

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 317 (2010)¹ Coastal towns and cities tackling threats from the sea

1. Europe has one of the longest coastlines in the world, which is exposed to most types of climate and to the consequences of climate change. Coastal zones perform important ecological, social and economic functions and play a vital part in the prosperity of many European countries. However, they are a particularly fragile resource which is permanently under pressure due to their high population density and to the high concentration of socio-economic activities.

2. Coastal towns and cities are faced with increasingly serious threats from rising sea levels, extreme weather events, changing current patterns, coastal flooding and increasing coastal erosion. They are already well aware – some painfully aware – of the breadth of the consequences and of the potential impacts on people, property, livelihoods, heritage and the environment.

3. Climate change will continue to exert increasing pressure on coastal towns and cities, thus requiring a new approach to foreseeable threats. This situation represents a challenge which in essence is inseparable from governance and urban management issues.

4. Local and regional authorities need to act responsibly, and in the long term, taking full account of all current and future risks. They should anticipate and resolutely implement measures to reduce the vulnerability of urban coastal areas.

5. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe considers that local and regional authorities hold key positions in the reinforcement of the resilience of their territory and their urban citizens. Indeed they are best placed to develop and deliver adaptation measures, as well as to collect information about coastal conditions, involving local stakeholders and the population.

6. Steps to combat climate change must be taken through mitigation plans to reduce emissions. Adaptation measures must also be taken to greatly reduce the impact of threats from the sea but this requires the adjustment of coastal management policies to changing circumstances.

7. The Congress strongly believes that adaptation is a social, political and economic process, not just a technical exercise. Therefore, it calls for a greater recognition of the vital role that local and regional authorities play in preparing the future of our societies and protecting socially vulnerable groups.

8. Furthermore, as the social and economic costs of dealing with extreme weather events and flooding are often picked

up by local and regional authorities, they must be supported to develop and deliver integrated adaptation strategies for these foreseeable events.

9. Some cities and coastal areas have already faced extreme weather events and the consequences were a clear illustration of how a number of fundamental rights can be affected, directly or indirectly, by climate change. As a result, the ethical and moral aspects to protecting individuals against foreseeable threats, including the increasing risk in certain zones, should be kept in mind in the search for responses.

10. There is an ethical and legal obligation for public authorities to take preventive measures and to accurately identify vulnerable areas through taking account of all types of hazard, including the potential impacts of climate change. It is essential that public authorities ensure that this is a transparent process with appropriate public participation to minimise the distress felt by the population.

11. Furthermore, the Congress regards co-operation, dissemination of know-how and exchanges of experiences as vital to the search for and implementation of optimal solutions to the growing threats from the sea.

12. Therefore, it calls for reinforced networking and, in this regard, welcomes the exemplary “Covenant of Mayors” initiated by the European Commission to support the mobilisation of local authorities for a sustainable and low-carbon future.

13. It also welcomes the commitment of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union to European legislation which takes full account of the essential role of local and regional authorities in natural disaster management and the fight against climate change and adaptation to its effects.

14. In this respect, it congratulates the United Nations’ International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) on its 2010-2011 campaign “Making Cities Resilient” which addresses issues of local governance and urban risk. The aim of the campaign is to get as many local governments to be as resilient as possible through raising political commitment to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

15. In the light of the above, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe invites local and regional authorities and, in particular, those located on the coastline to:

a. urgently address the erosion of their coasts and growing risks from sea-level rise, flooding and storms and take into account the full scale of these foreseeable threats which could redraw the coastline of Europe’s countries;

b. put in place short-, medium- and long-term responses in order to improve the resilience of coastal towns and cities, taking care to:

i. set up, as a priority, local actions to evaluate the potential impact of climate change on urban coastal areas and adapt sectoral policies accordingly;

ii. adopt land-use policies and regulate activities which limit, in particular, city expansion to sea fronts;

iii. implement flood warning systems and assess the potential impacts and vulnerability in order to reduce risks and to protect citizens and their assets;

c. reduce the vulnerability of the population and its assets by involving communities and promoting education and risk awareness;

d. conduct training and awareness-raising for local and regional administration staff on the impact and consequences of climate change on coastal areas to enable better implementation of local policies to fight against climate change and of local disaster management plans;

e. take the necessary steps to estimate adaptation costs so they can be taken into account in future financial decisions and examine more closely the potential use of innovative funding mechanisms for adaptation;

f. exchange experiences, tools, best practices and awareness-raising measures through networks of co-operation

between coastal regions and local authorities, in particular to tackle the singularities of coastal cities climate change;

g. sign up to the United Nations' International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) "Making Cities Resilient" campaign and work towards taking the 10 essential actions proposed in order to prepare themselves, reduce risks and make their cities and towns more resilient.

16. Finally, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe invites the Committee of the Regions of the European Union to continue its work to ensure that the important role of Europe's local and regional authorities in delivering climate change adaptation measures, in particular as concerns coastal regions, is recognised in the policies and programmes of the European Union.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2010, 3rd Sitting (see Document [CG\(19\)13](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: I. de La Serna Hernaiz, Spain (L, EPP/CD).