

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Resolution 262 (2008)<sup>1</sup>

### Public local and regional action: for a new energy culture

1. Energy is not just another commodity. Like water, air, raw materials and food, energy is essential for all human and economic activities.

2. Today's world is facing climatic constraints and the exhaustion of conventional energy resources, combined with an increase in the production of material goods and ever growing energy consumption.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is convinced that solving these problems requires a new paradigm and that the global challenges are so far-reaching that states and local and regional authorities must revise their energy production and exploitation models as quickly as possible and review their spatial development in line with this.

4. It recalls its ongoing work on energy-related issues, including the impact of energy market liberalisation, the promotion of renewable forms of energy and, more recently, the need for local and regional authorities to respond to the challenge of global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and local and regional adaptations to improve the protection of citizens and resources.

5. Local and regional authorities are key players in any sustainable energy policy. Energy is primarily consumed at the local and regional levels. These are also the levels where renewable local energy resources can be put to best use and where high-output production techniques such as cogeneration can be utilised. It is often at the local level that the most effective action can take place because local and regional authorities are closest to their citizens and know the complexity of the problems to be resolved within their areas.

6. The Congress is convinced that the relative lack of public action in this area stems mainly from an underestimation of the risks arising from our development practices. Since conventional forms of energy production and consumption are among the main causes of pollution, local and regional authorities must limit their local and global impact and protect the environment.

7. Local and regional authorities must take up the challenge to raise awareness of the urgent need to improve energy efficiency, to prevent climate change and to promote renewable and decentralised sources of energy. They must act in all the sectors in which they are involved: as consumers and service providers; as urban spatial planners and transport policy makers; as energy producers and suppliers; and as advisers,

inciters and models for the population and various local stakeholders.

8. Local authority involvement in these four spheres has a major impact on local development, on the local and global environment, on the quality of life and the attractiveness of towns, cities and regions, on alleviating the energy poverty of residents experiencing hardship and on economic development.

9. While the municipalities in some countries have few statutory powers in the energy field, they can nonetheless become actively involved in promoting energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources, as well as limiting pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

10. The Congress is aware of the major obstacles still to be overcome in the field of energy efficiency, including shortcomings or imperfections in existing legislation, inadequate financial resources for investment, and an institutional and human capacity which still has insufficient practical experience.

11. In this connection, it also notes the force of habit and the difficulty encountered by all stakeholders in defining a shared vision of the future of energy, as well as the drag exerted by energy producers and suppliers, who sometimes impede energy-saving policies.

12. In Europe, many local and regional authorities have realised the crucial importance of local action and strong investment in the energy field for the sustainable development of their localities. The Congress welcomes the "Covenant of Mayors" initiative which was launched in January 2008 by the European Commission in line with the above-mentioned mobilisation, calling on local authorities to make drastic cuts in emissions and improve Europe's overall energy efficiency.

13. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the local and regional authorities of the member states of the Council of Europe to:

*a.* tackle sustainable energy issues by developing a new energy culture which encourages local and regional energy performance, namely to:

*i.* improve the quality of energy services in the fields of heating, air conditioning and lighting;

*ii.* radically reorganise modes of transport and mobility for local inhabitants by introducing an ambitious public transport policy and encouraging eco-mobility by favouring "soft" transport methods (cycling, walking);

*iii.* reduce energy intensity in their areas and cut excessive energy expenditure in public and private budgets;

*iv.* incorporate sustainable local energy planning into local urban and regional development plans;

*v.* increase local and regional energy autonomy by promoting the use of renewable energy sources in order to reduce local and regional dependence on fossil energy sources and on imports from other countries;

*b.* implement local energy plans, drawing on the experience and *acquis* of some local and regional authorities in Europe in

the field of energy performance of buildings, cogeneration, renewable forms of energy and energy services;

*c.* set up specialist units in their own departments to deal with energy issues right across the board in order to:

i. create and update energy databases and introduce consumption monitoring systems;

ii. identify projects to improve energy efficiency in municipal properties, in particular by organising energy audits of municipal buildings, and prepare programmes and action plans for energy efficiency;

iii. modernise municipal vehicles and adopt a renewal policy facilitating the use of clean, economic and non-polluting vehicles;

*d.* set up a local energy agency to implement a sustainable energy policy at local or regional level in order to:

i. identify and improve the understanding of the overall energy situation;

ii. design an integrated energy policy in all spheres of local life, define its practical modalities and guarantee its monitoring and evaluation;

iii. involve all local players and citizens;

*e.* encourage specific legislation in their individual countries to improve energy efficiency and increase the proportion of renewable sources of energy, in particular through the introduction of incentives at all levels and through financial instruments to promote energy efficiency;

*f.* set up a national association of local and regional authorities for energy efficiency, particularly where there is a deficit of public capacities, which aims to:

i. identify the main obstacles to energy efficiency and promote the means to overcome them;

ii. enhance the capacities of energy managers and elected representatives and provide training;

iii. promote and disseminate good practices;

iv. establish relations with the national (national energy agencies and ministries) and local institutions (agencies and local and regional authorities);

v. promote European policies and objectives in their countries;

vi. facilitate local authority access to financial resources and international and national support programmes;

vii. co-operate with the national associations of other countries and pan-European networks;

*g.* help disseminate and exchange local and regional authority experience in Europe and work closely with the pan-European and international associations of local and regional authorities;

*h.* adhere to the “Covenant of Mayors” initiative and undertake to cut carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by over 20% by 2020 and involve inhabitants and keep them regularly informed of the results.

14. The Congress invites its Committee on Sustainable Development to intensify its co-operation with its opposite number in the European Union Committee of the Regions and with the networks of towns and cities working for a sustainable energy future.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(15)13REC, draft resolution presented by O. Luk’ianchenko (Ukraine, L, EPP/CD) and M. Spinoso (Italy, R, SOC), rapporteurs).