

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Resolution 323 (2011)<sup>1</sup> Meeting the challenge of interfaith and intercultural tensions at local level

1. In many parts of Europe today urban populations have often become increasingly heterogeneous in ethnic, cultural and religious terms. While this may offer cities opportunities in terms of cultural innovativeness and international competitiveness, heterogeneity also challenges the ability of local authorities to establish or maintain peaceful and productive relations among different segments of the population.

2. In order to ensure social cohesion, local authorities throughout Europe have therefore implemented innovative policies to ensure harmonious intergroup relations and to try to bridge real or perceived “gaps” between the different ethnic and religious groups in their communities.

3. The European Network of Cities for Local Integration Policies (CLIP), co-founded by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the City of Stuttgart and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions, has compiled some policies which the Congress fully endorses and which have inspired the policies outlined below.

4. The Congress has long been concerned by the threat to social cohesion posed by intercultural and interfaith tensions and has made several recommendations in the past, notably adopting 12 basic principles governing the conduct of local intercultural and interfaith dialogue. It remains convinced that it is at local level that the needs and diversity of communities can best be gauged and where sustainable intergroup relationships can be formed.

5. In view of the above, the Congress recommends that local authorities:

*a.* recognise, support and empower local migrant organisations by:

*i.* including them in political consultations and in consultative bodies, as recommended by Congress Recommendation 153 (2004) and Resolution 181 (2004) on a pact for the integration and participation of people of immigrant origin in Europe’s towns, cities and regions;

*ii.* inviting them to official municipal events and ensuring regular informal as well as institutionalised contacts with the mayor or main political authority;

*iii.* providing direct or indirect help (funding, meeting rooms, etc.);

*iv.* training leaders of migrant organisations in organisation management and political participation;

*v.* connecting migrant organisations with local organisations of the majority population;

*b.* co-operate with migrant organisations to develop a shared vision for intergroup relations, integration and the future of the city and to develop an inclusive identity strategy to create a sense of belonging among its residents of different origins. This identity should be sufficiently open and inclusive to express existing subgroup differences in an adequate way;

*c.* contribute to reducing ethnic stereotypes by promoting regular interethnic contacts which build upon shared interests (for example, women’s organisations, neighbourhood initiatives, sport) and are therefore less artificial and more sustainable;

*d.* increase intercultural competence among municipal staff through intercultural and diversity training and employ more people with a migration or ethnic minority background in their administration;

*e.* install an anti-discrimination office, including an online reporting system and a discrimination hotline;

*f.* where possible, create a public relations position within their integration/diversity departments and develop a professional media strategy for intergroup relations;

*g.* develop mediation projects for conflicts in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and forms of space management for parks, markets and other public spaces;

*h.* inform the public about the migrants’ religions, notably, with regard to relations with Muslim communities and support activities such as open events at mosques, and emphasise the diversity among Muslims to avoid their portrayal and perception as a homogenous group;

*i.* ensure the mayor and integration officers keep regular formal and informal contact with religious organisations, including regular meetings and through common projects;

*j.* while uncompromisingly safeguarding the fundamental values of the host community (such as gender equality) take into consideration and adapt to the religious needs of migrant groups by:

*i.* respecting the specific burial rites of some migrant religions and ensuring local legislation does not prove an obstacle to them;

*ii.* guaranteeing that food served in public institutions includes options meeting the religious requirements of migrant religions;

*iii.* ensuring that religious festivals and holidays of migrant religions play a role in local public life;

*k.* comply with the desire of Muslim communities for representative religious buildings by:

*i.* counselling Muslim communities that plan to build a mosque (planning and building laws, etc.);

*ii.* organising information campaigns and mediation in neighbourhoods where mosques are to be built;

iii. supporting the rights of minorities to have a place of worship;

*l.* initiate or support inter-religious dialogue dealing with faith and secular topics in religiously diverse populations through round tables of religious leaders and/or community members and exchange of preachers, imams and rabbis;

*m.* make every effort to prevent anti-immigrant radicalisation tendencies in the majority population;

*n.* use measures of social control against racist or anti-immigrant groups including public pressure, the judiciary and the police and implement de-radicalisation programmes for individuals;

*o.* install measures to prevent politico-religious radicalisation among young Muslims by:

i. making every effort to establish trust relationships with all Muslim communities;

ii. encouraging and recognising the efforts of Muslim communities to prevent or discourage radicalisation tendencies among them;

iii. addressing the legitimate grievances of young Muslims such as frustrations about discrimination and lack of opportunity thereby strengthening the resilience of Muslim communities against *jihadi* ideology and installing individual intervention programmes for deradicalising youth, such as mentoring, coaching, social assistance and ideological challenge.

6. The Congress reaffirms its commitment to participation in the CLIP Network and the dissemination of its examples of good practice and conclusions and to this end instructs its Committee on Social Cohesion<sup>2</sup> to continue to carry out this work.

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1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 23 March 2011 and adopted by the Congress on 24 March 2011, 3rd Sitting (see Document [CPL\(20\)2](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: E. Maurer, Switzerland (L, SOC).

2. Following the Congress reform, the activities carried out by this committee were taken over by the Current Affairs Committee set up on 1 December 2010.