

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 158 (2004)¹ on the challenges for regionalisation in South-east Europe

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Regions,

1. Recalling its Recommendation 65 (1999) on the current state of and prospects for regionalisation in Europe and its Recommendation 99 (2001) on international co-operation at regional level;
2. Having regard to its Recommendation 156 (2004) on the “Council of Europe Convention on Regional Self-Government – progress of the draft” and its Resolutions 146 (2002) and 161 (2003) on progress in intergovernmental efforts for the adoption of a Council of Europe convention on regional self-government;
3. Bearing in mind the Chişinău political declaration on transfrontier and inter-territorial co-operation between states in South-eastern Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at its 113th Session in November 2003 and its Recommendation 112 (2002) on the Forums of Cities and Regions of South-eastern Europe;
4. Referring to the many statements made by the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament in favour of regionalisation and transfrontier co-operation;
5. Having examined the report by Carlo Andreotti (Italy, R, EPP/CD) on the challenges for regionalisation in South-east Europe;
6. Considering that there is a current trend towards greater regionalisation in many Council of Europe member states and that there are numerous encouraging developments regarding decentralisation in several countries;
7. Stressing the advantages of regionalisation, which is one of the most important means of addressing the political development challenges in Europe and which makes it possible to take greater account of the particular territorial features of each state and to respond more appropriately to the inhabitants’ aspirations;
8. Considering that the regionalisation experience of European countries provides important examples, acting as an impetus for future administrative developments in South-east Europe;
9. Convinced that:
 - a. the promotion, establishment and strengthening of genuine regional democracy constitute one of the key factors in the political stabilisation process and are an

essential pre-condition for the development of regions in South-east Europe;

b. the regional context is one of the most important in the democratic life of every country and that the regional level should be given sufficient responsibilities to enable it to fulfil the tasks with which it has been entrusted;

c. the setting up of regional structures offers the most appropriate basis for the decentralised allocation of financial resources;

d. South-east Europe needs above all efficient action to enable it to carry out the necessary territorial reforms, develop institutional capabilities and set up management structures which are most suited to the regional level;

10. Bearing in mind that in South-east Europe, regionalisation is still frequently perceived as posing a threat to territorial integrity and not as an essential precondition for successful democratic development;

11. Having regard to the fact that regionalisation is a process designed to strengthen rather than weaken a country’s management;

12. Convinced that regionalisation implemented at the appropriate time and in consultation with the regions’ inhabitants can be a political means of preventing social and cultural tension and indeed conflicts within states;

13. Believing that promoting autonomy and the process of territorial sub-division should foster coexistence between different ethnic groups within a region and country and improve inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations;

14. Considering that:

a. the regional level is appropriate for incorporating the various specific actions required to implement political, cultural and socioeconomic development projects enabling the key issues of the moment to be identified more easily;

b. regions are the best placed to co-ordinate and oversee the necessary activities at horizontal level together with other regions within the same country or in the framework of transfrontier co-operation;

15. Convinced that:

a. the promotion of interregional and transfrontier co-operation is one of the fundamental requirements and essential objectives of European policy, both at the level of the Community and the Council of Europe;

b. such co-operation is an important instrument in the stabilisation and democratic development of South-east Europe and a means of strengthening the perception of links and interdependence between populations on both sides of a border;

16. Wishing to develop a social consensus in the countries of South-east Europe on political implementation of decentralisation in the organisation of the state;

17. Recalling that the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) has completed the

preparation of a draft convention on regional self-government and a draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on regional autonomy, which it has transmitted to the Committee of Ministers;

18. Considering that in the light of its programmes for South-east Europe, the European Union and the Council of Europe play an important role in supporting the process of the territorial and administrative reorganisation of the region;

