

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 375 (2014)¹ Promoting diversity through intercultural education and communication strategies

1. The population of Europe is rapidly diversifying, and it is now the case that not only in major cities, but also in small municipalities and authorities, the local population is more and more comprised of a very wide range of ethnic, cultural and religious origins. Ethnic minorities, foreign residents, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and residents of migrant origin form a European population which is not only growing more rapidly than in previous decades, but which has also become an integral part of the fabric of our societies. They are now a major force, thanks to their economic, social and cultural contribution.

2. Their diversity represents a wide-ranging resource for innovation, growth and local economic, social and cultural development, enabling an opening up to other cultures and an inflow of new knowledge, methodologies, skills and ideas which increase a community's creativity and make it better able to face up to new situations, crises and challenges. In the cultural sphere, diversity is a source of enrichment which is perceptible in literature, films, the arts, sport, cookery and fashion, and in many other forms of expression and activity. This creativity is also a source of job creation, attracting industries and firms in search of innovative ideas.

3. Thus the paradigm for society building in Europe has changed. Whereas, in the past, we sought to achieve social cohesion on the basis of homogeneity, we now find ourselves in an intercultural society. The Report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe entitled "Living together. Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe"², identifies European diversity as the main challenge facing modern democracy. The same report highlights the crucial role played by local and regional authorities in responding effectively, as well as their role in building harmonious intercultural relations between the different segments of the population.

4. However, when it comes to accepting cultural diversity as an enriching factor, there is still a degree of resistance and reluctance among local populations, fuelled by prejudice and misconceptions based on rumours, stereotyping and misinformation. This prejudice, often stemming from ignorance of other cultures, continues to affect the way in which people regard others. This resistance also derives from a more subjective and unconscious perception that the concept of cultural diversity is linked to that of the "foreign", "immigrant" or "minority" culture constituting a threat to the majority culture. Ignorance of the benefits of diversity is thus a major obstacle to intercultural action.

5. The Congress is certain that the diversity and cultural heritage of Europe's populations represent two of the main assets at the disposal of local and regional authorities, and that these authorities can, in turn, contribute to changing people's perceptions, bringing about a better understanding of other cultures, raising awareness of the advantages of diversity and approaching diversity in a context of interaction between different local groups. This work must include the implementation of strategies on intercultural education for the population and the training of public officials in intercultural skills, as well as effective strategies for making local residents aware of the assets of diversity. In this context, new information and communication technologies now provide, more than ever, a huge "area of knowledge" which could be an excellent tool for learning about diversity.

6. The Congress is also sure that it is necessary, in order to promote the benefits of diversity, to develop policies encompassing all social, ethnic and cultural groups. In this context, the Congress reaffirms the relevance of its Resolutions 280 (2009) on intercultural cities, 323 (2011) on meeting the challenge of inter-faith and intercultural tensions at local level and 332 (2011) on education for democratic citizenship – tools for cities, as well as of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

7. The Congress notes the work under way within the Council of Europe to draft a recommendation to member States on intercultural integration, and awaits with interest its adoption by the Committee of Ministers, in the firm belief that its implementation will also contribute to local and regional action in this sphere.

8. The Congress also notes two resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly: Resolution 1972 (2014) on migrants: ensuring they are a benefit for European host societies, and Resolution 2005 (2014) on identities and diversity within intercultural societies, which emphasise the important role of local and regional authorities in the building of an intercultural society.

9. In this respect, the Congress welcomes the initiatives already started at local and regional level, amongst them its own European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) and the Council of Europe programme "Intercultural cities", the *Practical guide for applying the urban model of intercultural integration*,³ produced within the framework of that programme, as well as associated projects such as Shaping Perceptions and Attitudes to Realise Diversity Advantage (SPARDA), Communication for Integration (C4I) and Diversity in the Economy and Local Integration (DELI).

10. The Congress also refers to the project Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership (AMICALL) and to the action plan drawn up by the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR), as well as to numerous other campaigns and initiatives by authorities, such as the Cosmopolitan Strasbourg in France, the "anti-rumour" campaign in Barcelona and other cities in Spain, as well as other "demystification campaigns", "Radio Diversity" projects, and so on.

11. In this context, the Congress reiterates its call to both local and regional authorities, first made in Resolution 280 (2009) on intercultural cities, to develop proper policies to promote interculturalism in their areas, enabling interaction and exchanges between the different local cultural groups, especially in respect of the design of employment, housing and leisure facilities, and particularly calls on them to express explicitly their common commitment to an intercultural policy approach, and to set up intercultural awareness training activities for politicians and for key policy and front-line staff in public services.

