

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 215 (2007)¹ Climate change: approaches at local and regional level

1. Global warming is one of the most serious challenges to sustainable development, to the health and well-being of humanity and to the global economy and it is already causing destruction and disruption on the European continent through extreme weather such as heatwaves, floods, storms and drought. Tackling climate change requires joint and responsible action from all levels of governance, the efforts of every citizen, including changes in lifestyle.

2. Climate change calls for an urgent, responsible, global response based on solidarity among the international community. The recent assessment of the present and future impacts of climate change by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) points out the potential danger that climate change may trigger conflicts over water, the spread of diseases and the migration of millions of people worldwide, numbers which are likely to rise considerably, possibly to 50 million by 2010 according to some estimates.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe believes that the fight against climate change must be made a priority and should receive the attention of all politicians at all political levels. It is concerned at the accelerating pace and the increasing extent of damage linked to climate as well as the negative economic and monetary implications presented in the Stern Review. Thus it reaffirms the need for urgent and resolute action and considers that this will considerably reduce the costs for our society in the long run with more efficient results in all areas.

4. The Congress recognises that Europe is in the forefront of facing up to climate change and its implications. It welcomes the leadership and commitments on climate change taken by the European Union and, in particular, the decision taken by the heads of state and government of the European Union on 9 March 2007 to commit to a post-Kyoto target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% before 2020.

5. The Congress is aware that the targets of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are not sufficient. It is now more urgent than ever that the international community negotiates firmly to find a comprehensive new worldwide agreement to stop global warming which must enter into force directly after the Kyoto commitment period in 2012.

6. The scientific evidence indicates that mitigation policies alone are not sufficient to stem the damage already done to the climate and that adaptation policies are required to ensure that citizens are protected from the threats posed by

the changing climate and to contribute to the sustainable development of communities, including from an economic point of view.

7. The Congress reiterates its ongoing commitment to sustainable development and welcomes the initiatives that many local and regional authorities have taken to develop programmes aimed at mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. It also notes with satisfaction that in many European countries even small territorial units are undertaking such programmes.

8. The Congress considers that there should be greater universal recognition of the comprehensive role local and regional authorities play in combating climate change. As such they should be granted sufficient powers and resources to carry out this role effectively in conformity with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122).

9. The Congress stresses that the fight against climate change should be central to the actions of all decision makers and that national governments should develop comprehensive national action plans to combat and to adapt to climate change. They should initiate multilevel agreements which involve regional and local governments both in the development and in the implementation of climate change policies. This is an opportunity for national governments to take advantage of the commitment, capacity and experience of local and regional authorities.

10. Furthermore, the Congress welcomes the principle of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of “common but differentiated responsibilities” and encourages the distribution of the burden between developed and developing countries to take into account each one’s contribution to the problems and their capacity to contribute to solutions.

11. In the light of the above, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

a. consider making climate change issues a central feature of all Council of Europe work, including migration, social cohesion, citizens’ rights, health and environmental issues, by inviting its steering committees to investigate ways in which they can address climate change issues in their work programmes;

b. ask the Council of Europe Development Bank to act as an example by making sure their funds and investments are as “green” as possible and by ensuring that the system for allocating funds offers incentives to projects which include climate change issues and progressive moves towards a low-carbon and low-risk economy.

12. Furthermore, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to ask member and observer states to:

a. invite those states that have not yet done so to sign and/or ratify the Kyoto Protocol;

b. implement the objectives of the Kyoto Protocol and henceforth take additional measures to go beyond its targets,

and to set ambitious objectives and targets for the post-Kyoto period after 2012, involving local and regional authorities and their networks in the process;

c. give climate change and its consequences the highest priority on the political agenda, and mainstream comprehensive and effective climate policy into all relevant areas, ensuring the participation of local and regional authorities in this process;

d. implement national climate action plans in partnership with all stakeholders, especially local and regional authorities and, in particular:

i. develop adequate adaptation measures and include them in long-term development strategies, in particular in those areas most at risk;

ii. offer financial and fiscal incentives to develop climate-friendly actions, in particular in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy;

iii. launch information and awareness-raising campaigns on the current state of the environment and the scale of global warming and encourage responsible policies and behaviour by all individuals, businesses and industries;

iv. develop training facilities and advice programmes directed at local and regional authorities to respond to the growing need for the new skills and competencies needed to put in place appropriate climate-friendly policies and new transversal methods of work;

e. ensure that territorial authorities have the powers and finances needed to provide a solid institutional basis for climate protection strategies and to facilitate co-ordinated action;

f. increase research and innovation, and foster the exchange of experience to further develop methodologies for the design, implementation and monitoring of local climate change action programmes;

g. pay greater attention to the transfrontier nature of climate change and the challenges this creates at all levels of governance;

h. review the role of local and regional authorities in the international bodies set up to manage and monitor climate change and invite, in particular, the United Nations, within the framework of the UNFCCC, to formalise and enhance the representation and visibility of territorial authorities in its work where they are currently classified as non-governmental organisations.

13. The Congress also recommends the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to invite the European Union to:

a. mainstream climate change policies, ensure that European strategies respond to the threat of climate change and also that regulatory impact assessments are carried out;

b. assist local and regional authorities in the fight against climate change through a clear and supportive regulatory and financial framework, including the funds needed for adaptation measures and research;

c. explore opportunities for multilevel climate change policy agreements and contracts at different levels and offer incentives to local and regional authorities to make binding commitments to such agreements.

14. The Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to pursue its efforts to draw national parliaments' attention to the need to implement appropriate legislation consistent with the principles set out above and with the challenges posed by climate change.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 31 May 2007, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(14)5REC, draft recommendation presented by A. Mediratta (United Kingdom, L, EPP/CD), rapporteur).