19. Recommends that member states:

a. create the right conditions for regionalisation and decentralisation to develop effectively and constructively in the countries of South-east Europe, and eliminate the legal and administrative barriers obstructing regionalisation;

b. encourage the regions of South-east Europe to draw on the positive experiences of regionalisation in certain countries where regionalisation has been a significant factor in improving national cohesion and draw up specific ways and means of ensuring a more effective transfer of such experience;

c. define in the most appropriate way the regions' relations with central authorities, local authorities and international organisations liable to have an impact on the functioning of the regional level;

d. ensure that an effective policy vis-à-vis the regions of the countries of South-east Europe is pursued, in particular the strengthening of the regions' decision-making powers, the effective development of institutions and the training of executive staff;

e. support the speedy adoption by the Council of Europe of a European charter of regional self-government in the form of an international convention which, once adopted, should serve as a basis for the reorganisation of territorial administration of the countries of South-east Europe;

f. promote transfrontier co-operation in South-east Europe and support initiatives in this field for the setting up of structured forms of transfrontier co-operation, such as Euroregions;

g. support the interest shown by the countries of South-east Europe and neighbouring states in expanding the legal framework of their transfrontier co-operation in order to draw up and conclude appropriate inter-state agreements in the implementation of the Council of Europe Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities;

h. set up corresponding structures, invested with adequate powers, in order to exert sustained, effective and lasting influence on the situation in the border regions concerned so as to overcome the internal and external obstacles to transfrontier co-operation in South-east Europe, and carry out activities related to such co-operation;

i. support the promotion of interregional associations and networks in the countries of South-east Europe, so as to

improve co-operation and exchanges of experience, and in this way, to help disseminate and implement the concept of regionalisation as it exists today in other parts of Europe and to contribute to the political and democratic stability of the region;

j. work, within the various European, and particularly Community, bodies to promote support for regionalisation and decentralisation in South-east Europe;

20. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

a. draw up European policies and actions to improve the situation in the field of regionalisation and decentralisation by lending particular support to the regions of South-east Europe;

b. incorporate in its programme of intergovernmental activities the regional dimension, in particular specific studies on regionalisation in South-east Europe and on the experiences and assistance which could be provided by the member states;

c. make appropriate provision, in its programmes of specific assistance to the countries of South-east Europe, for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to enable it, in pursuance of its responsibilities, to contribute to the setting up and functioning of regional democratic structures in these countries;

d. to encourage the governments of the South-eastern European countries:

i. to continue their efforts in implementing the principle of subsidiarity by appropriate initiatives and measures promoting decentralisation and the creation of democratic regional self-government structures;

ii. to develop further decentralised transborder co-operation and to examine the possibility for concluding a multilateral agreement providing a legal framework for transfrontier co-operation between local and regional authorities, as suggested in Recommendation 112 (2002) of the Congress;

iii. to continue their informal ministerial meetings for moving forward in their preparation for European integration and regionalisation in their countries;

21. Calls on the European Union:

a. to support with its different development programmes the implementation of the subsidiarity principle and policies for decentralisation and regionalisation, in particular through the joint programmes with the Council of Europe;

b. to promote and reinforce the need in the countries of South-east Europe for an effective, operational and fully democratic regional territorial system;

c. to continue to promote regionalisation as a key factor in democratic stability and national and regional socioeconomic development;

d. to involve the regions of South-east Europe closely in the implementation of its transnational and interregional co-operation programmes and to support transnational contacts with a view to setting up new co-operation projects;

e. to ensure that, following its enlargement, the new land and sea borders laid down by the Schengen Agreements do not become insurmountable dividing lines and new obstacles for close co-operation and partnerships between democratic states;

f. to extend the new neighbourhood programmes to the countries of South-east Europe that are now or will in future be on the borders of the European Union;

g. to promote without delay the new instrument proposed by the European Commission for increasing the number of Euroregions, in accordance with Opinion 24 (2004) on the Committee of the Regions' draft outlook report on "A new

legal instrument for cross-border co-operation" adopted by the Congress at its 11th Plenary Session;

h. to make full use of the South-Eastern Europe Regional Ministerial Conference on Effective Democratic Governance at Local and Regional Level (25-26 October, Zagreb, Croatia), organised jointly by the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the Council of Europe, to promote co-operation and decentralisation in South-east Europe;

22. Calls on the Committee of the Regions to join with the Congress in organising in 2005 a further Forum of Cities and Regions of South-Eastern Europe with a view to promoting co-operation between them beyond the boundaries of the European Union.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 4 November 2004 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 5 November 2004, (see document CPR (11) 6, draft recommendation presented by C. Andreotti (Italy, R, EPP/CD) rapporteur).