



International Conference of capital cities of the Council of Europe Member States

“Making the metropolis citizen-friendly: a challenge for public authorities”

(11 October 2013, Yerevan, Armenia)

CONCLUSIONS

Presented by Mr John Warmisham, Vice-President of the Congress

1. Today's conference “Making the metropolis citizen-friendly: a challenge for public authorities” has been very much a joint event, the result of close cooperation between the Armenian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, the City of Yerevan and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. I extend our thanks to the Armenian authorities for making this possible.
2. We have taken a close look at the challenges facing our capital cities and metropolises. Nearly all of us are now urban dwellers and this trend is set to continue. For many of our countries, urbanisation has been a rapid process and has brought many growth-related problems that are all too familiar, including pollution, transport gridlock, insecurity and unaffordable housing. Each working day our cities are invaded by an army of commuting workers, who come to earn their living and form a crucial part of our economic and institutional life, not least in terms of the tax revenue of our cities.
3. The metropolis can be our biggest headache; it can also be our greatest hope. Our cities are crucibles, which can offer us a vision of a sustainable, healthy and resilient urban future. The challenge for us is to get our governments, at all levels, to work together with a common purpose to address the challenges of our cities. For this we need new models of collaboration, better decision-making within and between all levels of government, and new and imaginative platforms for citizen engagement.
4. Today we organised our work in two sessions. The first looked at the potential of our metropolises to serve as engines for economic growth and the need to balance this with policies which improve –in a sustainable way - the quality of life for our urban citizens and enable them to live in security.
5. It is a fact that our metropolises are important generators of employment and revenue. They also serve as important hubs for people from adjacent areas, who come to work, shop and use the cities' public services. These factors have important implications for the size, cost and complexity of the responsibilities that municipal authorities are expected to shoulder. This calls for special recognition for metropolises by national governments. Too often they are treated in the same way as smaller towns and cities.
6. The governance of metropolises requires special measures, including long-term planning to address their infrastructure needs. Whatever the sector of service – provision of basic utilities, public transport, education, housing or health-care, long-term investment is required. This is often beyond the capacity of local authorities to make alone and calls for concerted action both with other levels of government and with the authorities of the catchment area.

7. Today's technologies are making it possible for our cities to become more sustainable, more intelligent and more user-friendly. Large cities provide huge scope for energy-saving innovations. In 2008 the Congress produced a new blueprint for reconciling the complex aspects of urban life, in its *European Urban Charter II - Manifesto for a new urbanity*, which remains a reference text in this field.
8. The second of our sessions looked at the political and institutional role of our cities and examined how to reconcile this with guaranteeing the active participation of our citizens at the local level and guaranteeing equal opportunities for our increasingly diverse populations. We also looked at the thorny question of how to maintain social services in a climate of economic austerity.
9. Our cities are multi-functional – serving very diverse interests, not least those of national government. They are also windows for the outside world – important for the international image of the country, increasingly important as centres of tourism and as transport hubs.
10. Life is changing fast in our big cities. We have to continue to focus on our residents, not just our voters, but also our children and future generations. We need concerted action to meet the challenges and also the opportunities. We need to think positively. The potential of our cities for positive change, to improve the lives of all our citizens, is continuing to grow.
11. The key to successful policy-making and decision-taking in our cities is inclusiveness and flexibility. We need light structures. We need to be able to react quickly. At the same time we need broad consultation. The more we involve our citizens, using both representative and direct democracy, the better and more effective our decision-making will become. Today's technologies, social networking and sophisticated web-platforms, give us unprecedented opportunities for giving our citizens more say in these processes. We have to take these opportunities. E-democracy at local level is becoming the norm in Europe's more advanced metropolises.
12. Linked to this is the issue of transparency. Greater transparency in the municipal decision-making process is a pre-requisite for better citizen participation and more effective consultation. This need is all the greater in large cities, where decision-making processes are necessarily more complex and involve more stakeholders.
13. Capital cities – and the same can be said for regional and state capitals – obviously require a special regulatory framework. In its 2007 *Recommendation on the Status of capital cities*, the Congress expressed its conviction that it was justified to give capital cities special constitutional or legal status, such as granting the municipality of the capital city regional or provincial status or giving it the power to enact specific regulations.
14. It is vital that competences be clearly defined at all levels of government and overlap as little as possible. As always, our principle legal reference is the *European Charter of Local Self-Government*. The ability of different levels of government to work together, to consult and effectively coordinate their actions and policies is equally important. This subject – which we are increasingly referring to as 'multilevel governance' – is one that the Congress will be increasingly turning its attention to over the next few years.
15. We should also – strange as this may sound – view the economic downturn as an opportunity. We cannot continue as before. We have to find new ways to finance our infrastructure and public services. Part of the answer lies in new partnerships and co-financing schemes, such as the PPPs - Public-Private Partnerships, in areas such as transport and health-care, giving us greater flexibility and alternative sources of funding. Today PPPs are evolving into PPCPs - Public-Private Community Partnerships, where both government and private players work together to improve social welfare, rather than focusing on profit.
16. To sum up, the future for our capital cities and metropolises lies in our hands. It can and should be a very bright future. If we seize the opportunities, using creativity and flexibility, effective consultation and imaginative ways of empowering our citizens and harnessing their energy, then we have tremendous potential to improve the quality of life for all those who live and work there.