

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 231 (2008)¹ Climate change: building the adaptive capacity of local and regional authorities

1. The changes to our climate as a result of global warming are becoming more noticeable by the day throughout Europe and the rest of the world. According to the latest simulations by scientists, the chances of curbing the average rise in temperature to 2°C by 2050 is now hypothetical and global warming and its expected repercussions can only continue to increase.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is concerned at the threat that climate change poses to human beings and the environment. The Congress believes that the greatest attention must be paid to the socio-economic dimension of the impacts of global warming and is concerned about the ensuing changes in migratory flows both across the world, from non-member states of the Council of Europe, and between its member states, their regions and even within those regions.

3. The increase in the number of exceptional climate events worldwide and on the European continent means that we are now faced with a dual challenge: the need, on the one hand, for an immediate and significant reduction in greenhouse gases to ensure that the climate does not undergo even more serious, less controllable changes and, on the other hand, for a sound policy aimed at adapting² to the effects of climate change and reducing vulnerability.

4. The Congress reaffirms its unswerving commitment to sustainable development. It believes that climate policies illustrate the need to “think globally, act locally” and therefore regrets that climate change has only very recently been taken into account. Nevertheless, it welcomes the fact that climate policies are currently emerging at all levels of governance, and particularly at local and regional levels.

5. The great unknown quantity in climate change is the intensity of the phenomenon, and the extent to which it will affect different parts of the world. The Congress therefore reaffirms the need for measures for adapting to climate change and reducing vulnerability in all areas, even where the impacts of climate change are not yet visible. These measures are justified by the various projections regarding future climate change and could prove to be very cost-effective, particularly with regard to long-lasting infrastructure.

6. The Congress welcomes the growing international mobilisation on global warming but regrets the difficulties in achieving public mobilisation on the problem; as a result

large-scale action and the adjustment of climate policies are still in their infancy. On the other hand, it means that local and regional authorities have a more important role to play in alerting people to the problem and eliciting a response.

7. Moreover, the Congress notes that, very often, climate policies are mainly a combination of very loosely related sectoral measures and that consistency and interaction are necessary to ensure effective public action in the field of climate change. It also notes that the adaptation policies currently being implemented are frequently drawn up in the wake of a specific disaster or exceptional event. It therefore calls on all decision makers in both the public and private spheres to take a more responsible attitude.

8. It firmly believes that strong, resolute public action to adapt to climate change must be considered as a matter of urgency at all levels of governance and by all stakeholders, including businesses, associations, citizens and the media. It also draws attention to the importance of feedback from experience and local knowledge and the need to co-ordinate initiatives.

9. The Congress welcomes the action taken by the European Union to deal with climate change and, in particular, the European Commission’s Green Paper on adaptation to climate change, which is a first step towards tackling the problem, and endorses the recent opinion of the Committee of the Regions on this subject.

10. It also welcomes the fact that the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to Al Gore, former Vice-President of the United States, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This decision reflects a new vision of world peace for the third millennium.

11. *The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:*

a. ask the Eur-Opa Major Hazards Partial Agreement to take account of the need to enhance resilience to climate events in its activities and to draw up climate change adaptation programmes, relevant to all levels of governance, offering a new approach to hazards;

b. invite the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) to frame and harmonise planning and development policies and to include the climate change dimension in its recommendations;

c. take account of the challenges posed by climate change in all Council of Europe activities and programmes, for example when examining the causes of migrations or the ensuing risks in the field of health;

d. ask the Council of Europe Development Bank to earmark special funds for climate vulnerability assessment and climate adaptation projects.

12. *The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to ask member states and observers to:*

a. establish, in co-operation with local and regional authorities, a comprehensive and balanced climate policy, based on two pillars: an intensified mitigation policy to reduce

greenhouse gases and an adaptation policy to anticipate climate change and protect people and property from its consequences;

b. establish a national policy of adaptation to the impact of climate change, taking account of the need for social equity and local and regional solidarity which, in the event of disasters, should, in the last resort, be able to rely on the full backing of central government;

c. ensure that all public and private decision makers are involved in defining national adaptation policies;

d. support research into vulnerability and adaptation to global warming and make sure that the results are available to local and regional authorities;

e. draw the attention of all public and private players and the public at large to the different climate change projections and their socio-economic repercussions, by disseminating information which can be readily understood by everyone;

f. considerably improve exchanges of information and expert knowledge at local and regional, national and international, level between the various stakeholders concerned by the repercussions of climate change.

13. *The Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to continue its efforts so that national parliaments adopt appropriate legislation in this field which makes it possible to harmonise existing legislation in order to reduce territorial vulnerability.*

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 13 March 2008 (see Document CG(14)33REC, draft recommendation presented by I. Franzen (Germany, R, SOC) and S. Orlova (Russian Federation, R, EPP/CD), rapporteurs).

2. Adaptation: adjustment of natural or human systems to a changing environment; adaptation measures can be anticipatory or reactive, public or private, spontaneous or planned.