

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Recommendation 271 (2009)<sup>1</sup> The global challenge of climate change: local responses

1. Global warming is one of the main challenges of the 21st century. The indisputable fact that the climate is changing and the growing impact of this phenomenon call for an urgent and global response by all policy makers and for individual efforts from citizens to change their behaviour and lifestyles.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe reaffirms its steadfast commitment to sustainable development. It reiterates the positions it adopted in its recent work on climate change<sup>2</sup> and in particular its conviction that local and regional authorities are key players in combating climate change, both through mitigation of its impact and through adaptation of territories, and that they have a strategic role in matters of energy efficiency.

3. The Congress fears that the present financial and economic crisis may serve as a pretext to further weaken the resources for ambitious action in the fight against global warming. It considers that this crisis should, on the contrary, constitute an opportunity for states to undertake a programme of green recovery measures and green investments which will create new jobs.

4. Stabilising the climate is already proving to be harder than expected. Integrated greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation initiatives undertaken over the next ten years will therefore be of vital importance. Any delay in combating climate change will necessitate ever-more drastic measures later to reverse the trends.

5. The Congress is convinced that the challenge of climate change can be met and that this necessarily entails coordinated climate and energy policies as well as coherent policies between the different tiers of governance. It reaffirms the appropriateness of action at local and regional levels of governance, both to implement innovative solutions and to raise public awareness in order to change behaviour.

6. Furthermore, climate change impacts on the basic elements of human life and thus directly affects a range of fundamental rights (for example the right to life, suitable living conditions, safety, food, housing, health and water). Although the debate initially focused on the physical and natural impacts of climate change, it is now time to take stock of the consequences on human societies.

7. The Congress is convinced that sustainable development as an aim has become a democratic issue and that the

interdependence of human rights and sustainable development is genuine. Thus, the integration of the human rights dimension into an agreement which aims to combat climate change would provide more sustainable responses to this global challenge.

8. It considers that climate policies illustrate perfectly the need to “think globally, act locally” and calls on the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to fully involve local and regional authorities in climate diplomacy.

9. The Congress welcomes the efforts of the European Union and some European states to protect the climate, and in particular the European Union initiatives recognising the role of local and regional authorities and their involvement, such as the “Covenant of Mayors” which brings together local authorities committed to achieving a significant percentage reduction in emissions and to energy efficiency in their local area.

10. The 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 15), meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009, should result in a new ambitious international treaty on climate change, which would take over after 2012 from the Kyoto Protocol. It is to be hoped that the planet’s biggest polluters will henceforth set an example.

11. In the light of this, the Congress requests the Committee of Ministers to:

*a.* participate at the highest level, as observer to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in the United Nations climate change conference (COP 15) in Copenhagen in December 2009 and bring an ambitious message concerning the impact of climate change on human rights and on the necessary involvement of local and regional authorities in the diplomatic process concerning the climate, as well as in the national implementation of the new international agreement;

*b.* take on board the effects of climate change in the inter-governmental activities of the Council of Europe, particularly in matters of migration, social cohesion, citizens’ rights, health and the environment, and invite the steering committees to consider means of addressing climate change in their respective activity programmes.

12. The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to request the member and observer states to:

*a.* acknowledge that local and regional authorities must be at the heart of all efforts to combat climate change both for mitigating its effects and for adapting their territories;

*b.* permit local and regional authorities to participate directly in the process of negotiating a new climate agreement, in particular by including them in their respective national delegations and by involving them in the discussions during

the conference on climate change (COP 15), as key partners in the actions to be undertaken.

13. The Congress also requests the Committee of Ministers to invite the European Union to give broader recognition to the mitigation and adaptation measures implemented by local and regional authorities in the fight against climate change by facilitating their access to funding and by fostering networking and exchanges of experience.

14. The Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to support the recognition of the role of local and regional authorities in the diplomatic processes relating to the climate and to pursue its efforts to ensure that national parliaments are mobilised to this end. It supports the Assembly's proposal that an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights should be drafted

which recognises the right to a healthy environment, and offers to make an active contribution to the work involved.

15. The Congress invites the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe to integrate the environmental dimension into his mission to promote respect of human rights.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 14 October 2009, 2nd sitting (see Document CG(17)8, explanatory memorandum presented by J. J. Nygaard, Denmark (L, NR), rapporteur).

2. Recommendation 215 (2007) on climate change: approaches at local and regional level;

Recommendation 231 (2008) on climate change: building adaptive capacity of local and regional authorities;

Recommendation 243 (2008) on public local and regional action: for a new energy culture.