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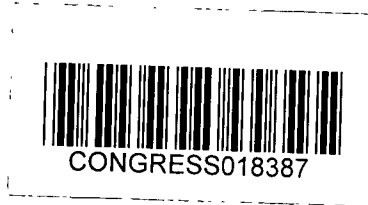
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**Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe**
Chamber of Local Authorities

**Congrès des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux de l'Europe**
Chambre des pouvoirs locaux

Strasbourg, 7 March 1996
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Part II

## SECOND SESSION

## "RESPONSIBILITIES AND INITIATIVES OF CITIES IN RESPECT OF EDUCATION"

## Rapporteurs: Mrs Lund (Denmark) and Mr Wrona (Poland)

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

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\* 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.

## I.     INTRODUCTION

In 1992, in the framework of the former Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and before the creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, a study of the competencies and role of local authorities in the field of education was begun. To this end, a working group was set up with the following joint composition: on the one hand, representatives of 10 European cities[1] and, on the other, elected local representatives belonging to the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, who were later replaced by members of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress and by a member of the Chamber of the Regions, in order to prepare an opinion of the latter Chamber.

This "Cities and Education" Working Group had three objectives:

i)     to compare the experiences of these ten European cities in the field of education;

ii)     to examine in the different member states of the Council of Europe the sharing of competencies in the field of school education between the local, regional and national levels;

iii)     to make a general study of the role and responsibilities of the local authorities in the field of education in the broad sense of the term, not only school education but also extra-curricular education, continued training, life-long education and education for citizenship.

## II.     ORGANISATION OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

During its four years of activity, the "Cities and Education" Working Group organised three seminars and two conferences.

1.     The seminar on "Combating unemployment through vocational training : the role of the city" (Stockholm 22 - 24 April 1993) dealt in particular with the questions of vocational training in schools and for special groups.

2.     The seminar on "The city's approach to the education of its multicultural population (migrants and minorities)" (Amsterdam, 2-4 December 1993) examined integration through education, the role of parents, adult education and multilingualism in the city.

3.     The conference on "The sharing of responsibilities and powers between local, regional and national authorities in the field of education" (Czestochowa, Poland, 19-21 April 1994) considered such sharing from the point of view of administrative and financial matters, curriculum content, appointments, management and training of teaching staff, the autonomy of schools and their principals and the involvement of parents and the private sector.

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[1]     The 10 cities are the following: Amsterdam (Netherlands), Barcelona (Spain), Bologna (Italy), Budapest (Hungary), Czestochowa (Poland), Frankfurt (Germany), Liverpool (United Kingdom), Lyons (France), Riga (Latvia) and Stockholm (Sweden)

4.   The seminar on "Education and comprehensive urban planning" (Lyon 13-15 October 1994) examined the definition, analysis and location of sensitive urban districts and the strategies of cities for distributing finance and responsibilities through their areas.

5.   The final conference, on "Cities and Education" (Bologna, 8-10 February 1996), was concerned with synthesising the group's deliberation while enlarging the scope of the inquiry to other European cities and to other partners involved at local, regional and national levels.

Parallel to these events, the working group asked an expert, Mrs Anne Van Haecht (Université Libre de Bruxelles), to prepare a study on **"The sharing of responsibilities and powers between local, regional and national authorities in the field of education "**. Twenty-three European countries responded to the expert's questionnaire and participated in the study, prepared in co-operation with the Education Committee of the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Co-operation. Mrs Van Haecht's study thus provided an overview of the various European countries with regard to the sharing of competencies in the field of education between the State and local and regional authorities.

Throughout its work, the "Cities and Education" Group was helped by Mr. Bogard, a consultant, who acted as general rapporteur for the three seminars and the Bologna final conference. Mrs Van Haecht, for her part, was general rapporteur for the Czestochowa conference. The CLRAE's rapporteurs and the working group as a whole wish to thank these two experts very warmly for their valuable assistance and their important contribution to the group's activities.

The CLRAE's rapporteurs also wish to thank all the representatives of the network's ten cities who, for each event held, provided their experience and ideas without which the group could not have been able to carry out the project.

Some of the cities have already started establishing direct links for exchanging information and co-operating, together bilaterally, and the CLRAE's rapporteurs hope that these links will be continued and indeed extended to other European cities.

## III.   RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES

1.   **"Sharing of responsibilities and powers between local, regional and national authorities in the field of education"**

At the beginning of its activities the working group wished to examine more closely the current situation regarding competencies of European local authorities of Europe in the field of education. The trend towards the decentralisation of school systems seemed to be becoming established in several member states, with the result that local and regional authorities were being called upon to shoulder increasing responsibilities in this field. The aim of the study by Mrs Van Haecht was therefore to provide an overview of the differences between one country and another in the division of responsibilities between central government and local and regional authorities.

