is also a pity that aid is only available for studies and advice on investment in infrastructure and other public works at local level and not for the implementation of the projects resulting from this preparatory work. It is therefore appropriate to ensure co-operation and synergy between the ECOS/OUVERTURE programme and the other programmes (such as the PHARE programme) set up by the European Institutions to assist with development in central and eastern Europe.

## **The role of European Institutions**

The transfer of experience, know-how and knowledge via partnerships is not costly, but it does involve a certain financial commitment. We are all aware that local authorities are obliged, now more than ever, to pay particular attention to their expenditure. There is also a real risk that financial constraints will lead municipalities to have reservations about getting involved in developing partnerships.

These very positive initiatives should therefore be given long-term political and financial support by European Institutions such as those of the European Union and the Council of Europe. We call on the Council of Europe in particular to speed up the implementation of the LODE and DEMOSTHENES programmes and to give partnerships and local authority co-operation projects the role which they deserve in this context. Inter-municipal co-operation between western and eastern Europe will strengthen local autonomy, democracy and political stability in the countries of central and eastern Europe.

The Council of Europe can also make a key contribution towards partnerships between cities, by calling on its member States to make provision, in inter-state co-operation treaties, for mechanisms aimed at promoting and facilitating inter-municipal co-operation and partnerships between cities and municipalities.

## **Partnerships with third countries**

In the mid-80s, municipalities were very active in the field of partnerships with local authorities from other continents. The "Solidarity in Acts" and "Water Solidarity" programmes made a major contribution to improving living conditions, for example in Africa. It would be a pity if the efforts being made to bring living standards in eastern Europe up to those enjoyed in western Europe were to lead to neglect of this field of international inter-municipal solidarity. Partnerships must therefore not be limited to Europe. They are an important channel of dialogue between North and South and must be incorporated into the co-operation policy carried out by the European Institutions.

## **The role of organisations of local authorities**

If it had not been for the initiatives of the European organisations representing local authorities and their work to bring together municipalities interested in establishing links via twinning, partnerships or joint projects, this broad movement for co-operation at local level would never have come about.

For this reason, we are now calling on European Institutions to co-ordinate their work on developing inter-municipal co-operation by involving the organisations representing local authorities in a genuine partnership. For, experience shows that the development of twinnings and partnerships is closely linked to the synergy of the network of organisations of European municipalities and cities.