

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 230 (2008)¹ Local and regional authorities committed to sustainable consumption

1. Rising levels of consumption worldwide are being fed by massive and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources thereby causing serious and irreparable harm to the environment; humankind's risk of self-destruction has never been greater than at present.

2. There is a shocking imbalance between over-consumption in developed societies whilst much of the world population does not have access to adequate food or drinking water. Even in developed countries there are enormous disparities with many people experiencing under-consumption and very limited access to goods.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe believes that radical changes are essential if we are to bequeath a healthy planet to future generations and that this requires strong political commitment from all tiers of government to defend non-financial benefits and long-term objectives.

4. The Congress believes that territorial authorities are well placed to transform collective and individual modes of consumption towards sustainability through responsible, environmentally-sound procurement and delivery of services and goods as well as through integrated policies for spatial planning, agriculture, industry and territorial development.

5. It believes that all levels of governance have an important role to play in ensuring that citizens have access to reliable information on how to consume and manage resources in a responsible manner. In this respect, children can be very receptive to environmental issues and are often keen to relay their knowledge to the wider community.

6. The Congress welcomes the efforts of some territorial authorities to go beyond purely economic criteria and take environmental, social and health impacts into consideration when evaluating and providing goods and services. However, it regrets the international and national legislative obstacles to prioritising non-economic criteria.

7. Strong economic, media and advertising pressures impose rapid product development and commercialisation and make it difficult for citizens to consume less and more responsibly. The Congress believes that public authorities, in partnership with civil society, can provide the information and framework necessary to counterbalance these pressures.

8. Furthermore, these same pressures mean that goods enter the market without adequate assessment of their potential

environmental or health risks. Public authorities have a duty to ensure that the precautionary principle is upheld.

9. The Congress affirms the importance of the "polluter pays" principle and in this respect congratulates the Council of Europe's Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (1995) which was one of the first international instruments to state that the cost of measures to prevent, control and reduce damage should be borne by the responsible party, as far as possible and appropriate.

10. The Congress is convinced of the need for legislation regarding food production and consumption which protects the environment, supports sustainable development and promotes healthier, prosperous and more informed communities, as stressed by the Parliamentary Assembly in its Recommendation 1786 (2007) on responsible consumption and Recommendation 1636 (2003) on organic farming.

11. The Congress is aware of the importance of initiatives which build partnerships, networks and exchange of good practices between public authorities and civil society and in this respect welcomes the Council of Europe's European Inter-network of Ethical and Responsible Initiatives (IRIS) which encourages and stimulates dialogue on responsible consumption.

12. The Congress is convinced of the need to promote responsible consumption throughout the world to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production and welcomes the Marrakech Process of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and its current preparation of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns for 2011-2021.

13. *In view of the above, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe invite the member states to:*

a. ensure that all levels of governance are able to use the fiscal and financial means at their disposal to encourage environmentally responsible behaviour (reduced VAT rates for ecological goods and services, incentives for energy-efficient and renewable energy sources, disincentives to limit car use and high-polluting cars);

b. support the introduction and the development of labelling strategies regarding the production of goods and services for the general public (eco-management systems, eco-labelling guides and green labels for ecologically-friendly products);

c. provide the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks to reduce the environmental impacts of consumption and:

i. impose standards and norms for environmental protection such as air and water quality and noise pollution levels and ensure that territorial authorities have the necessary powers for their implementation and evaluation;

ii. adopt the "polluter pays" principle and link its implementation with deposit/refund schemes, and pollution fines;

iii. include environmental and social impacts and life-cycle costs into criteria governing public procurement bids and all aspects of public action;

iv. promote the use of evaluation methods of environmental policies to verify, in particular, that environmental hazards are not simply moved upstream or downstream in the production process or to another setting;

d. review goods and passenger transport policies particularly closely in order to reduce excessive use of road and air transportation;

e. promote research, development and exchange of good practices at national and international levels to improve energy-efficiency and clean technologies;

f. support socially responsible, solidarity-focused firms which are trying to establish closer links between economic performance and benefits to the environment and community;

g. make the general public aware of the problem of consumption, and of the need for judicious consumer behaviour, and:

i. promote, with all the stakeholders involved, the acquisition of basic behaviour patterns and knowledge, and devise information programmes on the importance of responsible consumption;

ii. prepare young people and children to become informed consumers, by including consumer education in school and other curricula.

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 in order to respond to the need for radical change.*

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 13 March 2008 (see Document CG(14)32REC, draft recommendation presented by V. Kadokhov (Russian Federation, R, SOC), rapporteur).