

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 177 (2005)¹ on cultural identity in peripheral urban areas: the role of local and regional authorities

The Congress,

1. Having examined the report on the role of local and regional authorities concerning cultural identity issues in peripheral urban areas, presented by Mr Etienne Van Vaerenbergh (Belgium, L, GILD) on behalf of the plenary Committee on Culture and Education; and Resolution 205 (2005) on the same subject, it proposes a whole series of actions at the local and regional level bearing in mind the compendium of best practices appended to the aforementioned report;

2. Recalling:

- a.* the provisions of the European Urban Charter;
- b.* CLRAE Recommendation 17 (1996) on responsibilities and initiatives of cities in respect of education;
- c.* CLRAE Recommendation 59 (1999) on Europe 2000 youth participation: the role of young people as citizens;
- d.* Recommendation Rec(2002)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on education for democratic citizenship;
- e.* it reminds the different cultural and religious groups that respect for other people is attained by recognising the fundamental equality of all members of society (principle of non-discrimination);

f. recalling the conclusions of the European Conference “Integrated strategies for children and young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods” organised by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of the Federal Republic of Germany in conjunction with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport, from 23 to 25 November 2004, in Berlin, laying emphasis on best practices in cities throughout Europe; 18 European countries, 35 towns in Germany and 23 towns elsewhere in Europe undertook to pool their experience to enhance the quality of life of residents of these difficult neighbourhoods, by making available to local and regional elected representatives the tools and the methods that would enable the residents of these neighbourhoods to achieve advances in their day-to-day living.

3. Convinced that the different cultural and religious groups who abide by the fundamental values which the

Council of Europe upholds must be granted, on a mutual basis, the same possibilities for participation in the life of society and for expressing their opinions in arenas which are to include the policy-making bodies at local and regional level, in accordance with the principles of a democratic and pluralist society;

4. Observes:

- a.* an increase in the phenomena of worsening confrontation and incomprehension throughout Europe, which does not spare the outlying areas of major cities;
- b.* the appearance in various European countries of particularly deplorable acts of urban violence, but above all a very marked increase in occurrences of less serious violence which nevertheless recurs and even seems to become commonplace in some neighbourhoods;
- c.* the existence of a spectrum of acts of violence that ranges from vandalising equipment or buildings to physical acts of violence against persons who reside in these difficult neighbourhoods, not forgetting acts of a racist kind or violence against young girls;

5. Considers that the manifestations of violence at school are inseparable from questions of urban insecurity in outlying districts as a whole, as the perpetrators of acts of violence do not confine themselves strictly to the setting of the difficult neighbourhoods;

6. Anxious about the risks that such violence in outlying districts poses to our societies through:

- a.* debasement of the image of these districts in the minds of the youth and the other residents living in large urban areas;
- b.* worsening of the conditions of education, possibly leading to increased school failure, particularly in the outlying districts where learning conditions are already more difficult than in other better-off urban districts;
- c.* likelihood that this trivialisation of violent behaviour will be generally replicated outside the school setting in adult life later on;

d. a large increase in the number of young people with social integration problems due to their behaviour or their school failure;

7. Therefore considers that the deterioration of living conditions in these districts has an enormous social and economic cost, causes much suffering and thus calls for an awakening and a mobilisation of all players in society at the national, regional and local levels;

8. Is convinced that the following fundamental principles must underpin whatever policy may be applied to combat social exclusion;

- a.* prevention of violence in these outlying districts is a central concern of education for democratic citizenship, namely for tolerance, intercultural relations, gender equality, human rights and peaceful management of conflicts;

b. the policies to be applied at the local and regional level should strike a proper balance between preventive measures and remedial measures, and should be sustainable;

c. young people must be recognised as the players concerned in the first instance and as key partners for all work relating to active, creative neighbourhood participation;

d. dialogue is the prime method of resolving situations of conflict and of developing residents' aptitude for peaceable management of the resources made available to them by the local and regional authorities;

9. Is convinced that the root causes of the poor prospects should be overcome by working in partnership with the various components of the education system, associations, and all local community players;

10. Considers that local partnerships of this kind should develop flexibly without over-cumbersome structures being set up, so as to facilitate a high degree of responsiveness and co-operation founded on building links of mutual trust and on regular dialogue;

11. Is convinced that local and regional authorities are in a commanding position to support or to launch on their own account ground-breaking, effective initiatives for the development of such local partnership, by making their various local services, civil society, the world of work and the entire local community get together and act together;

12. Feels that the above proposals and concepts should be highlighted at a conference to be held in Strasbourg early in 2006 with the object of devising integrated strategies for children and adolescents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the latter's Directorate of Youth and Sport, and the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth are partners in this move;

13. Invites the Committee of Ministers:

a. to define, in agreement with the member countries concerned and with the regions and municipalities, pursuant to the principle of subsidiarity, programmes targeted to the various peripheral urban areas in Europe which have suffered from unemployment and from the economic and social consequences concomitant with a dearth of resources. The residents of these difficult neighbourhoods must be closely associated by including the members of different cultural communities; this

is meant to foster among the citizens residing in these outlying districts a culture based on dialogue and participation in community life, by encouraging the spirit of initiative and arousing a positive sense of belonging shared by all who dwell in these districts;

b. to devise programmes to promote good practice and prepare activities enabling the representatives of the various cultural and religious communities to share with others their respective traditions, customs and experiences, in order to enrich neighbourhood cultural life and foster knowledge of the other person, namely, their neighbour;

c. to encourage the member states to allocate to the regions and municipalities additional resources earmarked for developing cultural activities conducive to dialogue. This constitutes an investment in people's capacity to live peacefully together instead of clinging to an attitude of mistrust arising from ignorance of the other person's culture, if not from actual intercommunal confrontation, knowing nothing or next to nothing about the other;

d. to support the efforts of the Congress to help local and regional authorities identify and disseminate as widely as possible the best practices relating to promotion and development of a cultural identity favouring the inclusion of the residents of difficult neighbourhoods;

e. to develop partnerships between public authorities and community groups in order to improve communication with the community and gain their trust;

f. to prompt the governments of the member countries to support initiatives originating from the sphere of district associations and NGOs generally so as to secure assistance at local, regional and even national level of contacts who are able to run cultural activities commensurate with a neighbourhood, thereby giving more life and stimulus to the initiatives of residents of outlying districts;

g. to promote the idea of an inter-city partnership uniting cities that have already succeeded in applying the "best practices" with those still in search of viable, sustainable solutions, working for inclusion and opposing the exclusion of part of the urban population of Europe's major cities.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 9 November 2005 (see Document CG (12) 24, draft recommendation presented by E. Van Vaerenbergh (Belgium, L, GILD), rapporteur).