

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Working Documents

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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

tabled by Mr CAILLAVET and Mr PFLIMLIN

pursuant to Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure

on measures to combat excessive urban concentration
and to promote institutional polycentrism through
regional planning at European level and the use
of modern means of transport and communication

The European Parliament,

- recalling that, in several Member States, excessive administrative and political concentration - a survival of the 19th century - has enhanced urban and industrial concentration in the capitals and large conurbations to the detriment of other regions and urban areas, and finding that these processes have resulted in imbalances that are harmful to the country as a whole
 - having regard to the fact that in some States efforts are already being made to combat this dangerous trend by decentralization, whereby top decision-making, and even tertiary activities are dispersed towards new centres, away from the capital or large conurbations in which they were concentrated,
1. Points out that in a Europe that is striving for unification, it is important to avoid increasing the deleterious effects of over-concentration in order not to reproduce on a European scale structures which have become outdated at the national level;
 2. Considers that the European Community must be protected from gigantism and that it consequently seems essential to provide it with a multipolar political and administrative structure;
 3. Remains convinced that, first, improvement of existing transport and communications networks, and then the introduction of new technologies will facilitate the preservation and the coherent development of this polycentric structure of European institutions and of Europe itself;
 4. Believes, therefore, that it would be advisable for the Commission to examine and support high-technology transport and communications projects, and notably the Europole project which was studied by the Council of Europe in October 1973;
 5. Points out that the Europole, with which cruising speeds of 360 km/h can be attained, remains in real terms a faster means of transport than the train or aircraft for distances under 600 km, and can thus assure inter-city links that aircraft cannot provide over short distances or in bad weather;
 6. Points out also the structuring effect that the Europole link will have on the frontier regions it crosses, by opening them up and promoting their complementary development;

7. Notes that the Europole line, at a cost lower than that of the Roissy airport in France, or of the proposed Channel Tunnel, can begin a process of dispersion away from the central areas, directing the developmental flow towards the peripheral regions;
8. Considers that the Europole link thus becomes symbolic of the political will to advance towards a united Europe through participation of all its components on the one hand, and through the mastery of new communications techniques on the other;
9. Recalls that the European Parliament adopted in 1978¹ and in 1972² amendments to the draft general budget of the European Communities proposing that appropriations of, respectively, 20 m EUA and 50 m EUA be entered for 'financial operations in transport infrastructure projects' (Article 378), when it referred to 'the plan for a high-speed link between Brussels and Strasbourg extending into Switzerland (a project studied by the Council of Europe under the title of 'Europole')';
10. Emphasizes that the implementation of this Europole project, which is of Community interest, would lead to the creation of a large number of jobs in just those regions which are particularly affected by the crisis, and would also play a part in promoting investment;
11. Recommends therefore that the Commission examine the present state of technology in communications which already makes it possible to hold 'teleconferences', i.e. meetings of groups of people separated by hundreds of kilometres who are able to see each other, converse and transmit documentation by the use, notably, of cable television together with large-screen video, as well as teletext and various telematics applications;
12. Is of the opinion that such a decentralizing approach to the problem of the location of the European institutions would help reduce the dangers and the social and human costs which excessive concentration of the European institutions must inevitably entail;
13. Draws attention to the conclusions of the Galway Conference³ which pointed out the 'environmental impact' and the encroachment on open spaces and their function in maintaining an 'eco-spatial' balance, resulting from present trends towards urban concentration in North-West Europe, and pleaded for a more equitable distribution of activity throughout the Community if only from considerations of economic rationale;

¹ Mrs KELLET-BOWMAN's opinion, PE 53.542/fin.

² Lord HARMAR NICHOLLS' opinion, PE 59.074/fin.

³ First Convention of the Authorities of European Peripheral Regions, Galway, October 1975: the process of concentration in North-West Europe's highly urbanized regions, and its impact on the environment, in the light of obstacles to the development of peripheral regions.

14. Notes also the conclusions of a recent study by Mr Edgar FAURE¹ showing that the 'marginal social cost of infrastructures may exceed the marginal social benefit, especially if the costs of congestion imposed on the population and the harmful effects on the environment are included', because in highly urbanized zones there arise special problems, such as continually rising prices for land and for civil engineering projects (tunnels, viaducts, underground railways, etc.), overloading of transport systems and of welfare infrastructures (hospitals, old people's homes, nurseries and crèches, etc.), together with environmental problems (noise, pollution of air and water, shortage of green zones and leisure areas with its obvious harmful consequences for the health and comfort of the population);
15. Considers, in any event, that concentration of political decision-making centres in one place, while aggravating the problems due to urban concentration, would detract from the popular impact and the independence of the European Parliament;
16. Recognizes, moreover, that a judicious geographic distribution of its institutions according to functional criteria will more effectively promote awareness of the reality of Europe and will help spread the European ideal among the peoples;
17. Stresses that the European Parliament, which has always called for the implementation of an overall policy of regional planning must, if it is to be consistent, oppose the concentration of European institutions in a single place, precisely because of the new possibilities offered by modern transport and communications technologies, and invites its appropriate committees (on Transport, on Regional Policy and Regional Planning, on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection, as well as the Political Affairs Committee) to draw up a report on this question;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission of the European Communities and, for information, to the governments and the parliaments of the Member States.

¹ 'L'Union Économique et Monétaire et les déséquilibres régionaux', Revue du Marché Commun, No. 231, Nov. 1979

