

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 245 (2008)¹ Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue: an opportunity for local democracy

1. Local and regional authorities in Europe are increasingly faced with a profusion of different values and a whole range of cultural identities based on religious references and affiliations.

2. The Council of Europe is committed to the democratic management of cultural diversity in Europe while at the same time seeking to strengthen social cohesion so as to remain in line with the major policy decisions taken at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Warsaw in May 2005.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe supports the Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue adopted at the closing conference of the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention in Faro in October 2005 and the conclusions of the Juncker Report highlighting the development of intercultural dialogue as one of the Organisation's priorities.

4. In Resolution 202 (2005) and Recommendation 170 (2005) on intercultural and inter-faith dialogue: initiatives and responsibilities of local authorities, the Congress itself puts strong emphasis on intercultural dialogue.

5. The Congress believes that local and regional authorities are well placed to gauge the cultural and religious diversity of the residents within their areas. The aim is for the authorities, elected representatives and representatives of the various cultural and religious groups present locally to establish trusting relations and regular dialogue that gradually takes on a structured form.

6. With the adoption by the Assembly in 1993 of Recommendation 1202 on religious tolerance in a democratic society, the Council of Europe had already chosen to open a dialogue based on the equal dignity of Europe's various cultures and religions.

7. In this light, the Congress has drawn up a report on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue: an opportunity for local democracy, identifying 12 key principles to be applied in order to create the necessary conditions for facilitating such a dialogue.

8. The Congress expresses its full support for the activities designed to implement the specific, concrete measures recommended in connection with the Council of Europe's

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and calls on the Committee of Ministers to ask member states to:

a. support the establishment of the network of "Intercultural cities: governance and policies for diverse communities" aimed at strengthening efforts to build on and expand cultural diversity at local level;

b. establish within the responsible bodies of each member state a centre of excellence charged with gathering and analysing information and data concerning the cultural and religious networks in existence throughout the country and to make such information accessible to all those involved in intercultural dialogue;

c. focus on the cultural dimension of religious beliefs by stressing their social usefulness and include the relevant information in history and civics classes and textbooks;

d. pay particular attention to the involvement of young people in intercultural dialogue, including through the development of policies which aim to prepare them for living in multicultural societies;

e. provide active support, including financial assistance, for non-governmental organisations so as to encourage them to facilitate communication about the way the majority culture relating to the religion(s) historically present in a given area operates and is transmitted, while enabling new cultural or religious communities to enter into contact with representatives of the majority culture and thereby facilitate mutual understanding;

f. promote awareness through civics programmes of non-discriminatory behaviour towards non-majority cultures;

g. draw up joint calendars of major cultural and religious festivals at national, regional and local level so as to raise local and regional residents' awareness of existing cultural and religious diversity and increase mutual understanding;

h. encourage the mass media to provide opportunities for all to learn about other people's cultures and beliefs, to exercise the right to freedom of expression responsibly and to avoid stereotypes which foster intolerance;

i. instruct the Council of Europe's Co-ordinator for Intercultural Dialogue to make an initial assessment of the needs of the various partners involved in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, with a view to possible further assistance in the realisation of projects aimed at promoting this dialogue;

j. encourage the appointment of a diversity ombudsperson at local and/or regional level to act as a focal point for requests concerning the management and support of initiatives that facilitate the further development of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(15)15REC, draft recommendation presented by P. Corneloup (France, L, EPP/CD) and G. Martini (Italy, L, EPP/CD), rapporteurs)