

Press release of the first session of the CLRAE (Strasbourg, 31 May-3 June 1994)

Caption: Summary report of debates of the first session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, held in Strasbourg from 31 May to 3 June 1994.

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Press release of the 1st session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (Strasbourg, 31 May-3 June 1994)

Summary report of debates published under the responsibility of the President of the CLRAE

Official opening of the inaugural session of the Congress (Tuesday 31 May 1994 - Afternoon sitting)

I - The Congress as successor to the Conference

In his opening address at the first sitting of the new Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Mr Bengt MOLLSTEDT, outgoing President of the former Conference, said that the Congress was not an entity built in a single day but the culmination of a process begun 37 years earlier with the foundation of the original Conference. The membership then consisted entirely of local authorities and the proportion of regional authorities which joined them as from 1975 had remained fairly low. Mr MOLLSTEDT went on to describe democracy as fragile, stressing the need to base it on firm foundations in Europe's towns and regions. While anticipating a few teething troubles for the Conference, he said that it would have to take up a number of challenges. The Conference would need to back reforms and also watch over the progress of local democracy in the new member countries and in those applying for membership. When the applications for membership were examined the Conference must be consulted by the Committee of Ministers in the same way as the Parliamentary Assembly. He paid tribute to Catherine LALUMIERE for her "vital" contribution in enhancing the profile of the Council of Europe and the role of the local and regional authorities. He ended with the cry, "The Conference is dead; long live the Congress!"

In a message read out by Mr Lucien SERGENT, Mr Jacques CHABAN-DELMAS, the first President of the Standing Conference who had been unable to attend, told the Congress that it must now tackle the job of finding common ground between the various levels of local government rather than dwell on aspects which might needlessly place them at variance, since its duty was to help improve the administration of Europe's local authorities in accordance with the expectations of its citizens. Their high expectations in the municipalities, districts and regions belonging to the Congress must not be disappointed, otherwise they would become alienated from the common goal of furthering the construction of an ever more united Europe.

Speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies, the Bulgarian Ambassador Mr RAEV said that the Committee of Ministers had taken account of the former Standing Conference's recommendations for the purposes of setting up the new two-chamber Congress and would closely follow its proceedings. /..

Mr Francesco PARISI (Christian Democrat, Italy), speaking on behalf of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, made a sustained plea to strengthen the subsidiarity which was an essential component for building a people's Europe and should act as a counterweight to decisions taken at the national and international levels, securing active citizen involvement in policy-making instead of passive acceptance.

Mrs Catherine LALUMIERE, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, stressed the need give the transformation of the old Conference into a Congress tangible effect. The change of status did not suffice in itself and the bulk of the work remained undone according to Mrs LALUMIERE, who discerned various difficulties ahead. The constitution of the two Chambers was a necessity but, as in marriage, once coupled there was the problem of making a successful life together. Another difficulty might stem from the disparity of the member authorities and the dissimilarities in their respective powers. The paucity of the staff and financial resources available to the Council of Europe Territorial Authorities Division might constitute a further difficulty. The statutory resolutions represented an advance in making the Congress a fully-fledged Council of Europe organ but, she observed, it remained a consultative one and she hoped that it would acquire real powers "a morsel at a time". If the malfunctioning of democracy was to be remedied, reliance must be placed on the intermediate position occupied by the local and regional authorities in the "gulf between citizens and State authorities", she concluded.

Mr PUJOL, President of the Assembly of European Regions, voiced the hope that the regions might

contribute very positively to the building of Europe. He mentioned the ambivalence of the present time and the prevailing uncertainty of citizens who could be expected yet again to express their disorientation by staying away from the polls at the next European elections. It was crucial to rally the citizens around the European idea, and this would be impossible without reducing the remoteness of the institutions in which the local authorities had a key function.

The President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, Mr MARAGALL, placed emphasis on transparency, with the words "Subsidiarity must not be opaque"; information must circulate between all levels of government. He ended with a call to uphold the principles of protection of human rights and democracy which had inspired the Europe of the early years.

II - Alexander TCHERNOFF, First President of the Congress

Following the ceremonial sitting the oldest member, Mrs Amelia CORTESE ARDIAS, Vice-President of the Campania Regional Council (Italy), gave the names of the two candidates for the office of President of the Congress: MM. Josef HOFMANN (Germany) and Alexander TCHERNOFF (Netherlands), both nominated for this first election from among the local authority representatives.