The study placed emphasis on the part of the system for which public authorities are responsible, whereas adult education and continuing training were not covered. The information available on higher and university education varies widely from country to country.

## The diversity of the school systems in Europe

The results of the study show the diversity of school systems in Europe. Some differences are apparent in the following fields:

1°)     Authority or authorities responsible at the different levels of the school system

2°)     Administrative and financial powers

3°)     Grants and subsidies

4°)     Opening and closing of schools

5°)     The appointment and payment of teachers

6°)     The content of education: responsibility for drawing up curricula.


One of the study's main concerns was with the degree of centralisation or decentralisation of the different school systems considered. In this connection, attention cannot be confined to the informatin given by the respondents in the 23 countries participating in the study. It may be seen that matters are not as obvious as they first appear. According to the replies of Switzerland or Germany, for example, these countries might be placed in the category of countries with a mainly decentralised structure. However, if these two countries are considered, not from the standpoint of the federal state, but from that of the canton or land, it becomes clear that this, the initial impression, needs to be qualified.

While a trend towards decentralisation undeniably characterises a number of European school policies, not every country is affected by it in the same way. For the sake of clarity it is important to make a distinction between deconcentration (or functional decentralisation) and territorial decentralisation. The former consists of a shift of competencies from the central authority to its administrative branches; the latter a shift of competencies from the State to subordinate entities governed by elected assemblies (provinces, municipalities, communes etc.). Deconcentration does not necessarily have the purpose of weakening state control, which can still very easily continue to be exercised on the basis of centrally issued criteria.

Having regard to these caveats, school systems were reclassified in a more detailed typological way dividing hte various systems into **three main categories**:

1.     Mainly centralised school systems:
    1.1     Highly centralised systems
    1.2     Centralised systems with a tendency towards deconcentration

2.      Centralised school with a tendency towards decentralisation

3.      Mainly decentralised school systems.

The autonomy granted to a school system can take different forms, which can be classified under three headings:

a.      *Autonomy within a territorial model*: in all modern school systems, the State has been the guarantor of the right of access to education.   Nevertheless, the organisation and management of educational institutions may be delegated to territorial authorities, such as provinces, counties and municipalities.

b.      *Autonomy within a solidarity-based model*: this covers all the cases where the users subscribe to a specific idea, that of making a shared education a choice based on a common vision of the world.  This type of autonomy is a feature of private schools (belonging to a particular religion or adhering to a particular educational philosophy), whether or not they are subsidised from the public purse.

c.      *Autonomy within a participative model*: this enables representatives of parents and/or employers, trade unions and elected councillors, as well as teachers and pupils, to participate in school councils and in the regional committees which exist at the various levels of the education system.

These three forms of autonomy are not, of course, mutually exclusive. Indeed in several European countries they can co-exist in different permutations.

**In practice, each national school system takes the form of an entity comprising a special combination of these different types of autonomy, reflecting the country's institutional and political arrangements.**

## Arguments in the debate on the decentralisation of school systems

According to Mrs Van Haecht's study, the reasons most frequently put forward in support of decentralisation measures are follows:

.       the redistributive argument: the aim is to share the power traditionally granted to central government's traditional power to regulate institutional and individual activities (so as to meet the need for standardisation) and to allocate resources (to ensure fairness by limiting regional variations while achieving economies of scale and resource mobility);

.       the efficiency argument: the purpose is to mobilise local and private resources which are not available in a centralised system.

.       the learning cultures argument: this calls for a greater sensitivity to local differences.

.       social conflict management: if a conflict cannot be resolved by a central directive, decentralisation can allow the State to diffuse the sources of the conflict;

.     <u>the search for compensatory legitimacy</u>: the aim here is to answer criticism concerning
the State's excessive centralisation, the impersonality of its administrative system and
its lack of interest in local cultural peculiarities.


Decentralisation (covering territorial decentralisation, deconcentration and school
autonomy) is plainly central to the current debate about school policies. It is significant that
even countries now possessing a highly centralised system stressed in their replies that they
were starting to become interested in this or that aspect of the issue.

The reasons for (or against) a system of decentralisation should, it seems, be sought
first of all in the main policy objectives of the countries concerned. It is on this basis that
similarities and divergences emerge, over and beyond a consensual conception.

The two main challenges therefore seem to be : on one hand, deciding whether schools .
should be regarded as forming a public service, ie as part of a market in social assets; and,
on the other, taking account of the problems of balance posed by a process of decentralisation
and the measures to solve them.

**A clear definition of competencies at school level is therefore essential, but it is
also necessary to make these competencies operational by providing for the resources
required to exercise them effectively.**

**Furthermore, the diversity of school systems in Europe is evident, but it is not an
obstacle to finding common solutions to educational problems.**

Mrs Van Haecht's study, however, reflects the situation at a given moment, whereas
the field of education is in a constant state of flux. It would therefore be desirable to monitor
closely its future developments and Mrs Van Haecht's analysis in a few years' time, in order
assess these developments and identify European trends in the matter.


