

# The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



**18<sup>th</sup> SESSION**  
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## After Copenhagen, cities and regions take up the challenge

Bureau of the Congress  
Rapporteur: Dubravka SUICA, Croatia (L, EPP/CD<sup>1</sup>)

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### *Summary*

The Copenhagen Agreement disappointed many observers, even though it recognised the reality of global warming and the need to limit it. The difficulty that States experienced in negotiating an agreement makes the work of local and regional authorities even more essential.

Cities and regions are at the heart of the fight against global warming and are taking a lead in adaptation strategies. They are mobilised and determined to pursue their climate action.

The Congress believes that States must recognise the fundamental role of local authorities and regions and fully integrate them into the diplomatic climate process, as essential partners in the initiatives that need to be taken. In this context, it is important that they reinforce their capacity to take action closest to citizens.

A new agreement is called for, that takes account of the ecological, economic, ethical, social justice and human rights dimensions, to achieve more sustainable climate change solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> L: Chamber of Local Authorities/R: Chamber of Regions  
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress  
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress  
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress  
NR: Member not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



## A. DRAFT RESOLUTION<sup>2</sup>

1. The 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Copenhagen (Denmark) from 7 to 18 December 2009, brought together representatives of 193 governments and a very large number of local and regional authorities and non-governmental organisations from all over the world, to prepare follow-up action to the Kyoto Protocol.
2. The conference was emblematic in terms of the mobilisation to which it gave rise and the expectations which it generated among the public, thus marking a historic turning point in the world's response to the challenge of global warming.
3. Unfortunately, the political agreement concluded is inadequate in view of all that is now at stake, not just ecologically and economically, but also in terms of equity and human rights.
4. While deeply regretting this lack of results, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe hopes that this agreement nevertheless represents a first step towards the development of the substance of a new binding treaty which it is imperative to adopt at the next Conference of the Parties, to be held in Mexico from 29 November to 10 December 2010.
5. Numerous representatives of the world's local and regional authorities were present in Copenhagen, some of them as members of their national delegations, as advocated in Congress Recommendation 271 (2009) and Resolution 288 (2009).
6. It notes with satisfaction their determination - perhaps even greater since Copenhagen - to take action on the climate and their mobilisation through the Local Government Climate Roadmap as well as through their respective networks and associations.
7. The Congress was also represented in Copenhagen and made a strong commitment, particularly alongside the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, to obtaining full recognition of the role of local and regional authorities in a new global agreement.
8. It welcomes the official recognition by certain countries and by the European Union of the vital role that they are having to play both in mitigating the effects of climate change and in adapting their territories.
9. The Congress takes the view that action by local and sub-national governments to rise to the energy and climatic challenges is all the more vital because States did not take any practical decisions. It would like cities and regions to continue to show that they are the drivers of major changes in their own areas.
10. It therefore calls for this commitment to be pursued and for effective participation throughout the negotiation process in 2010 and beyond. For its part, it will work in the same direction and support the activities of international associations and networks of local and regional authorities in the diplomatic process relating to the climate.

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<sup>2</sup> Preliminary draft resolution and preliminary draft recommendation approved by the Bureau of the Congress on 5 February 2010.

Members of the Bureau:

Y. Mildon, President of the Congress, *I. Micallef (President ad interim of the Congress and President of the Chamber of Local Authorities)*, *L. Sfirloaga (President of the Chamber of Regions)*, D. Suica, G. Krug, A. Knape, S. Rihntiemi, H. Zach, *I. Borbely, J.-C. Frécon, S. Orlova, F. Pellegrini, K. Andersen, E. Yeritsyan, I. Michas, O. Van Veldhuizen, N. Romanova.*

N.B.: The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Bureau: D. Rios, L. Taesch

11. *In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member and observer States:*

a. to commit themselves in the sphere of climate change and set themselves ambitious targets, without waiting for governments' commitment;

b. at the same time, to start a dialogue with their respective governments in order to enhance each nation's proposals and encourage them to enter into clear and ambitious commitments at European and global level;

c. to ask their respective national governments to:

i. recognise fully their essential role in the combating of climate change;

ii. include representatives of local and regional authorities in the delegations to be formed for the next Conference of the Parties (Mexico, December 2010), and throughout the process of negotiation of a new agreement.

12. *The Congress instructs its Committee on Sustainable Development to continue to monitor climate and energy issues.*

## **B. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION<sup>3</sup>**

1. The 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Copenhagen (Denmark) from 7 to 18 December 2009, closed with a political agreement which brings only partial answers to the challenges of global warming. The possible conclusion of an international treaty was therefore deferred to the next Conference of the Parties, which will take place in Mexico from 29 November to 10 December 2010.