The results of the first ballot were as follows:

187 members voted; of 181 votes validly cast, 85 were in favour of the former CDU Mayor of Mainz (Germany) and 96 in favour of the Liberal Burgomaster of De Bilt (Netherlands). As neither candidate had gained the 114 vote majority, Mr HOFMANN announced his decision to withdraw. Alexander TCHERNOFF was then elected President by acclamation at the second ballot.

The new President of the Congress is 52 years old and has been Mayor for 11 years. Before that, he worked for 14 years as legal adviser to the Netherlands Ministry of the Interior. He has long-standing experience of transfrontier co-operation. As a member of the former Conference as from 1986, he chaired its Environment Committee between 1988 and 1990, and he has been a Vice-President of the CLRAE since 1992.

On taking up his new office, Alexander TCHERNOFF pointed out that the success of the Congress did not depend solely on its President and appealed for co-operation by all delegations. Their work was not to be pursued for their own sake but for that of the citizens of their countries and the people who had found a home there, he concluded as he moved the adoption of the agenda.

The Congress adopted rules of procedure but instructed an ad hoc group to reexamine them in a year's time in the light of experience at the 1st session.

First meeting of the two Chambers (Wednesday 1 June 1994 - Morning sitting)

I - Josef HOFMANN elected Chairman of the Chamber of Local Authorities

The former Christian Democrat Mayor of Mainz (Germany), Dr Josef HOFMANN (67), was elected Chairman of the Chamber of Local Authorities in the first round by 76 votes, against 35 for the other candidate, Mr Anthony HAGGIPAVLU, Mayor of Limassol (Cyprus).

Mr HOFMAN, who is currently a town councillor of Mainz, served as International Chairman of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions from 1984 to 1992. Since 1992 he had been Vice-Chairman of the Standing Conference.

The new Chairman called on his colleagues to "help to map out the future European landscape" and to ensure that the Chamber "serves as a spearhead in the fight to promote local authorities". He also hoped that bridges would be built to countries that had not yet joined the Congress, and emphasised the necessity of establishing a Charter of Local Finance to complement the Charter of Local Self-Government.

The Chamber also elected its six vice-Chairman, in the following order:

- Mr Gabor DEMSZKY, Mayor of Budapest (Hungary);
- Ms Olga BENNETT, Councillor, Dublin Corporation (Ireland);
- Mr Halvdan SKARD, Chairman of the Norwegian Association of Local Authorities;
- Mr Alain CHENARD, Mayor of Nantes (France);
- Ms Gülay ATIG, Mayor of Sisli (Turkey);
- Mr Anthony HAGGIPAVLU, Mayor of Limassol (Cyprus).

II - Claude HAEGI elected Chairman of the Chamber of Regions

After the second round and after Mr Ioan ONISEI (Romania) had withdrawn in his favour, Mr Claude HAEGI (Switzerland) was elected Chairman of the Chamber of Regions by 45 votes, against 36 for Mr Bengt MOLLSTEDT (Sweden) and 10 for Mr Erwin VETTER (Germany).

At 54 years of age, Mr HAEGI is President of the Government of the Canton of Geneva. He is a Liberal, and has been a member of the Standing Conference since 1983.

After thanking his colleagues for the trust they had placed in him, the new Chairman expressed the hope that the Chamber of Regions would make a significant contribution to a stronger, more democratic Europe which was also closer to citizens.

The Chamber of Regions elected its six Vice-Presidents. The following were elected:

- Mr Piotr BUCZOWSKI, President of the National Assembly of Local Authorities and the Regional Assembly of Poznan (Poland),
- Mr Edmund FREIBAUER, Member of the Regional Executive of Niederösterreich (Austria),
- Mr Michael O'BRIEN, Member of Kilkenny County Council (Ireland),
- Mrs Patrizia DINI, Regional Councillor for Sicily (Italy),
- Mrs Josephine FARRINGTON, Member of Lancashire County Council
- Mr Jacques-Médéric CHEVROT, Councillor for the region of Franche-Comté (France).

III - For Mr ARDANZA, Europe is the only true common reference

In an address to the Chamber of Regions, Mr ARDANZA, President of the Basque Government, referred to the Basque people's great capacity to resist uniformisation and its long struggle for self-government. He noted that for the Basques, Europe provided an ideal opportunity to combine integration with respect for pluralism, and went on to say that this Europe would not be a true haven of democracy and freedom without the full participation of regional authorities.