## 2.     Conclusions of the Czestochowa Conference

Like several other eastern and central European countries, Poland is reforming the
division of competencies in the field of school education. In particular, the communes with
the status of towns were to be made responsible for nursery and primary schools. At the time
of the Czestochowa conference however, a certain number of problems raised by the reform
remained unsolved, viz:

-     the lack of any clarity or certainty concerning the way in which the operation was to
      be financed;

-     the impossibility of taking steps to provide schools with sufficiently competent staff
      to ensure good-quality teaching;

-     delays between centralised decision-taking and the allocation of grants to local
      authorities;

-     uncertain legal situation regarding the ownership of school buildings and the land they
      occupy.

In fact, a comparison suggests that western European countries are more interested than eastern European countries in the practical functioning of the school system and in pupils' pathways, whereas the eastern European countries are trying to build a democracy that is reflected at school level in new values and new forms of behaviour marking a break with the past. It clearly emerged from the Czestochowa conference that there was more a difference of degree than of kind in the problems encountered on each side.

It is important to stress that a good part of the discussions at the conference was focused, for all the European countries represented, on harmonising whatever decentralisation arrangements were deemed necessary with **universal democratic values** preserving the public-service status of education, regardless of the political system or European country concerned.

The participants in the Czestochowa conference adopted a **Declaration** on "Education in Europe: a common responsibility, shared competencies" (cf. CPL (2) 7 Part I Appendix).

In this text participants stressed that the State remains the guarantor of the coherence and viability of any school system. The State cannot evade this duty, which it must nevertheless carry out while respecting the right of parents to choose a school matching their own values. However, while a process of decentralisation can improve the operation of a school system, none of the arrangements designed for this purpose can be considered a universal recipe. In any event, the sharing of competencies between the different tiers of authority should be clearly provided for in an outline law, and the transfer of funds should be done in a reliable and open manner in order to enable regional and local authorities to shoulder the duties assigned to them.

The participants also stressed the importance of enhancing the social status of teachers and intensifying their training in order to meet the new needs of education existing in present-day society.

## 3. General conclusions of the Bologna conference

The participants in the Bologna conference adopted a **declaration** on "The responsibilities and initiatives of cities in the respect of education" (cf. CPL (2) 7 Part I Appendix).

The cities are, first and foremost, places where people live and work. They are all confronted, though in different ways according to their history and circumstances, with the problems caused by the soaring unemployment, deepening social divides and increasing social exclusion, the erosion of security for entire sections of the population.

Although cities alone cannot solve these urgent problems, they must give a clear commitment to help to solve them by harnessing all their resources to this aim, including the resources offered by their education policies.

Under every education system, no matter what competencies are specifically granted to local authorities in the field of school education, cities in particular can act on the periphery of school education . They possess a set of resources physically situated in their areas (businesses, museums, social, cultural sports and artistic facilities etc), which they can mobilise as necessary.

Moreover, cities are the most appropriate level for activating the necessary partnerships and synergies at local level, as they are more alive to the diversity of situations and possible solutions in their territories. Cities are also in a key position to energise and decompartmentalise the different services offered to citizens.

It should be emphasised that cities are not systematically asking for more competencies and are not trying to replace other levels of authority but to turn their means of action to account by making use of their existing networks and structures as well as developing partnerships with the private sector and with local voluntary associations.

Finally, education cannot be reduced to what is customarily termed "schooling", nor can its contribution to social integration be limited to the first twenty or thirty years of an indivisual's life. The revolutions that our societies are currently undergoing (in terms of information, the media, changes in family structures, increasing unemployment, growing insecurity, exclusion etc) make a new approach to education an urgent necessity.

Accordingly cities have a central role to perform in planning and implementing a broad-based type of education which will enable their inhabitants to develop both as individuals and as active citizens. This role available to cities is a chance to be seized, as life-long learning and adult education still need to be sunstantially developed, deepened and tested.

It is a new conception of citizenship and participation that is necessary.

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In conclusion, the general principles presented in the Bologna Declaration are the result of a three years' intensive and enthralling work. The members of the working group and the representatives of the cities involved in the exercise succeeded in transcending the obvious differences between their situations and between the histories and outlooks of their countries and cities and in observing the similarity between the problems experienced in all countries, albeit to varying degrees, as well as the striking convergence of the strategies to be developed in order to deal with these problems.

The working method which consisted of pooling experience between a small group of European cities, then enlarging the discussion to a larger number of partners, was thus fully profitable. This method, a novel one for the CLRAE, proved to be extremely valuable and, in the opinion of the rapporteurs, should be used by other working groups on other issues.