2. Climate change affects the fate of humanity and throws up some major challenges for the 21st century. It is no longer a purely ecological question, for it has economic and geopolitical implications as well as implications on equity, human rights and international solidarity. The Copenhagen conference gave rise to an unprecedented mobilisation by non-governmental organisations, citizens and local and regional authorities from all over the world.

3. While the heads of State did not manage to agree on a binding global plan under which each country makes commitments commensurate with its responsibilities, this mobilisation bears witness to the place that global warming now holds in public opinion and on the international political agenda.

4. The indisputable fact of global warming and the vital need to restrict it were formally acknowledged in the Copenhagen Accord. It is therefore States' responsibility to get the whole world to commit in the near future to a binding agreement proportionate to the present energy and climate challenges.

5. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is convinced that a binding global agreement bringing together the needs of developed and developing countries is no longer an option, but a moral and political imperative.

6. As a crucial year of negotiations begins, there must be no widening of the gap between worldwide public opinion and governments. The Congress calls on States to make an individual commitment and collectively to commit the whole international community.

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2

7. Local and regional authorities, for their part, are well aware of the challenges that lie ahead and have responsibilities in many fields enabling them to combat climate change effectively and to adapt in their territories in line with the new climatic conditions. They remain active and are politically and very practically committed in the field. They are determined to provide ambitious and sustainable solutions and, to this end, make full use of the various levers available to them.

8. The Congress has resolutely committed itself to obtaining recognition of the fundamental role that local and regional authorities play in combating climate change, for it considers their action to be vital in order to meet today's unprecedented energy and climate challenges. Thus, it played an active part in the Copenhagen conference and supported the efforts of cities, regions and their associations to obtain recognition of this role and to give an account of their initiatives.

9. It considers that States' lack of commitment makes the action of local and sub-national governments worldwide even more essential. The unprecedented extent of the challenges certainly requires an urgent and comprehensive response from every level of governance.

10. It notes that, while local and regional representatives may regret the shortcomings of the diplomatic process and the lack of tangible results at international level, they did not wait for an agreement between States before starting innovative activities in their cities and regions to encourage citizens to change their ways.

11. The Congress points out that local and regional authorities constitute the level of governance closest to citizens and bear responsibility for safeguarding their citizens' quality of life. They will continue to work in partnership at both national and international levels and to work with their associations to make the greatest possible contribution to national and international objectives.

12. The Congress applauds the transcending by local and regional authorities of differences in political, geographical and demographic terms in order to make a joint commitment and ensure that 2010 will be the year of a binding global agreement on combating climate change. It calls for national discussions to enhance their governments' proposals.

13. It also considers that the European Union has to date played a prominent role in the fight against climate change and that, without awaiting the individual positioning of non-European states, it should go beyond its initial commitments and contribute the resources needed for adaptation on the continent of Europe and in developing countries.

14. *Consequently the Congress reiterates its request for the Committee of Ministers to support the Congress in its efforts to persuade member and observer States to involve local and regional authorities fully in the diplomatic process relating to the climate.*

15. *The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to ask member and observer States:*

*a. to make commitments commensurate with the challenges arising and ensure that political negotiations throughout the year 2010 do not become bogged down and that the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Mexico in December 2010, brings the conclusion of a new binding agreement on the climate;*

*b. to recognise that local and regional authorities should play a central part in all the efforts to be made, combat global warming and adapt their territories in line with its effects;*

*c. to allow local and regional authorities direct access to the diplomatic process relating to the climate, and therefore to include them in the national delegations which throughout the year 2010 will be taking part in negotiations on a climate change agreement, and to involve them in the pre-negotiation phase as key partners in the activities to be carried out;*

d. to support local and regional authorities in the implementation of activities to combat climate change and to amend national legislation in order to strengthen their capacity for action at the level closest to citizens.

16. *The Congress also asks the Committee of Ministers to invite the European Union:*

a. to make commitments beyond its current ones in order to promote a binding world agreement on climate commensurate with the energy and climate challenges arising;

b. to recognise to an even greater extent local and regional authorities' activities to combat climate change by facilitating their access to funding and by promoting networking and the pooling of experience.

17. *The Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to support its efforts to persuade national parliaments to take fully into consideration the role of local and regional authorities and to promote appropriate legislation increasing their capacity to mitigate, and adapt to, climate change, in accordance with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy.*

## C. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

### I. Introduction

1. The work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on climate change reflects its continuing commitment to deal with the major challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as biodiversity and climate.

