

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 204 (2006)¹ on regional democracy in the Slovak Republic

The Congress, bearing in mind a proposal from the Chamber of Regions,

1. Refers to:

a. Article 2, paragraph 1.*b.*, of Statutory Resolution (2000) 1 on the Congress, which provides that one of the Congress's aims is "to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy";

b. Article 2, paragraph 3, of Statutory Resolution (2000) 1 on the Congress, which provides that "the Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member states and in states which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure, in particular, that the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government are implemented";

c. its Resolutions 31 (1996), 58 (1997) and 106 (2000) of the Congress, setting out guiding principles for drawing up such reports;

2. Takes note of the report on the situation of regional democracy in the Slovak Republic, drawn up by the rapporteur, David Shakespeare (EPP/CD, R, United Kingdom), following two official visits to Bratislava (31 January-1 February 2005 and 18-19 May 2006), with the assistance of Professor Angel-Manuel Moreno (Spain), member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, whom the Congress thanks for his contribution;

3. Recalls its Recommendation 88 (2001) and Resolution 109 (2001) on local and regional democracy in the Slovak Republic;

4. Thanks all the governmental and parliamentary authorities and the elected representatives of the regions, municipalities and towns of the Slovak Republic, as well as the experts who agreed to meet the Congress delegation during its visits and assist in preparing the report;

5. Wishes to bring the attention of the Slovak authorities, the Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to the comments and recommendations presented below;

6. With regard to the general situation of regional democracy:

a. notes with satisfaction that the Slovak Republic has made an important effort in the domain of decentralisation over the past five years since the adoption of the previous Congress recommendation and in general terms the process of regionalisation can be considered successful;

b. points out, with regard to the general situation of regional self-government in the Slovak Republic, that the Slovak system deserves an overall positive assessment, taking into consideration the political and social context of the country, its size and historical unitary character, its population and current political priorities;

c. welcomes the setting up of the self-governing regions in 2001 which may be considered, in the light of their five years' experience, as true regions therefore largely meeting the criteria for regional self-government;

d. notes that the adoption of the Act of 4 July 2001 on Self-Governing Regions and its supplementary laws and regulations, clearly demonstrate the desire of the Slovak Republic to enhance regional self-government in line with the core concepts and common principles endorsed by the Helsinki Declaration on regional self-government;

e. recommends that the Slovak authorities pursue the legislative efforts already accomplished, aiming at strengthening regional authorities and continue the progress and initiatives taken so far, in order to consolidate and deepen regional democracy;

7. With regard to the competencies of self-governing regions:

a. welcomes the gradual transfer of competences from the central state to self-government which resulted in a fair share of regional powers, basically in the domain of economic management and regional development, education, schools, culture, transportation;

b. notes, however, that the new Slovak territorial system and approach in the handling of public affairs and its new experience in the domain of regional decentralisation may be streamlined and improved;

c. recommends the setting up of specific bilateral co-ordination structures between the state administration and the regional one, in order to provide a solution to the lack of co-ordination in some fields, such as social affairs and education;

8. With regard to the financial resources of self-governing regions:

a. notes that the establishment of fiscal decentralisation has been accomplished in a very reasonable time and with notable expediency;

b. recommends continuing the process of fiscal decentralisation and increasing the financial autonomy of the regions, so that they are able to cover not only operating expenses, but also to perform a comprehensive programme of investments;

9. With regard to the relations with local authorities, recommends reinforcing links between regional and local government, so that they can develop joint development strategies and co-operative efforts;

10. With regard to citizens' participation in regional elections:

a. regrets the very low electoral turnout registered in the 2001 and 2005 elections;

b. recommends enhancing the interest of the people towards the regions and encouraging participation in regional elections through an institutional information campaign;

11. With regard to the status of the capital city, recommends clarifying the role and place of Bratislava in the territorial definition of the current regions especially that which concerns the financial resources and equalisation schemes;

12. With regard to the regional administration and staff:

a. notes the need to improve the efficiency of self-governing regions, particularly in political and economic terms;

b. recommends developing and reinforcing the technical capacity and managerial abilities of the human resources of the regional authorities so that they are adequately equipped to satisfy the challenges of the regional governmental activity;

c. given the fact that qualified staff is of importance for the successful framing and launching of regional development programmes, recommends organising training for civil servants at the regional level, which could be the object of a nation-wide programme of technical education;

13. With regard to regional development and co-operation:

a. is convinced that the regions should be considered as competent partners for central government in the area of

economic development and social cohesion, and especially in the areas of regional development policy shaped by national strategies and European Union instruments;

b. recommends consulting regional authorities during the preparation of the national strategic framework for regional development and in procedures concerning the use of the EU Structural Funds and involve them closely in designing and deciding on regional development projects and strategies;

c. considers that interregional and transfrontier co-operation between regions is important and deserves to be carried further for the purposes of their social and economic development;

14. The Congress consequently invites:

a. the Committee of Ministers to transmit this recommendation and its explanatory memorandum to the Slovak authorities;

b. the Slovak authorities responsible for regional self-government:

i. to submit to the President of the Congress, by 1 December 2008, a written report setting out in detail the measures taken to implement the recommendation;

ii. to appoint a senior representative of the government to present, at a session of the Chamber of Regions before that date, an interim report on the measures taken and/or planned in order to implement the recommendation.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 14 November 2006 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 15 November 2006 (see Document CPR(13)6, draft recommendation presented by K. Behr (Germany, R, EPP/CD), on behalf of D. Shakespeare (United Kingdom, R, EPP/CD), rapporteur).