

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 281 (2010)¹ After Copenhagen, cities and regions take up the challenge

1. The 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Copenhagen (Denmark) from 7 to 18 December 2009, closed with a political agreement which brings only partial answers to the challenges of global warming. The possible conclusion of an international treaty was therefore deferred to the next Conference of the Parties, which will take place in Mexico from 29 November to 10 December 2010.

2. Climate change affects the fate of humanity and throws up some major challenges for the 21st century. It is no longer a purely ecological question, for it has economic and geopolitical implications, as well as implications for equity, human rights and international solidarity. The Copenhagen conference gave rise to an unprecedented mobilisation by non-governmental organisations, citizens and local and regional authorities from all over the world.

3. While the heads of state did not manage to agree on a binding global plan under which each country makes commitments commensurate with its responsibilities, this mobilisation bears witness to the place that global warming now holds in public opinion and on the international political agenda.

4. The indisputable fact of global warming and the vital need to restrict it were formally acknowledged in the Copenhagen Accord. It is therefore states' responsibility to get the whole world to commit in the near future to a binding agreement proportionate to the present energy and climate challenges.

5. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is convinced that a binding global agreement that brings together the demands of developed and developing countries is no longer an option, but a moral and political imperative.

6. As a crucial year of negotiations begins, there must be no widening of the gap between worldwide public opinion and governments. The Congress calls on states to make an individual commitment and also a collective commitment with the whole international community.

7. Local and regional authorities, for their part, are well aware of the challenges that lie ahead and have responsibilities in many fields enabling them to combat climate change effectively and to adapt in their territories in line with the new climatic conditions. They remain active and are politically and very practically committed in the field. They are determined to provide ambitious and sustainable solutions

and, to this end, to make full use of the various levers available to them.

8. The Congress has resolutely committed itself to obtaining recognition of the fundamental role that local and regional authorities play in combating climate change, for it considers their action to be vital in order to meet today's unprecedented energy and climate challenges. Thus, it played an active part in the Copenhagen conference and supported the efforts of cities, regions and their associations to obtain recognition of this role and to give an account of their initiatives.

9. It considers that states' lack of commitment makes the action of local and sub-national governments worldwide even more essential. The unprecedented extent of the challenges in reality requires an urgent and comprehensive response from every level of governance.

10. It notes that, while local and regional representatives may regret the shortcomings of the diplomatic process and the lack of tangible results at international level, they did not wait for an agreement between states before starting innovative activities in their cities and regions to encourage citizens to change their ways.

11. The Congress points out that local and regional authorities constitute the level of governance closest to citizens and bear responsibility for safeguarding their citizens' quality of life. They will continue to work in partnership at both national and international levels and to work with their associations to make the greatest possible contribution to national and international objectives.

12. The Congress applauds the transcending by local and regional authorities of political, geographical and demographic differences in order to make a joint commitment and ensure that 2010 will be the year of a binding global agreement on combating climate change. It calls for national discussions to enhance their governments' proposals.

13. It also considers that the European Union has to date played a prominent role in the fight against climate change and that, without awaiting the individual positioning of non-European states, it should go beyond its initial commitments and contribute the resources needed for adaptation on the continent of Europe and in developing countries.

14. Consequently the Congress reiterates its request for the Committee of Ministers to support the Congress in its efforts to persuade member and observer states to involve local and regional authorities fully in the diplomatic process relating to the climate.

15. The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to ask member and observer states to:

a. make commitments commensurate with the challenges arising and ensure that political negotiations throughout the year 2010 do not become bogged down and that the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Mexico in December 2010, sees the conclusion of a new binding agreement on the climate;

b. recognise that local and regional authorities should play a central part in all the efforts to be made to combat global warming and to adapt their territories in line with its effects;

c. allow local and regional authorities direct access to the diplomatic process relating to the climate, and therefore to include them in the national delegations which, throughout the year 2010, will be taking part in negotiations on a climate change agreement, and to involve them in the pre-negotiation phase as key partners in the activities to be carried out;

d. support local and regional authorities in the implementation of activities to combat climate change and amend national legislation in order to strengthen their capacity for action at the level closest to citizens.

16. The Congress also asks the Committee of Ministers to invite the European Union to:

a. make commitments beyond its current ones in order to promote a binding world agreement on climate commensurate with the energy and climate challenges arising;

b. recognise to an even greater extent the actions of local and regional authorities to combat climate change, by facilitating their access to funding and by promoting networking and the sharing of experience.

17. The Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to support its efforts to persuade national parliaments to take fully into consideration the role of local and regional authorities and to promote appropriate legislation, increasing their capacity to mitigate climate change, and adapt to its effects, in accordance with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 18 March 2010, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(18)4, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: D. Suica, Croatia (L, EPP/CD).