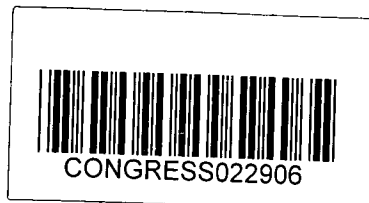


502

Council of Europe
Conseil de l'Europe



88/9048

For debate in the Standing Committee
Pour débat à la Commission Permanente
* See Rule 12 (4) - Voir article 12 (4) du Règlement *

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe
Congrès des Pouvoirs Locaux et Régionaux de l'Europe

Strasbourg, 25 May 1998
s:\delai.fdb\session\session5\doc\rappcasa.ang

CG (5) 14
Part II

FIFTH SESSION

(Strasbourg, 26-28 May 1998)

REPORT ON THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCIES

Rapporteur: Claude CASAGRANDE (France)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

* Objections to the Standing Committee procedure must reach the Head of the Congress Secretariat a clear week before the meeting of the Standing Committee; if 5 members object, the report will be submitted to the Plenary Session.

Les éventuelles objections à l'examen en Commission Permanente doivent parvenir au Chef du Secrétariat du Congrès une semaine avant la réunion de la Commission Permanente; si 5 membres du Congrès présentent des objections, le rapport sera soumis à la session plénière.

“The Local Democracy Agencies”

In recent years, the *local democracy embassies* (LDEs) have been recognised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe as one of its priority areas. It was in this light that a report was presented in 1997 to the Plenary Session of the Congress, and a recommendation and resolution were adopted.

The Committee on LDEs considers it vital to report to the Congress on the activity of the past year and on developments in the situation of the LDEs.

1. Activity since the 1997 Session of the Congress

At its last session, the Congress invited the Committee on LDEs, in Resolution 56 (1997), “to engage, in a spirit of consensus, in discussion and a consultation with the partners involved in the funding and management of the programme [...] in order to define the legal status which [a ‘European Foundation for Local Democracy’] could ultimately be given”.

With a view to implementing this resolution, the Committee on LDEs, under its Chair Gianfranco Martini, held consultations as appropriate:

- the Assembly of LDEs met on 24 September 1997 and 27 January 1998 for talks with the LDE delegates and representatives from LDE leader towns and regions. These meetings were an opportunity to clarify the needs, expectations and wishes of the partners in the programme;
- simultaneously, the Committee on LDEs, responsible for co-ordinating the programme, met on a regular basis in order to evaluate activity in progress and consider a number of new projects proposed by European local and regional authorities. Along with other members of the Congress, members of the Committee on the LDEs became heavily involved in implementing LDE activities;
- a Rapporteur Group of the Committee of Ministers examined Recommendation 33 (1997) in February and again in April 1998. Further information was then provided. The issue of whether to set up a “Foundation of LDEs” is still being discussed, and the Rapporteur Group is shortly to consider that recommendation once again. The Committee of Ministers is due in the same context to examine the Parliamentary Assembly’s invitation to the CLRAE to open an LDE in Kosovo (Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1288 (1996)).
- Attention should also be drawn again to President Haegi’s talks with the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers, during which the LDE programme has been raised.

2. The need for a suitable legal instrument

The considerable budgetary increase at the Council of Europe is very welcome. These additional resources enable the CLRAE, through the Committee on LDEs, to play a significant role in allocating financial support and defining priority action, to complement its other activities consolidating its role in the region.

In this connection, I would like to propose that the CLRAE and its working groups call on the LDEs and their host authorities more actively to promote the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the programmes developed by CLRAE members.

These measures should be accompanied by an improved information policy which will increase awareness of LDE activities and of the results achieved among local and regional authorities and their associations in Europe. In this respect, the CLRAE's Internet site is now a channel for swift and direct communication and information.

In order to develop LDE activity, which has faced no opposition at all and has indeed been in demand (see the Parliamentary Assembly recommendation on opening an LDE in Kosovo), it is vital that a suitable legal instrument be set in place. In addition to providing the requisite legal clarity and legitimacy, such an instrument would enable consideration to be given to expanding the programme to other cities of the regions like Mostar or into new regions: the idea of LDEs seems an effective tool which could usefully contribute to the development of local and regional democracy in Albania or Kosovo in particular.

It is for this reason that the Committee on LDEs considers it imperative, subject to the readiness of the Committee of Ministers and the other institutions concerned to back it, to set up a foundation (or another body with appropriate legal status) as a single intermediary with genuine legal personality. The project leaders and representatives of the European Union should be invited to any talks on this matter.

3. Consolidating co-operation between the institutions

European Union support is of course crucial for the LDE programme. The LDEs play a part in EU initiatives aimed at introducing democracy and respect for human rights, and have had EU support since 1994. Nonetheless, new difficulties which have unfortunately arisen in the last few months (the origin and reasons for which are difficult to understand) now threaten the position of some of the oldest and most active of the LDEs.

We are also grateful for the ongoing support of the Council of Europe member states, which, through the Programme of Confidence-Building Measures, the LODE programme and the LDE Special Account, have been of valuable assistance in enabling the LDEs to work effectively.

4. Proposal to change the programme title

At various times during talks on the programme, the representatives of certain member states have pointed out that the term "embassy" as currently used could cause some confusion. Although it considers "embassy" to be the most suitable term (it is "local democracy" that is represented at the LDEs through the partner local and regional authorities), the Committee on the LDEs has borne this objection in mind and accordingly proposes changing the programme title to "Local Democracy Agencies".

The Agencies would also aim to expand their areas of action, especially regarding activities for the development of local and regional democracy, such as the training of elected representatives and study visits carried out in co-operation with partner authorities.

5. A call for support from local and regional authorities

The LDE programme has earned warm and widespread appreciation and regularly receives encouragement. The Committee also receives proposals for the setting up of new LDEs.

We must therefore remember that the principal driving force behind the LDE programme is provided by local and regional authorities.

Indeed, only the active participation of the partner authorities in a given LDE can help bring about lasting relations built on trust, encourage the sharing of experience and set up partnership networks in Europe.

The participation of local and regional authorities must also extend to their making financial contributions to the LDEs' operating and activity costs.

In this respect, the Committee on LDEs points out that the pooling of even modest contributions to funds can provide a boost for initiatives in favour of local and regional democracy.

This is why Congress delegates are earnestly requested to (re)affirm or increase the practical support they offer to the LDE programme. There are various ways of doing this:

- they might become active partners in an LDE, with a say in deciding and implementing activities;
- financial contributions can be made to the LDE Special Account, which is controlled by the CLRAE working group responsible for the LDE programme.

Congress members are also invited:

- to promote the LDE programme in their towns and regions;
- to promote the setting up of solidarity, sharing and partnership initiatives which will contribute to the process of European integration in which local and regional authorities have a key role to play.