

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 234 (2008)¹ City Diplomacy

1. City Diplomacy is a tool for local governments and their associations to promote social cohesion, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction with the aim of creating a stable environment in which citizens can live together in peace, democracy and prosperity. It can be seen as a natural development of the role of cities as members of the international community, sharing values of democracy, rule of law and human rights. The growth of City Diplomacy initiatives illustrates the unique contribution that cities can make in actions of international solidarity, in fostering and developing peace and the growth of civil society. In some respects this development has been considerably strengthened by the conflicts that have broken out across Europe and the challenges of the rapid democratisation of the states of central and eastern Europe and the Balkans.

2. The growing awareness of City Diplomacy is reflected in the organisation of the First World Conference on City Diplomacy, “the role of local governments in conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict resolution”, to take place in The Hague, Netherlands, from 11 to 13 June 2008.

3. The Local Democracy Agencies, set up on the initiative of the Council of Europe Congress, have played a pioneering role in this development, starting in the Balkans and now extending across the European area.

4. However, it remains difficult to accurately determine the principle factors for success and failure of City Diplomacy activities. Approaches must be tailor-made and flexible in a rapidly changing environment. City Diplomacy actors must be well aware of the specific context of a conflict region. They should realise that City Diplomacy is a complex activity and is always complementary to other efforts.

5. Therefore the Congress,

a. bearing in mind that, in the Statute of the Council of Europe, the member states underline that “the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation is vital for the preservation of human society and civilisation”;

b. bearing in mind that the member states of the Council of Europe identified peace as the objective of their co-operation when they reaffirmed, in the European Convention on Human Rights, their firm belief in the “fundamental freedoms which are the foundation of justice and peace in the world”;

c. bearing in mind Article 10 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which enshrines local authorities’ rights to co-operate with their counterparts in other states;

d. convinced of the need to offer an international structure to facilitate city diplomacy;

e. convinced of the need to offer a European structure to facilitate dialogue between communities of very different cultural, ethnic, social and religious traditions, and of the positive role that City Diplomacy can play in this respect;

f. convinced that it has a role in co-ordinating and facilitating the demand and supply of City Diplomacy initiatives, together with other relevant actors;

g. convinced that it has a role to play in evaluating experiences to assess what makes some initiatives work better than others;

h. believing that the key assets of cities in this respect are their experiences in the field of participatory community-building models and the development of a vibrant local democracy, and their expertise in providing essential services to all citizens without any discrimination in such areas as public health, education and environment policy, and that they can therefore be effective players in restoring vital services in post-conflict areas;

6. *Recommends that the Committee of Ministers:*

a. prepare a recommendation to member states on City Diplomacy, underlining that it is a legitimate expression of European citizenship, sharing the values of democracy, rule of law and human rights, and inviting member states to support City Diplomacy initiatives, both bilateral and multilateral, as a promising tool for fostering long-term peace, in the general framework of their foreign policies, and to support civil society initiatives in this respect;

b. recognise City Diplomacy’s role in developing solidarity and peace beyond Europe’s frontiers and particularly in the countries neighbouring Council of Europe member states;

c. note the pioneering role that the Local Democracy Agencies, established at the initiative of the Congress, play in this process and provide them with support, including budgetary support;

d. remind member states of their commitment – as laid down in Article 10 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government – to guarantee the freedom of co-operation of local authorities across national boundaries;

e. include the support and promotion of City Diplomacy in the Council of Europe’s priority activities;

f. invite the North-South Centre to develop its activities to encourage City Diplomacy initiatives;

g. acknowledge, in the White Paper that it is preparing on intercultural dialogue, the potential of City Diplomacy for strengthening this dialogue.

1. Debated and approved by the Standing Committee of the Chamber of Local Authorities on 13 March 2008 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 14 March 2008 (see Document CPL(14)12REC, draft recommendation presented by O. Van Veldhuizen, Netherlands (L, ILDG), rapporteur).