The creation of an advisory congress with two chambers was a further step along this road. "We are united by a common dream, a common desire to create Europe" (...) We must struggle against a loss of faith in the European idea", said Mr ARDANZA, emphasising that it was vital for regional representatives to make the greatest possible efforts to convey a sense of Europeanness to their electorates. "We are Europe's most effective helpers and its most faithful allies", he noted, ending his address with a call for more Europe, less

"State" (criticising those governments which insisted on holding on to the remnants of national sovereignty) and more "nation" in the sense of homogeneous regional areas.

Both Chambers start business (Wednesday 1 June 1994 - afternoon sitting)

I - Reviving hopes in Europe

Addressing in turn both Chambers of the Congress, Mr Jacques BLANC, Chairman of the European Union's Committee of the Regions and President of the French region of Languedoc-Roussillon, set out the various goals of the new European Union body set up by the Treaty of Maastricht. The Committee intended to overcome the difficulty arising from its contradictory membership - it included representatives of the regions and other local authorities alike - to show the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the European Parliament that it could both achieve institutional changes and bring the citizens of Europe closer together. In Mr BLANC's words, the Committee's role was to "revive hopes in Europe". This he hoped they could do through effective co-operation with the European Parliament.

He added that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe might act as a linchpin between the European Union body which he headed and regions Europe-wide, especially those in countries which wanted to join the Union, whether or not they had applied. The Committee of the Regions would pay close attention to the Congress and all it did. Mr BLANC concluded with an appeal for leading members of both institutions to meet as soon as possible.

II - Both Chambers examined reports on current affairs, the environment and local self-government

Each Chamber examined the three reports to be submitted to the Congress for adoption on Thursday.

Central Europe: developments in local self-government, culture and education

The various Rapporteurs presented their reports to both Chambers in turn. They dealt with current affairs relating to local and regional authorities and cultural and educational issues. They emphasised the need to back reforms to local democracy in Central and Eastern European countries. Legally speaking self-government was already a fact of life in most Eastern countries, but finances remained a major stumbling-block. Mr MERASZ of Hungary spoke of the need to allow all citizens to take part in decision-taking which is where the principle of subsidiarity should be applied. On the other hand this principle should not be an excuse for taking power away from any tier of local or regional authority simply to grant it to another.

The other Rapporteur, Mrs LUND of Denmark concentrated on the need to pool experiences, especially in the field of education and culture, between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where administrative shortcomings were still a problem. Know-how, an equally vital commodity, was also largely missing.

Joint action on the environment

Mr MOLNAR of Hungary presented his report on the environment in Central and Eastern Europe: the role and responsibility of local and regional authorities. He mentioned a huge study which had revealed "cases of considerable, not to say alarming, deterioration". These countries could not afford to take the necessary measures, which made all the more crucial multilateral co-operation in the form of joint action to preserve the environment. He made a special plea for environmental education from the earliest age.

Mr POHJOLA of Finland then presented his report on co-operation between local and regional authorities in the Baltic area. The rapporteur outlined those problems which are particular to the eastern Baltic and echoed similar appeals for increased regional co-operation.

Local self-government: still beset with many problems

As Mr VAN CAUWENBERGHE of Belgium was absent, Mr DE SABBATA of Italy presented the report on monitoring the implementation of the European Charter on Local Self-Government. This Charter, dating from 1985, had been ratified by 19 member states of the Council of Europe. In practice it was still difficult to appeal against cases of failure to implement the Charter. On the Rapporteur's behalf, Mr DE SABBATA asked local and regional authority associations to pass on any such cases as the Charter remained "a very significant framework for the devolution of central powers". He hoped that one day the Congress would be able to hear complaints.

The elderly, twinning, regionalisation and regional planning

In accordance with the procedural rules, each Chamber was called upon to examine and issue an opinion on the reports to be formally adopted by the other Chamber before ratification by the Standing Committee on the Congress' behalf.

In this respect, the Chamber of Regions took note of the report by Mr Josef HOFMANN of Germany on partnerships between towns and municipalities: an efficient instrument of co-operation in a larger Europe. It did the same for the report by Mr GUALANDI (Italy) on Europe and its elderly: towards a pact between generations. Both reports would be submitted for adoption to the Chamber of Local Authorities on Friday morning.

