

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 331 (2012)¹

The governance of macro-regions in Europe

1. A macro-region is a grouping of sub-national entities (local and regional authorities) – a territory covering a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges – which come together to co-operate on common issues. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe believes that such co-operation can provide added value in terms of social and territorial cohesion and democratic stability.

2. The potential benefits are many. Economies of scale make it easier for public authorities to carry out their tasks effectively, improve public services and thereby improve the quality of the lives of citizens. Macro-regions can raise the level of social and economic development, creating more opportunities for citizens in terms of employment and culture, improving creativity and productivity, as well as improving neighbourly relations and understanding between peoples. They can also be very useful in tackling common challenges, such as the protection of the environment.

3. Recognition of the benefits of regions co-operating together and the resulting removal of barriers has long been a core element of the European project. A key provision of both the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy is the right of territorial authorities to associate and to co-operate with other such authorities in other countries in matters within their competences and within the framework of the law.

4. The European Union (EU) is an increasingly important player in such co-operation. The progressive enlargement of the EU and the European Neighbourhood Policy have increased the number of Council of Europe member States which may benefit from EU structural funds, while at the same time highlighting the need to improve territorial cohesion between EU and non-EU member States within the wider European area.

5. Experience shows that many obstacles need to be overcome before the political intentions and commitment to improve macro-regional co-operation can be translated into concrete results. Projects need to be realistic in scope, result-oriented and practical, respecting the realities on the ground. By focusing on sector-specific co-operation, with moderate goals, co-operation can more easily proceed and avoid stalemates resulting from tensions between governments at national level.

6. Many obstacles to such co-operation are of a legal nature and stem from issues that are addressed in the European

Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Madrid Convention, ETS No. 106) and its Protocol No. 3 concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (CETS No. 206). The entry into force of this protocol in the near future should therefore be a priority for the local and regional democracy agenda of the Council of Europe.

7. The Congress therefore reaffirms the importance of the Madrid Convention and its protocols, and refers also to:

a. Article 10 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government on local authorities' right to associate;

b. the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy;

c. Recommendation Rec(2005)2 of the Committee of Ministers on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and interterritorial co-operation between territorial communities or authorities.

8. The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite those member States which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Madrid Convention and its protocols and transpose them into their national legislation.

9. It also recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member States to:

a. promote the conclusion of multilateral agreements and arrangements, as foreseen in Article 1 of the Madrid Convention, and provide financial instruments conducive to the setting up of macro-regional co-operation projects;

b. support the development of macro-regions as platforms facilitating inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation;

c. provide part-funding for macro-regional co-operation projects in order to stimulate these projects.

10. The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to:

a. include, in its intergovernmental programme of activities, consideration of how obstacles to inter-regional, transfrontier and macro-regional co-operation can be overcome and how such co-operation can contribute to achieving its goal to promote democracy, with an emphasis on its local and regional aspects;

b. support exchanges between experts and exchange of advice among macro-regional representatives and experts, through seminars, co-ordination meetings and by establishing contact groups in order to learn from best practices, working in partnership to achieve greater impact and to use the existing resources of the Council of Europe more effectively.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 17 October 2012 and adopted by the Congress on 18 October 2012, 3rd Sitting (see Document [CPR\(23\)2](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: E. Mohr, Austria (L, EPP/CD).