

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 248 (2008)¹

Climate change: building the adaptive capacity of local and regional authorities

1. The climate change observed to date is relatively limited compared to that expected and predicted by the scientific community for the 21st century. In its fourth summary report on climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2007, warns about consequences which risk being sudden and irreversible.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is seriously concerned about the now inevitable changes in the climate and, given the intensity and increasing frequency of extreme weather events, reaffirms the need to consider adaptation measures as a vital supplement to the greenhouse gas mitigation and reduction measures already being taken.

3. The aim is to avoid the most serious consequences of climate change, in which connection the Congress notes that the effects of climate change particularly reveal our vulnerability at local and regional level. There is therefore a need to act without delay, with resolute and co-ordinated efforts being made by all decision makers at all levels.

4. Political will is vital and the Congress believes that local and regional authorities have a role to play in terms of action, awareness-raising and prevention of the risks related to climate change. In its view, it falls to local and regional elected representatives to prepare for the predicted disruption and take appropriate decisions.

5. Local and regional climate policies are increasing in importance with proactive measures (local climate plans, carbon accounting, etc.) which are to be welcomed. The emergence of measures involving adaptation is more recent, however. It should be noted that regions directly confronted with the effects of climate change are more likely to include the issue of adaptation in their local political agendas.

6. The Congress believes that adaptation must be seen as a means of managing local and regional vulnerability stemming from climate change. Often, climate change does not create really new trends but compounds existing problems. In this respect, local and regional authorities have vast experience in all their sectors of activity of adapting to climate variations in a stable climate. It is necessary to revive know-how that often already exists in order to implement appropriate adaptation policies and measures.

7. Taking proper account of the effects of climate change requires the renewal of practices in areas such as spatial

development, town planning, transport and mobility, energy production and consumption, resource management, waste processing, agriculture and forestry. While action by the various authorities concerning climate issues depends on the distribution of responsibilities, the scale of the challenge requires local decision makers to be innovative, to shift the boundaries of responsibilities and barriers between sectors, to develop outside partnerships and to introduce a new risk culture within their own authorities.

8. In this respect, and while there are often no national or international rules or benchmarks, it is vital to foster the sharing of know-how and exchanges of experience, which ensure a free flow of practices, ideas and trial measures. The Congress strongly believes that local and regional know-how is a key basis for developing effective national adaptation policies.

9. The Congress also regards diplomatic and international action by local and regional authorities and their role in disseminating and sharing know-how and best practices as vital. It urges local and regional authorities to co-operate with their counterparts in the least developed countries, which are also more vulnerable to climate change, and to include adaptation to climate change in their exchange programmes.

10. *In the light of the above, the Congress calls upon local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member and observer states to:*

a. define climate strategies which, alongside mitigation policies, focus on vulnerability assessment and adaptation and guarantee the protection of people, resources and property faced with the consequences of climate change;

b. implement an integrated approach for improved internal and external sustainability, in particular for the provision of services and the protection of infrastructure, buildings and resources;

c. implement disaster-management plans and arrangements for solidarity between different regions with a new approach to risks and crisis management which takes account of the social and spatial inequalities stemming from the particular threats of climate change;

d. adjust sectoral policies already implemented, for example spatial development and town planning policies, and supplement them with adaptation policies;

e. boost their role as catalysts and co-ordinators and foster a partnership-based approach so as to bring about a dynamic process at local and regional level and ensure the individual commitment of citizens;

f. establish, as close as possible to the relevant executive organs, a cross-sectoral body whose purpose is to act upstream of policies, implement an “adaptation” action plan and create a new culture of action;

g. strengthen their “environment watch” capacity with the aid of various tools, in particular local or geographical data systems so as to bring about improvements in the assessment of vulnerabilities and the pooling of information;

h. conduct training, awareness-raising and public education measures to encourage radical changes in attitudes and behaviour;

i. establish co-operation and partnerships with local and regional authorities in developing countries so as to help them to implement policies for adapting to the consequences of climate change.

11. *The Congress asks its Committee on Sustainable Development to:*

a. develop and expand activities on climate risks and, on the basis of previous work on natural disasters, draw up an adaptation guide for a new culture to tackle risk, in partnership with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council

of Europe and the Eur-Opa Major Hazards Partial Agreement;

b. continue co-operating with its counterpart body in the Committee of the Regions and with associations and networks of local and regional authorities so as to foster exchanges of experience on adaptation and ensure that this policy approach is clearly integrated into national and international policies on climate change.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 13 March 2008 (see Document CG(14)33RES, draft recommendation presented by I. Franzen (Germany, R, SOC) and S. Orlova (Russian Federation, R, EPP/CD), rapporteurs).