For its part, the Chamber of Local Authorities took note of the reports by Mr HAEGI of Switzerland, on regionalisation in Europe, and by Mr RAMOS of Spain, on prospects for regional planning in the new Europe, both of which would be submitted to the Chamber of Regions for adoption on Friday morning. The Chamber of Local Authorities issued an opinion on the subject.

The Congress adopted its first reports (Thursday 2 June 1994 - Morning sitting)

I - Don't forget culture

The Congress adopted its first resolutions and recommendations. Before voting took place a number of speakers called for specific policies to deal with local and regional authorities to allow the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to modernise their structures. For the sake of democracy, investment in culture and education was sound investment.

The Secretariat was called upon, in the Resolution, to continue to work on programmes intended to develop local and regional democracy in the region "through more committed participation by the Congress in the LODE programme". A call was also made for encouraging initiatives by the towns, cities and regions of Europe to lessen tension through practical twinning and co-operation agreements. The Piloting Committee's activities in favour of the people of the new sovereign states formerly part of Yugoslavia should also be fostered. The Congress would be supporting the activities of the European Network of Centres of Local and Regional Training and was fully behind the CDCC's idea to set up a European Centre for Cultural Development and Co-operation, another means of promoting transfrontier co-operation. Of course, local and regional authorities in western Europe and their association should continue to co-operate directly with their counterparts in the eastern part of the continent.

The main point of the draft recommendation dealing with the particular difficulties arising from the attempts to set up local self-government in the East was an invitation to the governments in the region "to use as a foundation for the on-going development of democracy in their countries the principles included in the European Charter on Local Self-Government". An immediate appeal was sent to national parliaments in those countries to apply the principles of the Charter when passing new laws in this field. The Congress also asked the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to "ensure that the new member States took a

full part in the construction of a single Europe in conditions of equality and to reject out of hand any initiative designed to create a two-speed Europe in which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were relegated to the second division". The text which was adopted, albeit slightly amended, welcomed the decision to hold an informal Conference of Ministers responsible for local authorities, in Warsaw next September.

II - Acting as a watchdog for the Charter of Self-Government

The Congress faced up to difficulties in monitoring the 1985 Charter on Local Government. It agreed that local and regional authorities could refer problems directly to the Congress via the delegations.

In countries where the Charter had been incorporated into domestic legislation and where it was possible to appeal before the courts, "legal action should be taken whenever problems arose as to whether domestic laws or regulations complied (with the Charter)".

In the draft Recommendation, the Committee of Ministers was asked to call on the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Authorities to examine these questions and, where it saw fit, to clarify any point which so required.

(Thursday 2 June 1994 - Afternoon sitting)

III - Environment: promoting sustainable development

After examining the report prepared by MM. MOLNAR (Hungary) and POHJOLA (Finland) concerning "The Environment in Central and Eastern Europe" and "Environmental Co-operation between Local and Regional Authorities in the Eastern Baltic Region", the Congress adopted a Recommendation in which it called on the governments of Central and Eastern Europe to:

- adopt, if they had not yet done so, a comprehensive national strategy for restructuring industry and agriculture according to the principles of sustainable development;
- study the possibility of setting up national banks for the environment which would help to finance investment in environmental protection and make loans available for this purpose;
- integrate the "polluter payer" principle into their environmental legislation;
- set up a system of charges for the use of natural resources and pollution taxes to finance environmental investment;
- make the conclusion of agreements to reduce cross-border pollution a priority;
- work on the joint financing of common programmes, such as the action programme for the Baltic environment.

The Congress also asked the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to continue preparing model legislation on environmental protection, which could be used to harmonise measures taken in this field at European level, and to encourage member states to use this model when drafting or amending environmental legislation.

When it adopted a draft Resolution on this subject, the Council called on the local and regional authorities of Central and Eastern Europe to encourage the activities of national associations of municipalities and strengthen their position on the grounds that they played a decisive role in boosting the ability of local and regional authorities to manage the environment in a sustainable way, but also to introduce more stringent measures for economic auditing for the environment and charging for public utilities, such as waste water collection, solid waste management, district heating and waterworks.

The Congress envisaged undertaking the following in its future work:

- to examine ways of encouraging the training of personnel on environmental questions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, possibly in the context of the European Network of Training Centres for Local and Regional Authority Staff;
- to examine the possibility of supporting the employment of trained environment personnel in national associations of municipalities;
- to support regional initiatives for direct co-operation between local authorities in Central and Eastern Europe on environmental protection.

IV - Verification of credentials

The Congress verified the credentials of its members, and adopted a Resolution by which it approved virtually all credentials.