2. 2010 is a critical year for climate change because the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, which met in Copenhagen (Denmark) in December 2009<sup>4</sup>, ended with a political agreement which only offers partial responses to the issue of global warming and defers the conclusion of an international treaty to the next conference of parties, to be held in Mexico from 29 November to 10 December 2010.

3. 2010 is also the International Year of Biodiversity and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity will take place in Nagoya (Japan) from 18 to 29 October. The governments will have to take important decisions in highly linked and mutually-influential areas which represent major challenges.

4. The Congress, which has militated for genuine recognition of local and regional authorities' key role in combating climate change, was an active participant in the Copenhagen Conference<sup>5</sup> and gave its support to the mobilisation of towns, cities and regions.

5. With the opening of a crucial year of negotiations on a binding agreement for all countries, Europe's cities and regions remain committed to finding innovative and lasting solutions to this major challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

6. With this new recommendation, the Congress reaffirms its conviction that local and regional authorities can make an important contribution to combating climate change. It hopes that the impetus given by the Copenhagen Conference will continue. It will fully support the efforts of these authorities and their associations with a view to the forthcoming international climate negotiations.

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<sup>4</sup> The so-called 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference.

<sup>5</sup> The Congress delegation to the conference was led by its Vice-President, Dubravka Suica, and also included another Vice-President, Günther Krug, and the Chair of the Sustainable Development Committee, Gaye Doganoglu.

## **II. The Copenhagen Conference: unprecedented mobilisation**

7. The aim of the Copenhagen Conference, which was to achieve an international framework for combating climate change that would come into force in 2013, after the Kyoto Protocol expired, aroused new hopes and great expectations. The final outcome caused enormous disappointment but it still represented a historic turning point in the global response to the climate challenge.

8. Tens of thousands of representatives of local and regional authorities and non-governmental organisations made the journey to join the heads of state and government representatives of 193 nations, thereby demonstrating their common commitment to finding solutions.

9. The Conference also highlighted the shortcomings of global democracy and the difficulty of conducting negotiations attended by 193 nations. There was also support for a world environment organisation to ensure that governments honour their commitments and that climate targets are consistent with the protection of biological diversity.

10. Although the heads of state and government did not manage to agree on a binding global plan to which every country would be fully committed, the unparalleled mobilisation of opinion in Copenhagen is clear evidence of the importance of climate change for the general public and on the international political agenda. From this point of view, Copenhagen will have served a purpose. We must now make sure that the gap between world public opinion and governments does not widen.

## **III. The Copenhagen Accord<sup>6</sup>: towards a more binding agreement**

11. The final document of the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference in Copenhagen is not legally binding. Countries are invited to sign this new accord but they are not required to produce a treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol and the duration of such a treaty is not specified.

12. However, it does acknowledge, for the first time, the scientific recommendations that the increase in global temperature should be below 2 degrees Celsius and that emissions have to be reduced, though there is no agreement on long-term targets. It also calls for an assessment of the accord's implementation by 2015, and this would include "consideration of strengthening the long-term goal".

13. The accord also speaks of an urgent need for "enhanced action and international cooperation on adaptation" in developing countries, with the support of their developed counterparts.

14. According to the agreement, rich countries are committed to implementing "the quantified economy-wide emissions targets for 2020", and parties to the Kyoto Protocol must further strengthen their current targets, but no reference date is specified for these targets – 1990 or 2005? For their part, developing countries must also introduce mitigating measures. All countries were required to announce their planned targets and measures by 31 January 2010.

15. Turning to financing, the new accord explicitly provides for the mobilisation of 100 billion dollars a year by 2020 to help developing countries to reduce their gas emissions and adapt to the new climatic conditions. Over the period 2010-2012, the developed countries are to contribute 30 billion dollars for this purpose. A "significant portion" of such funding should flow through the "Copenhagen Green Climate Fund" established by the accord to support projects, with a particular focus on reducing deforestation, which can play a "crucial role" in reducing emissions, helping countries to adjust and financing the development and sharing of clean technologies. However, there is no reference to the precise provenance of this funding, which will come from "a wide variety of sources", to the individual contributions of the rich countries, or to how it will be distributed among the poorest ones.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/l07.pdf>

16. All these decisions were the subject of hard bargaining against a background of significant differences of opinion between rich and developing countries about how responsibilities should be apportioned. The rich countries want a new agreement to replace Kyoto covering every country. The developing countries want the Kyoto targets to be extended and strengthened, a specific agreement for the United States and an invitation to poor countries to take action without binding targets.

