

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 243 (2008)¹ Public local and regional action: for a new energy culture

1. Energy is at the heart of the planet's future and is a central concern for contemporary societies. Global challenges today require resolute action to control and curb climate change and safeguard local and regional energy supplies.

2. The need for urgent change is particularly clear because fossil energy resources are running out, thereby requiring anticipatory measures: the need, on the one hand, to limit the ever-increasing demand for energy and, on the other hand, for a radical transition to renewable and sustainable energy sources.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe considers that these challenges can be met and that the requisite action involves linking up energy and climate policies very closely, given that an energy policy that respects the environment is a key aspect of climate policy.

4. The Congress is convinced that to continue with the current energy model would inevitably lead to dramatic developments not only for the future of our planet but also for international stability, the world economy and social insecurity. All the Council of Europe member states should immediately undertake resolute action to effect an energy transition which considerably reduces greenhouse gas emissions, cutting them by a quarter in industrialised countries by 2050.

5. This requires the construction of a developmental model that is very different from the current one. We must review our modes of energy production and of energy use and we need to adopt effective measures to cut the use of fossil fuels, to save energy and to develop alternative energies.

6. On this issue, states must support these new ambitions. Sharing technology and market mechanisms not only ensures energy efficiency but also encourages the involvement of emerging economies and transition countries in the necessary changes.

7. The Congress considers the efficient use of energy as a genuine and cost-effective use of resources, because it provides one of the less costly means of cutting greenhouse gases and contributes to promoting sustainable and secure energy supplies. Heavy investment in energy efficiency will also help develop a low-carbon economy and stimulate the emergence of new fields of economic activity.

8. Furthermore, the Congress believes that, for all the technological progress made since Recommendation 161 (2005)

on local and regional authorities and renewable energy sources, these forms of energy – which are naturally available across the globe – are still being overlooked in favour of energy types which are more cost-effective in the short term but more costly for the environment. Renewable forms of energy are now being used in more appropriate and economically viable ways in a multitude of fields. It is for the state and local and regional authorities to encourage their introduction.

9. The Congress welcomes the European Union's ambitious policy in the field of energy and the environment. The strict objectives for sources of renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction provide an example for the international community and non-member states. It also welcomes the recognition of the prominent role played by towns and cities in attaining energy goals and the European Union "Covenant of Mayors" initiative backing the mobilisation of numerous local authorities and their networks.

10. Local and regional authorities are central to combating climate change and they play a strategic role in developing a new energy culture. They are currently the ideal organisations to implement new ideas and innovative projects geared to combating global warming, preventing the exhaustion of fossil fuel resources and ensuring a sustainable energy future for the next generations.

11. Towns, cities and regions – together with their inhabitants and local stakeholders – should become frontline operators in implementing energy policies. States must support them in this effort to promote energy efficiency by assigning them the necessary powers and resources to play their role effectively, in accordance with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

12. Furthermore, while the Congress is convinced that such policies must be implemented on the ground at the local and regional levels, backed by the whole population, states must nonetheless set an example through exemplary policies in their own buildings, purchases, transport fleets and waste processing methods.

13. The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe invite the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT) to take account of the energy challenge in its spatial planning and management policies and to include energy efficiency and climate change issues in its recommendations.

14. Consequently, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to ask member states to:

a. implement ambitious national action plans for energy efficiency, by:

i. involving local and regional authorities and a wide range of public and private players in their formulation, elaboration and implementation;

ii. setting specific sectoral objectives in order to facilitate assessment;

b. adopt national legislation to take more account of the importance of energy efficiency and the role of local and regional authorities, by:

i. introducing incentives to improve energy efficiency at all levels and to reduce energy bills for households, public administrations and industry;

ii. facilitating the introduction of modern financial instruments to improve energy efficiency;

iii. harmonising legislation and legal regulations in accordance with the highest standards, for example those currently of the European Union;

iv. increasing the autonomy of local and regional authorities, where this has not already been done, and reinforcing their capacity for effective action by granting them the appropriate powers and sustainable financial resources required to reduce vulnerability in their areas;

c. encourage investment and increase research into technological developments aimed at energy efficiency and the expansion of renewable forms of energy;

d. back these efforts with strong, sustained initiatives which inform and raise awareness of the issues and of the need for all citizens to participate in the measures adopted;

e. promote a “demand” culture, particularly in countries dominated by a traditional “supply” monoculture; this is a priority precondition for improving energy efficiency, calling for education and awareness-raising at all levels;

f. develop affordable and sustainable energy services;

g. implement an exemplary policy of energy efficiency in their administrations, departments and buildings;

h. develop and promote co-operation in the field of energy provision and energy supply security;

i. attach appropriate importance to the human factor, because the requisite changes call for the emergence and development of new competencies on the ground, geared to promoting the new energy culture and facilitating policy reorientation.

15. The Congress also recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe invite the European Union to:

a. pursue an integrated European energy and climate change policy with the ambitious aims of reducing greenhouse gases, significantly increasing energy efficiency and strongly encouraging renewable forms of energy;

b. support the action of local and regional authorities and their associations, facilitate their access to funding for innovative projects and support interterritorial exchanges of know-how and optimum exploitation of successful experiences.

16. The Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to continue its action to ensure that national parliaments harmonise their legislation and regulations on energy issues, particularly in terms of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(15)13REC, draft recommendation presented by O. Luk'ianchenko (Ukraine, L, EPP/CD) and M. Spinosa (Italy, R, SOC), rapporteurs).