However, it challenged the credentials of Mr SKULASON, a delegate from Iceland, and of MM CARMELO AIRES, BRAGA DA CRUZ and OLIVEIRA ASSOREIRA of the Portuguese delegation. These persons would not be considered members of the Congress unless they handed in proof that their mandate fulfilled the requirements set out in Article 2 of the Charter within a three-month deadline (direct electoral mandate or direct answerability to an elected body).

The Congress called on the delegations of Poland and San Marino to hand in further information concerning the electoral mandates of MM. ZAWADKI, ZYLKA, BERNARDI AND GHIOTTI. These persons would cease to be members of the Congress in three months' time unless the information required was provided and found to be satisfactory.

It decided that MM HORINEK, DVORAK, PROSEK AND TALIR did not fulfil the requirements set out by the Czech Government in its official procedure of appointment for delegates to the Chamber of Regions. However, as they were elected representatives, they were to be considered members of the Congress but not of the Chamber concerned.

It called on the delegations of Cyprus, Estonia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Malta to submit further information regarding the requirements set out for members of the Chamber of Regions in Transitory Provision no. 1 of the Charter, which laid down admission criteria to the Chamber of Regions for countries which had not as yet set up regional institutions of this type.

Finally, the Congress called upon those states which had not appointed any women to fulfil the requirements of Article 2.2.d) of the Charter.

Presenting this Resolution, the Rapporteur, Mr CHENARD (France) examined the different reasons why the Bureau had submitted it to the Congress. In particular, he emphasised that it was necessary for Congress members to be elected representatives. With regard to the Chamber of Regions, he said that it was an absolute necessity for its members to belong to the body immediately below national level. After reviewing the cases of various members whose credentials presented problems, he issued a call for women to be more equitably represented on the delegations.

The following debate focused mainly on the case of the Portuguese delegation to the Chamber of Regions. As representatives of Portuguese local authorities expressed their satisfaction at the Bureau's proposal that representatives of the Portuguese regions be required to provide proof that their mandate fulfilled the statutory requirements within a three-month deadline, a number of participants criticised this decision. The most outspoken was Mr CHEVROT (France). While acknowledging that at present there were no real regions in Portugal, apart from Madeira and the Azores, he said that preparations for regionalisation were

under way. He went on to question the justification of representatives from Luxembourg sitting in the Chamber of Regions, as this country was too small to have proper regions. Mr MEINTZ (Luxembourg) replied that a region was not defined by its size.

V - Granting of special guest status

The Congress had received five applications for special guest status from local and regional authorities of non-member states which already enjoyed special guest status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It decided to grant this status to Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Latvia and Russia. It also decided to instruct its Standing Committee to clarify the conditions under which special guest status could be granted to a delegation of local and regional authorities from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Both Chambers approved their first reports (Friday 3 June 1994)

On Friday 3 June 1994, the Standing Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe ratified the texts approved by the Chamber of Regions, on regionalisation in Europe and regional planning, and by the Chamber of Local Authorities, on twinning and elderly persons.

I - For a European Charter on Regional Self-Government

In a Resolution on regionalisation in Europe, the Congress invited the Chamber of Regions and the Chamber of Local Authorities to prepare a "European Charter on Regional Self-Government", modelled on the European Charter on Local Self-Government, in co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly.

In a Recommendation, the Congress called for the closest possible co-operation between the European Union's Committee of the Regions and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, for which special liaison and consultation arrangements would be needed to avoid duplication and ensure that their actions dovetailed. National authorities were urgently recommended to set up legal instruments within domestic law to enable inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation to be promoted and amplified. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe was urged to ensure the proper functioning of the new representative structure of local and regional authorities in the Council of Europe, providing it with the appropriate administrative infrastructure and funds to match. The national authorities and the Committee of Ministers were also called upon to take account of the outcome of the Geneva Conference on "Regionalisation in Europe: past record and future prospects", held on 3 - 5 June 1993, in deciding new policies and planning future activities.

Presenting both texts included in his report, Mr HAEGI of Switzerland stressed the fact that much time and thought had gone into their preparation. He mentioned the principle of subsidiarity and the need to progress from the bottom up - hence the importance of local and regional authorities. Powers should be passed upwards to the next tier only if the lower tier was unable to carry out the task properly. "We are the architects of the Europe of the Regions", declared Mr HAEGI. He went on to urge the Chamber to throw its weight behind the preparation of a European Charter on Regional Self-Government. Mr KAMER of Switzerland presented the opinion of the Chamber of Local Authorities, emphasising the favourable welcome which both texts have been given there. He explained the amendments tabled and passed by his colleagues, which were intended to reintroduce the local dimension into the various proposals and which were all adopted.

