

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 236 (2007)¹ Climate change: approaches at local and regional level

1. Territorial authorities are on the front line when dealing with the effects of climate change and its impact on citizens' lives. Extreme weather conditions such as heatwaves, floods, storms and drought are causing widespread disruption throughout Europe, and the work and financial costs resulting from such events often falls disproportionately, directly or indirectly, on local and regional authorities.

2. Local and regional authorities have, in many cases, taken the lead in efforts to tackle one of the most serious economic, social and environmental challenges of this century. Many are implementing innovative and effective mitigation and adaptation strategies and are actively participating in the local authority associations and networks set up to combat climate change through standard setting, exchange of best practices and awareness raising.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is deeply concerned about the accelerating pace and the increasing and unequivocal extent of the impacts of climate change. It believes that the fight against this phenomenon must be given a higher political profile and made a priority for decision makers at all levels.

4. To face this most serious, man-made challenge, the Congress calls for resolute action at all levels of governance and emphasises the need to foster partnerships and improved co-operation in Europe in order to limit the damage caused by climate change.

5. The Congress welcomes the leadership and commitments made on climate change in Europe by the European Union and, in particular, the decision taken by the heads of state and government of the European Union on 9 March 2007 to commit to a post-Kyoto target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% before 2020.

6. The Congress considers that the efforts of local and regional governments to respond to the threat of global warming have demonstrated significant results and can contribute a great deal to meeting climate change objectives at national and European levels.

7. The Congress strongly believes that it is important not only to implement the commitments of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change but to go beyond them, and that every local and regional authority needs to take climate change into consideration and has the potential to do more to reduce the negative effects of climate change. All territorial authorities

should develop policies and strategies to cut greenhouse gas emissions and to put adaptation measures into place.

8. The Congress believes that climate change is not simply a threat but is also an opportunity to build a more sustainable and inclusive future for the continent. Tackling climate change brings positive results beyond the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and innovations in this field can save public and private money, create jobs, and improve the competitiveness of the regional economy. Local and regional authorities should not consider climate policies as a costly burden, a luxury or as non-urgent.

9. Territorial authorities are in a strong position to set up integrated climate policies and adaptation strategies as, in most member states, they have responsibility for sectors which have a direct impact on the rate of carbon dioxide emissions. In some areas such as procurement, land use planning, urban development and transport, and involving the private sector, they have unique opportunities to combat climate change. In all other areas, such as energy use and production, sustainable mobility, resource management, waste management, forestry and agriculture they can provide a crucial contribution.

10. Local and regional authorities need to develop partnerships to co-ordinate policies, promote expertise and disseminate knowledge and best practices. Such partnerships can facilitate access to information, know-how and expertise for elected representatives and for local and regional administrations. They can also help to optimise and disseminate the results of relevant scientific research.

11. Developed countries should build partnerships with the least-developed countries which, although they have the lowest emissions levels, are the most vulnerable and the most affected by climate change. Local and regional authorities should step up their co-operation with their counterparts in these countries in order to help them to minimise the negative impacts.

12. The Congress is convinced that grass-roots action to limit climate change and to reduce its impacts, whether undertaken by individuals, structured or informal groups of citizens working in their communities, needs to be encouraged and supported. These actions are often exciting, innovative and effective and they can influence the solutions these complex phenomena demand.

13. In the light of the above, the Congress calls upon local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member and observer states to:

a. participate, at their own level of governance, in the international efforts to achieve targets beyond the Kyoto Protocol and ask their national governments to take resolute action to ensure the honouring of commitments;

b. develop mitigation and adaptation policies which limit climate change and increase their capacity to limit damage and to ensure that citizens, resources and property are protected from the threats of a changing climate;

c. immediately implement priority policies and local action plans to limit climate change with measurable and realistic

targets, time frames and responsibilities which include all stakeholders and, in particular:

i. undertake an environmental audit of the extent of greenhouse gas emissions through their current energy use and develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce these emissions;

ii. mainstream climate policy into all areas of responsibility which need to be addressed to tackle the challenge, including energy issues, public transport and co-ordinated and efficient mobility, land use, building and planning, water and waste management, forestry and agriculture;

iii. act as a role model in all their activities, namely as a producer of emissions and consumer of substantial amounts of energy, as a public service provider and as a spatial planner;

iv. review their public procurement policies and ensure that they are climate-friendly, particularly through the purchase of locally produced goods and services;

v. increase resilience to climate change by adapting existing private and public facilities and current lifestyles to ensure a better resistance to unpredictable, extreme weather events, and develop improved emergency programmes;

vi. explore and apply existing policy instruments such as:

– land use planning (for example working towards a compact city, favouring renewable energy installations through siting policies);

– regulation (for example energy standards for buildings, priority areas for climate-friendly district heating systems, obligations to use renewable energy in buildings);

– new financing schemes (for example performance contracting and community-based financing of climate protection projects);

– incentives (for example for energy use improvements in private homes and other buildings);

– and disincentives (for example congestion charges for private cars entering city centres);

vii. provide appropriate training for local elected representatives and for local and regional government personnel concerning the stakes, efforts and methods involved in working transversally and in setting up comprehensive climate actions;

viii. monitor the impacts of climate policies using quantifiable targets and appropriate methods such as sustainability indicators, and communicate the achievements to a wider audience;

d. step up co-operation and build partnerships based upon shared responsibilities between all level of governance – local, regional and national – as such co-operation has proved effective and financially beneficial in several European countries;

e. encourage regional authorities and groupings of local authorities to act as catalysts and facilitators for smaller local authorities within their territory, through setting up local networks and common agencies and providing guidance and

support to implement climate-friendly actions in order to improve the outcomes of these policies;

f. take advantage of their privileged position close to the citizen to explain environmental issues and climate change challenges, to build awareness of the role of each single person in fighting against it, to change behaviour patterns, and to encourage local grass-roots initiatives which address climate change and decrease local carbon footprints;

g. work with all stakeholders in the local community, and in partnership with the private sector, on key issues including energy, transportation, health care and education, to motivate, inform and advise private households and businesses on the reality of the phenomenon, its impacts and ways to create a climate-friendly community, with the aim of building a stronger sense of common purpose and engagement of the whole community;

h. put in place private-public partnerships to design and implement local climate policy programmes, and to identify and invest in projects applying low-carbon technologies that lead to a low-energy vision for the future;

i. set up co-operation with research institutes to develop greater expertise and skills and to concentrate on increasing access to verifiable data on carbon impacts, also developing tools to assess these impacts and the response required;

j. join the existing international networks and associations of local and regional authorities and participate in their exchange of best practices and the elaboration of monitoring systems, guidelines and indicators, and build partnerships and support networks with municipalities in the developing world in order to help them mitigate and adapt to the impacts of global warming.

14. The Congress asks its Committee on Sustainable Development to:

a. continue to keep climate change issues under specific review and help local and regional authorities meet their responsibilities to the full in addressing the most serious challenge of this century;

b. implement the priorities set up in its work programme for 2007-08 and prepare a hearing and report on adaptation strategies to reduce vulnerability to climate change, as well as undertake a review of the issues of energy, as energy-related targets and actions are a key element of climate protection programmes and policies;

c. develop co-operation with the corresponding committee of the EU Committee of the Regions and the networks of local and regional authorities working in this area with a view to devising a common strategy for international organisations and national governments adopting common and concrete policies on climate change and energy issues and to include local and regional authorities in the international negotiation processes.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 31 May 2007, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(14)5RES, draft resolution presented by A. Mediratta (United Kingdom, L, EPP/CD), rapporteur).