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"Towards responsible food consumption"

Recommendation 1786 (2007)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 1005th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (26 September 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers has examined with interest Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1786 (2007) "Towards responsible food consumption". It transmitted the recommendation to the Steering Committee on Social Cohesion (CDCS), to the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the Public Health Committee (Partial Agreement) (CD-P-SP).

2. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the interest of the Parliamentary Assembly in raising responsibility with regard to food consumption which can contribute not only to protecting the environment and supporting sustainable development but also to promoting healthier, prosperous and more informed communities. It particularly supports the ethical and human rights' approach of the Assembly in this regard. It welcomes the emphasis put upon the need to ensure that production and promotion of farming in member states also takes due account of the changing expectations of citizens as consumers and the possible implications on social cohesion and poverty, as well as on the need to raise awareness and foster co-operation between economic and social players on all fronts with regard to responsible food consumption.

3. The Committee of Ministers would like to emphasise that responsible food consumption means in the first place healthy food consumption. It appends the comments submitted by the CD-P-SP and the CDCS on the recommendation (cf. Appendices I and II). It also notes with interest the recommendations and suggestions of the Assembly with regard to developing responsibility in the field of food consumption and urges the relevant authorities in member states to bear them in mind where necessary or appropriate.

Appendix 1 to the reply

Opinion of the Public Health Committee (Partial Agreement) (CD-P-SP)
on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1786 (2007) "Towards responsible food consumption"

1. The Public Health Committee (Partial Agreement) (CD-P-SP) supports paragraph 6 where it is stated that responsible consumption reflects a new awareness based on sustainable development and the ethos of responsibility, in an effort to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of human beings. However, the importance of healthy food should also be stressed. In our point of view, responsible food consumption means in the first place healthy food consumption.

2. The CD-P-SP fully subscribes to paragraph 7 where it is stated that responsibility in food consumption has specific connotations and is of special importance. It is important that all agricultural production contributes to the goals of sustainability. Some scientific studies suggest that sustainable pasture-raised, and organic foods may provide health benefits to consumers. The use of hormones, antibiotics, pesticides and chemical fertilisers should be limited to when their use is necessary and alternatives are not readily available.

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3. In line with paragraph 8, where the importance of sustainable development and an ethos of responsibility are stressed to guarantee lasting economic prosperity and greater respect for the human right to the protection of health, an adequate income and a varied, high-quality environment, the CD-P-SP would like to point out that sustainability relates indeed to the continuity of economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects of human society, as well as the non-human environment. Its aim is that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems in the very long term.

4. The CD-P-SP fully supports the statement that fair trade is also a very particular form of responsible consumption in so far as it takes the nature and characteristics of production processes into account to combine sustainable consumption, respect for the environment and human dignity (paragraph 9 of the recommendation). Moreover, it wants to stress that fair trade represents a strategy for poverty alleviation and sustainable development, creating opportunities for producers who have been economically disadvantaged or marginalised by the conventional trading system. It enables production which is socially just and environmentally sound, encouraging better environmental practices and the application of responsible methods of production. However, the importance of consumer health protection should not be neglected. The intrinsic quality of the food, food safety, and its nutritious content should be given the highest priority.

5. The citizens have indeed to be alerted to their responsibilities as consumers, particularly of food. The growing public awareness of values other than immediate economic benefit could be used. Consumers are at the centre of environmental issues – everything consumers do in their daily lives impacts on the environment. As stated in paragraph 13, consumers have to be informed to help them make enlightened choices. The CD-P-SP is of the opinion that the consumer's choice must in the first place be a choice for healthy food. Consumers need clear messages. Common information, labelling standards and more effective national awareness campaigns would be favourable. In this respect the CD-P-SP wants to emphasise the importance of schools. Education on food and nutrition should be included in the curriculum and comprise the domains of responsible consumption and sustainability in line with Resolution ResAP(2005)3 on healthy eating in schools.[1]

6. The CD-P-SP would like to point out that the possible work of the European Youth Centre on responsible food consumption should emphasise the importance of healthy eating. In this respect childhood obesity as an ever growing problem should be given particular attention.[2]

Appendix 2 to the reply

Opinion of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS)
on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1786 (2007) "Towards responsible food consumption"

The European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS) welcomes Recommendation 1786 (2007) "Towards responsible food consumption" as a very positive step towards responsible consumption reflecting the new awareness based on sustainable development and sense of responsibility and taking into consideration the effects of consumer choices on society and the environment.

It recalls the fact that agriculture remains the most important economic activity which is closely related to the basic human need, i.e. food, and that the revised Strategy of social cohesion promotes a core set of social rights – notably those of the most vulnerable groups – so that decent living conditions and a high level of social protection may be accessible to everyone. The implementation of these rights goes beyond their mere legal recognition and includes social, political and economic factors.

The CDCS considers that the patterns and results of production, investment and consumption should take account of the dual objectives of social cohesion and sustainable development. It promotes social and human capital as well as the principles of equity and social justice.

[1] Cf. "Eating at school – making healthy choices" emanating from the "European Forum on Eating at School – Making Healthy Choices" held on 20 and 21 November 2003 in Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, February 2005, ISBN 92-871-5574-7.

[2] Policy statement on "Counteracting Obesity" elaborated by the Committee of Experts on Nutrition, Food and Consumer Health for the WHO European Ministerial Conference on "Counteracting Obesity", Turkey, 15-17 November 2006, www.coe.int/t/e/social_cohesion/soc-sp/public_health

Special emphasis should be put on sustainable agriculture development for economic farming and food safety and security. These issues are of paramount importance in poor agricultural countries, which do not have other resources to improve their situation and promote and upgrade their agricultural production. These countries could improve their standard of living by favouring organic agriculture, traditional agricultural products, application of new technologies in fruit and vegetable processing and adopting fair trade principles in the agricultural sector.

As suggested by the Assembly's Recommendation 1786 (2007), the CDCS, and, in particular, its European Platform for Dialogue on Ethical and Solidarity-based initiatives to combat poverty and social exclusion, could within its three-year action plan, deal with this topic and aim also at improving awareness in children, access to responsible consumption for the poorest population groups, links between solidarity and responsible consumption, and product information tools.