17. A certain number of undertakings were entered into but the Congress is nevertheless convinced that the absence of binding objectives, and of recognition for the role of local and sub-national tiers of governance, is a major impediment to achieving ambitious targets for reductions in greenhouse gases, to combating climate change effectively and to ensuring that cities and regions adapt to its consequences.

#### **IV. Local and regional authorities as a force for change**

18. Local and regional authorities were active throughout the negotiation process and participated in large numbers in the Copenhagen Conference, some of them as part of their national delegations, as the Congress advocated in its [Recommendation 271 \(2009\)](#) on 'The global challenge of climate change: local responses'.

19. Numerous mayors and leaders of regions travelled to Copenhagen to share their ideas and continue the dialogue with national delegations. They described their achievements at a number of gatherings and were highly active in events organised in the special area set aside for them.<sup>7</sup>

20. Towns and cities, regions and federated states have shown that they do not hesitate to take action. They can implement 50 to 80% of the measures needed to reduce climate change effects. In many cases the results obtained were better than those of their respective national governments. The mayors of the world's greatest cities drew attention to the added value of their activities and to the fact that local authorities and regions should be recognised as laboratories in the search for innovative solutions to this complex global challenge.

21. Elected members from sub-national levels of government have worked together to secure recognition for their role in a new global agreement and will continue to show that they have modified their practices for several years now and are significant forces for change in their respective areas.

22. Although the Copenhagen Conference was a missed opportunity, the world's cities and regions are committed to combating climate change and to increasing their contribution to national targets by a strong mobilisation in their respective territories. They have declared themselves ready and willing to act in partnership at both national and international levels to continue to show how emissions can be reduced and to put forward innovative solutions until a binding agreement is reached.

23. They have set themselves ambitious targets without waiting for governments. They are engaged, as key partners, in making all necessary efforts to stabilise the climate and in adapting their territories. They will continue their joint activities and efforts throughout 2010 to ensure that states sign a binding agreement in Mexico that acknowledges their role and this effective partnership. They will call on their governments to enter into national dialogues with a view to enhancing those governments' proposals.

24. Finally, as well as reducing greenhouse gas effects, cities and regions are convinced of the need for better governance and a strengthening of the institutions of local and regional government. Good governance is an important part of the solution and member states should fully implement the European Charter of Local Self-Government as well as the Guidelines on Decentralisation and Strengthening of Local Authorities.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Local Climate Lounge: [www.iclei.org/cop15](http://www.iclei.org/cop15)

<sup>8</sup> Resolution 21/3 (2007) UN-Habitat

25. The Congress fully supports the activities of local and regional authority associations in this field. They share the hope that the new texts under discussion will explicitly recognise the role of each tier of governance. Together, they will continue to put pressure on governments to acknowledge this role and to recognise that sub-national tiers of government are key partners in the diplomatic negotiations on climate.

26. The Congress, again, urges governments to ensure that local and regional elected representatives are included in national delegations so they no longer suffer restrictions on access, such as those experienced in Copenhagen.

## **V. Conclusion**

27. The Copenhagen climate conference in December 2009 was a crucial step in combating climate change but ended in disappointment. Nevertheless, Copenhagen was the scene of an unprecedented mobilisation of non-governmental organisations, local and regional authorities and ordinary citizens from across the world. It thus marked a turning point in so far as it provided an opportunity for the different social, ecological and solidarity-based movements to unite to face the challenges of our planet's sustainable development.

28. The mobilisation of civil society in the past has greatly contributed to the promotion of new values to govern and a new way to understand this world and defending individuals. It is now time to take into account this mobilisation and better integrate climate change impacts on the ecology and economy but also on equity, social justice and human rights. Also, negotiations for a new accord should take into account these different dimensions to provide more sustainable solutions in this universal challenge.

29. The lack of commitment from nation states makes it even more important for local and regional authorities to take action. Local and regional members may regret the shortcomings of the diplomatic process and the absence of practical results at the international level but they have not waited for governments to reach agreement before introducing new approaches in their towns, cities and regions to encourage their fellow citizens to change their day-to-day behaviour. They have ignored differences of politics, size and geography and are now jointly committed to ensuring that 2010 will see the birth of a binding global agreement to combat climate change.

30. Making full use of the various levers available to them, they are politically committed to practical and locally-based action. They will call on their governments for support, and for changes to their national legislation to strengthen the capacity for action at grass roots level. They will continue their efforts to ensure that the conference accord really does form the basis of a new international treaty that is binding on all the countries of the world, to be adopted at the next conference of the parties, in Mexico (December 2010).