

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Opinion 28 (2007)¹ Evaluation, auditing and *monitoring* of participation and participatory policies at local and regional level

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Institutional Committee,

1. Having regard to the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy's (CDLR) request for opinion on the preliminary draft CDLR recommendation on the evaluation, auditing and *monitoring* of participation and participatory policies at local and regional level;

2. Recalls:

a. its Opinion 15 (2001) on the draft recommendation of the Committee of the Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe on participation of citizens in local public life;

b. its Recommendation 182 (2005) on public participation in local affairs and elections with the explanatory memorandum CPL (12) 10 Part II;

c. the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life;

d. the Preamble to the European charter, according to which "the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the democratic principles that are shared by all member states of the Council of Europe", and "it is at local level that this right can be most directly exercised";

3. Welcomes the initiative of the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy to prepare a draft recommendation on the evaluation, auditing and *monitoring* of participation and participatory policies at local and regional level;

4. Emphasises that participation of citizens in elections, and of civil society in general, makes a major contribution to good governance and effective decision making;

5. Reaffirms its commitment to public participation in local affairs and elections and considers this a priority as part of the more general setting of the Council of Europe Action Plan adopted at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government in Warsaw, which undertook to strengthen democracy, political freedoms and citizens' participation through a Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy in Europe;

6. Reiterates that legitimacy of democracy at local and regional level as much as at national level depends on participation of citizens and therefore a key concern in assessing

the health of a democratic system is the extent to which citizens actually participate;

7. Notes that election turnout varies and that although there is a slight upward trend in certain Council of Europe member states, in most of them voter turnout is falling. Yet to be viable, democracy needs the support of an active electorate, which must be a matter of concern to governments and elected representatives;

8. Notes that although the majority of member states seem to be aware of and worried by the decline in voter turnout, local and national authorities need to make more effort to improve the situation;

9. Notes that participation rates rise in line with educational levels and socio-economic status and welcomes the fact that certain member states have therefore introduced measures to encourage participation among the least involved segments of the population such as young people, women, those who are less well educated and from less economically prosperous backgrounds;

10. Underlines the importance of identifying means of encouraging especially these less involved groups to more active participation;

11. Recalls in this regard that a first European Local Democracy Week was launched on 15 October 2006 in Valencia/Spain with events taking place in municipalities in 16 countries. This initiative is aimed at making the functioning of local authorities more visible to citizens and encourage their participation at local level;

12. Underlines that participation should not be confined to the act of voting;

13. Is aware in this respect that, also in view of citizens' changed expectations, representative democracy must be supplemented with elements of direct democracy;

14. Recalls, therefore, that citizens can and must be allowed and encouraged to influence politics in other ways than through elections. This entails not only developing forms of direct democracy but also exploiting the knowledge and commitment of citizens, as those directly affected by political and administrative decisions, to arrive at appropriate solutions acceptable to local people. This makes it necessary to develop a culture of dialogue between administrative authorities, politicians, citizens, social groups, associations, representatives of industry and other operators;

15. Welcomes therefore new means of participation such as referendums, petitions, surveys, citizens' juries;

16. Welcomes the trend towards greater participation by civil society groups of various kinds – socio-economic, territorial, user interests – as complementing and enriching the traditional electoral representation;

17. Notes in this regard that however beneficial the influence exercised by such non-elected groups is, they still require some form of legislative or institutional framework so as not to threaten the democratic legitimacy of decisions taken;

18. Recalls that the participation of civil society groups should therefore be subject to democratic safeguards and institutional, financial and logistical resources to enable local authorities to channel that participation in an appropriate manner;

19. Effective and balanced interaction between elected representatives and civil society based on complementarity and co-operation will only be possible if a proper framework is established for group participation in decision making;

20. In the face of the greater use that is being made of various forms of participation other than elections, stresses the necessity to carefully assess their effectiveness;

21. Considers it important to acquaint municipal and regional authorities in the member states of the Council of Europe with the success factors that make for greater public participation. This, again, requires the evaluation, auditing

and *monitoring* of participation and participatory policies at local and regional level and the identification and promotion of appropriate tools for doing so;

22. Emphasises the need to adapt participatory policies to the outcome of evaluations, audits and *monitoring*;

23. Gives its full support to the draft recommendation, namely the overall importance of citizens participation and the necessity to evaluate the effectiveness of instruments of participation in and outside elections at national, regional and local level.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 21 November 2007 (see Document CG(14)22OPINION, draft opinion prepared by A. Knape (Sweden, L, EPP/CD) and K. Whitmore (United Kingdom, R,ILDG), rapporteurs, presented by K. Whitmore).