II - Regional planning in a new Europe

In a Resolution, the Congress asked its Bureau to set up a joint working party which would be a think-tank on the future developments of European land management, bearing in mind the contribution which proper management could make to the continent's social, economic and cultural cohesion. This working party should also begin work in preparation for a "Pan-European Forum on Regional Planning", in co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly, the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning

(CEMAT) and the industries and organisations concerned.

In a second text, also included in Mr RAMOS' report (Spain), the Congress recommended national authorities clearly to define powers in the field of regional planning and, in the process of clarifying structures, to grant the regions the powers and means which they needed to undertake operational works in this area. In States where regional planning power was centralised, the national authorities were urged to re-think their regional planning policy by applying the principle of subsidiarity, by including the regional and local authorities in decisions and practicalities. The European Commission was urged to consolidate and broaden the work it was carrying out on regional planning with the year 2000 in mind. On this score, it should attach more importance to planning in intra- and extra-Community frontier regions. In co-operation with the Association of European Frontier regions it should develop actual projects of this kind, concentrating on eastern Europe and southern Mediterranean countries.

The Congress equally recommended the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to call on the relevant committee to look into the possibilities of creating a European Academy for Regional Planning, making use of existing institutions, which could gather the information required to prepare reference documents on land use in Europe while producing such tools as computerised cartography, an analytical atlas of regional development or a data-bank with data on regional planning/land use methods, tools and instruments.

The European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) was urged to revise the European Charter on Regional Planning, involving representatives of local and regional authorities in the work.

III - An inter-generations approach in the spirit of Sienna

As explained in the report by Mr GUALANDI of Italy on "Europe and its elderly", it has proved vital to take action to give the elderly "the place and respect which they deserve and to combat social stereotypes whereby age and the elderly are rejected, marginalised and pushed aside". The Sienna Conference, held last October, had come to the same conclusions. The Chamber of Regions overwhelmingly supported this report.

The Congress recommended that national, regional and local authorities should only envisage, produce and implement policies which took into account the ageing population, by adopting an inter-generations approach as set out in the Recommendation and findings of the Sienna Conference.

The governments of the member States should recognise that "the towns and municipalities of Europe could not bear the growing weight of policies for integrating ageing populations and that efforts should be shared in accordance with the principles of proximity and subsidiarity". The European Union should for example, devise a "Senior Erasmus" programme to develop European exchanges between the elderly. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe was urged to insist that those member States which had not yet done so should ratify without delay the Protocol to the European Social Charter whose Article 4 called for the elderly to be protected. The Congress made a number of proposals, not least of which was a recommendation for the creation in Strasbourg of an institutional body "designed to develop the inter-generations approach in Europe, promoting and co-ordinating work by governments, the regions and the towns, with participation by NGOs, associations and clubs, charity groups, research centres and universities and colleges for all ages, including senior citizens".

IV - Encouraging partnerships

In the report by Mr HOFMANN (Germany), on "Partnership in Europe", the citizens of European towns and municipalities, their mayors and elected representatives, along with national associations of municipalities, were urged to develop, in particular in the framework of twinnings between towns and cities in Western and Eastern Europe, exchanges of experience between local elected representatives, economic and technical co-operation and encounters between professional groups "so as to strengthen local democracy in the countries of central and eastern Europe and improve their economic lot".

The Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions, Mrs FARRINGTON (United Kingdom), expressed her total agreement with the draft Recommendation and launched an appeal for the operation "SOS Albanian Schools" to be continued.

The Recommendation, among other things, called for an active boost, in terms of funding and technical assistance, for programmes initiated by the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe, aimed at forging partnerships (eg ECO/OUVERTURE, DEMOSTHENES and LODE).

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly was urged to throw its weight behind this operation and to consult the Chamber of Local Authorities "when selecting towns and cities to be awarded the Prix de l'Europe". On this score, in a brief ceremony immediately following normal business, the prize had been given on behalf of the Assembly by Vice-President Louis JUNG to representatives of the Dutch town of Delfzijl (1992) and the German towns of Bocholt and Mülheim-an-der-Ruhr (1993).