12. The Congress emphasises the role played in this process by civil society (especially by associations of migrants and minorities, including Roma), youth organisations, the media, educational institutions, trade unions and the private sector (including migrants' businesses), as well as the growing role of the new media and social networks.

13. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to set up "local partnerships for diversity" – platforms for co-operation and co-ordination with the aforementioned stakeholders, in order to promote the advantages of diversity. The objectives of these platforms should be to:

a. produce an overall, fact-based intercultural vision for their areas on the basis of research and the collection of targeted data;

b. formulate intercultural communication and education strategies of a general nature, with a view to promoting a consistent approach to diversity amongst the different local and regional authorities, raising public awareness of the advantages of diversity and deriving maximum benefit from it;

c. draw up action plans for the implementation of these strategies;

d. set up a system of intercultural mediation ("local intercultural mediator") between the different cultural groups, with a sustainable budgetary allocation and stable employment conditions – either through qualified mediators or, preferably, by offering training in intercultural competences and mediation to the local and regional administrations and staff in public services.

14. The Congress, *in particular*, invites local and regional authorities to make use of the *Practical guide for applying the urban model of intercultural integration*, produced by the Intercultural cities programme on the basis of the participating cities' experience, with a view to re-examining administrative functions through an "intercultural prism", particularly in respect of education, public areas, housing, public services and the authorities, and to setting up intercultural governance structures.

15. In particular, where intercultural communication and education are concerned, the Congress invites local and regional authorities to:

a. draw inspiration from a communication strategy prepared by the SPARDA project in order to establish a lasting intercultural dialogue within their areas, and also from the recommendations of the AMICALL project and from the action

plan drawn up by the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR);

b. set up training courses in intercultural skills for local and regional administrative departments, local and regional staff and social services staff, in order to raise their awareness of intercultural and diversity issues, the importance of which was also highlighted by the Congress in Resolution 362 (2013) on migrants' access to regional labour markets and in Resolution 358 (2013) on integration through self-employment: promoting migrant entrepreneurship in European municipalities;

c. co-operate with educational institutions, including schools, higher education establishments and schools of journalism, to develop their curricula and textbooks, as well as teacher-training courses intended to improve local minority groups' intercultural skills, vision of diversity and knowledge of cultures;

d. ensure that minority groups and migrants learn the local languages, and that new arrivals, in particular with the help of their associations, are taught about the host country's culture as well as its local laws and traditions;

e. promote cultural exchanges through, *inter alia*, twinning arrangements, with the cities of minority populations' countries of origin;

f. engage in structured co-operation with civil society, and particularly with youth organisations, with a view to promoting the teaching of diversity and of diversity advantages;

g. co-operate with the media, and particularly with local and regional media, to improve professionals' intercultural understanding and capacities, to appeal to the sense of responsibility of journalists in the preparation of reports on diversity issues, and ensure that leading personalities of the city are able to act as spokespersons on intercultural issues;

h. make sure that information on diversity which is based on facts is disseminated through the media and civil society, as well as on local and regional administrative departments' own websites, taking advantage of the new information and communication technologies and social networks;

i. set up neighbourhood intercultural centres and organise activities involving the whole local population in order to enable intercultural interaction and exchanges in such forms as festivals, celebrations and campaigns, giving a greater visibility to ethnic and cultural minorities;

j. encourage the commitment of cultural and arts institutions to the promotion of diversity, and provide support to cultural projects which highlight diversity;

k. communicate more about ethno-cultural subjects and the history of immigration, and hold regular "critical discussions" on current issues and diversity-related matters, so as to deal with complex and sensitive issues with the participation of experts, representatives of the different cultural groups and other appropriate persons;

l. stop using the question of immigration as an instrument in local political discussions, and emphasise instead the processes of mutual adaptation and migrant integration.

16. The Congress invites local and regional authorities to develop network-based work, making more use of international networks to exchange information between local and regional administrative departments, and, in particular, join the “Intercultural cities” programme and the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR), and play an active part in European Local Democracy Week.

17. The Congress instructs its Current Affairs Committee to continue to address questions related to the promotion of the advantages of cultural diversity and to ensure that the relevant good practices are disseminated to local and regional

authorities, especially through their national and European associations.

18. The Congress also invites its Governance Committee to include in its work programme, as aspects of good local and regional governance, intercultural issues and the advantages of diversity.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2014, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(27)6FINAL, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Nawel Rafik-Elmrini, France (L, SOC).

2. Council of Europe, May 2011.

3. *The intercultural city step by step – Practical guide for applying the urban model of intercultural integration*, Council of Europe, March 2013, ISBN 978-92-871-7818-3.