

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 365 (2014)¹ Promoting diversity through intercultural education and communication strategies

1. The population of Europe is rapidly diversifying, and it is now the case that not just major cities, but also small municipalities and authorities more and more frequently have local populations of a very wide range of ethnic, cultural and religious origins. Ethnic minorities, foreign residents, migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and residents of migrant origin form a European population which is not only growing more strongly than in the previous decades, but has also become an integral part of the fabric of our societies. They are now a major force, thanks to their economic, social and cultural contribution.

2. Their diversity represents a wide-ranging resource for innovation, growth and local economic, social and cultural development, making possible an opening up to other cultures and an inflow of new knowledge, methodologies, skills and ideas which increase a society's creativity and make it better able to face up to new situations, crises and challenges. In the cultural sphere, diversity is a source of enrichment which is perceptible in literature, cinema, the arts, sport, cookery, fashion, and in many forms of expression and types of activity. That creativity is also a source of job creation, attracting industries and firms in search of innovative ideas.

3. Thus the paradigm for society-building in Europe has changed. Whereas, in the past, we sought to achieve social cohesion on the basis of homogeneity, we now find ourselves in an intercultural society. The Report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe entitled "Living together. Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe"² identified European diversity as the main challenge facing modern democracy. That same report highlighted the crucial role played by local and regional authorities in responding effectively, as well as their role in building harmonious intercultural relations between the different population groups.

4. When it comes to accepting cultural diversity as an enriching factor, there is still a degree of resistance and reluctance among the local population, fuelled by prejudice and misconceptions based on rumours, stereotyping and misinformation. That prejudice, often stemming from ignorance of other cultures, continues to affect the way in which people regard others. That resistance also comes from a more subjective and unconscious perception that the concept of cultural diversity is linked to the idea of the "foreign", "immigrant" or "minority" culture constituting a threat to

the majority culture. Ignorance of the benefits of diversity is thus a major obstacle to intercultural action.

5. The Congress is certain that the diversity and cultural heritage of populations represent two of the main assets of European societies, and that a precondition for a change in attitudes to diversity is a better knowledge of its advantages in both populations and authorities, necessitating the development of policies encompassing all social, ethnic and cultural groups and an educational effort based on intercultural communication and teaching.

6. In this respect, the Congress reaffirms the relevance of its Recommendations 261 (2009) on intercultural cities, 304 (2011) on meeting the challenge of inter-faith and intercultural tensions at local level, 347 (2013) on migrants' access to regional labour markets and 343 (2013) on integration through self-employment: promoting migrant entrepreneurship in European municipalities, as well as of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education³ and of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2005 (2014) on identities and diversity within intercultural societies.

7. The Congress notes the work under way within the Council of Europe to draft a recommendation to member States on intercultural integration, and awaits with interest its adoption by the Committee of Ministers, in the firm belief that its implementation will also contribute to local and regional action in this sphere.

8. In this context, the Congress draws the attention of the Committee of Ministers to the initiatives already started at local and regional level, amongst them its own European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) and the Council of Europe programme on "Intercultural cities", *The intercultural city step by step – Practical guide for applying the urban model of intercultural integration*⁴ produced in the framework of that programme, as well as associated projects such as: Shaping Perceptions and Attitudes to Realise the Diversity Advantage (SPARDA), Communication for Integration (C4I) and Diversity in the Economy and Local Integration (DELI).

9. The Congress also refers to the project "Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership" (AMICALL) and to the action plan drawn up by the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR), as well as to numerous other campaigns and initiatives by authorities, such as the Cosmopolitan Strasbourg in France, the "anti-rumour" campaign in Barcelona and in other cities in Spain, as well as other "demystification campaigns", "radio diversity" projects, and so on.

10. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress asks the Committee of Ministers to adopt as soon as possible the recommendation to member States on intercultural integration, and to invite the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. produce an overall intercultural vision based on the experience of, and with a contribution from, the authorities;

b. formulate intercultural communication and education strategies of a general nature, with a view to promoting a consistent approach to diversity amongst the different government structures and the different levels of governance, and to raise society's awareness of the advantages of diversity in order to derive maximum benefit from it;

c. to develop the curriculum, textbooks and teacher-training courses for schools, higher education establishments and schools of journalism, so as to improve intercultural skills and the vision of diversity;

d. set up a system of intercultural mediation at every level of governance, with a sustainable budgetary allocation;

e. stop using political discourse about immigration as an instrument, and emphasise instead in politics and discussions about migratory movements the processes of mutual adaptation and migrant integration;

f. encourage the commitment of cultural and arts institutions to the promotion of diversity, and provide support to cultural projects which highlight diversity;

g. establish partnerships for the introduction of programmes relating to diversity, inter alia with authorities, players from civil society, national media and businesses;

h. support local and regional action in this sphere and provide continuity of budgets for the introduction of relevant programmes on the ground;

i. work in general against negative stigma, taking account of different dimensions which affect social reality, both objective (work, housing, access to public services) and subjective (feelings of belonging).

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2014, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(27)6FINAL, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Nawel Rafik-Elmrini, France (L, SOC).

2. Council of Europe, May 2011.

3. Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (May 2010).

4. *The intercultural city step by step – Practical guide for applying the urban model of intercultural integration*, © Council of Europe, March 2013, ISBN 978-92-871-7818-3.