

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 273 (2009)¹ Equal access to local and regional elections

The Congress,

1. Having regard to Article 2, paragraph 1.*b*, of Statutory Resolution (2000) 1 of the Committee of Ministers relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, which stipulates that one of the objectives of the Congress is “to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy”, and to Articles 2 and 3 of Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2007)6 of the Committee of Ministers;

2. Recalling that the fundamental principles of democratic participation of everyone in decision making have been enshrined by the Council of Europe in a number of legal and political instruments, which form a common set of standards on democracy for Europe as a whole;

3. Considering the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), particularly its preamble and Article 3 which states that local councils or assemblies shall be composed “of members freely elected by secret ballot on the basis of direct, equal, universal suffrage”;

4. Referring to its explanatory memorandum on equal access to local and regional elections,

5. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge the governments of member states to:

a. invite the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to monitor local and regional elections in their countries to ensure that the requirements for equal access to local and regional elections are met;

b. achieve equal representation of each sex, to establish an electoral system at local and regional level ensuring that men and women alternate on lists (with a minimum of one for every three), with financial penalties in the event of non-compliance, and to enable the under-represented sex to attain positions of responsibility within the executive bodies of municipalities and regions;

c. grant the right to vote and stand in local elections to all residents legally residing for at least three years on their territory, irrespective of their origin;

d. invite local and regional authorities to ensure the availability of electoral material in regional or minority languages and to give the right to candidates from minority groups to use their mother tongue in the pre-electoral campaign in order to guarantee equal access to local and regional elections to members of minority groups;

e. assist local and regional authorities in implementing, and participating in, awareness-raising campaigns especially addressed to young people, and in supporting local initiatives for local youth councils, in order to promote their participation in the decision-making process at local level;

f. stimulate the creation of secure alternative forms of access to the polls, such as postal, proxy voting or secure e-voting systems;

g. review their domestic legislation in order to ensure that no provisions remain in place which would impede the registration of political parties and candidates, and to guarantee transparency and fairness in the financing of electoral campaigns at local and regional levels;

h. guarantee, through appropriate domestic regulations, fair and balanced media coverage (television, radio and newspapers) of all candidates in local and regional electoral campaigns, notably under the supervision of an independent local or regional authority;

i. ensure that special assistance from local and regional authorities is provided to voters with physical and sensory impairments, those with mobility problems, learning disabilities or dyslexia; alternative measures and specific arrangements in polling stations should be provided on election day to enable them to exercise their right to vote;

6. Requests that the Committee of Ministers call on all member states to give appropriate follow-up to Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, as well as the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004) on women’s participation in elections, in which states have been asked to take special action, by introducing parity measures (such as, for example, the implementation of quotas), in order to bring a change in attitudes and to stimulate and support women’s willingness to participate in political and public life.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2009, 3rd sitting (see Document CG(17)12, explanatory memorandum presented by J. Wienen, Netherlands (L, EPP/CD) on behalf of C. Bijl, Netherlands (L, SOC), rapporteur).