

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 457 (2021)¹ Territorial solidarity: the role regions can play

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

a. Article 3.1, Article 4.6 and Article 9 (in particular its paragraph 5) of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, hereinafter “the Charter”);

b. the Contemporary commentary by the Congress on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted on 7 December 2020 by the Statutory Forum of the Congress;

c. Congress Recommendation 455 (2021) on recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring and election observation missions (reference period 2017-2020);

d. the Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026, in particular priority *a*: resilient societies: effective local and regional responses to public health crises; and priority *c*: cohesive societies: reducing inequalities in the field;

e. Recommendation Rec(2005)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the financial resources of local and regional authorities;

f. Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the funding by higher-level authorities of new competences for local authorities;

g. Congress Recommendation 362 (2014) on adequate financial resources for local authorities;

h. Congress Recommendation 427 (2018) “Coping with the debt burden: local authorities in financial difficulty”;

i. Congress Recommendation 438 (2019) “Fair distribution of taxes in transfrontier areas: potential conflicts and possibilities for compromise”;

j. the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 10 “Reduced inequalities” and Goal 16 “Peace, justice and strong institutions”.

2. The Congress points out that:

a. States are facing different challenges of a social, economic and environmental nature, which are affecting the traditional economic and social ties between and within regions. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of these

challenges, particularly with regard to public healthcare systems and with economic repercussions impacting many European regions and their subdivisions unequally. The need for better territorial cohesion and greater territorial solidarity is therefore becoming more critical than ever, most notably between the central and peripheral regions;

b. while national governments have seen their scope of action reduced due to economic difficulties, the increasing role of the European Union and decentralisation, the redistribution of services and financial resources between regions can contribute to territorial development. In order to tackle these new challenges, it is necessary to promote new methods by redefining the core sovereign powers of States and strengthening their role in areas such as security and financial equalisation, while at the same time expanding the role of regional and local authorities in grass-roots policy areas such as transport, healthcare, education and the environment;

c. in this context, regions play a crucial role as the intermediary between national and local levels in reducing territorial disparities by pursuing a wide range of (re-)distributive policies, in cooperation with various players at the sub-State and supranational levels. By using new instruments of equalisation, the regional powers can effectively address the challenges that different territories are facing today in order to ensure a greater level of territorial solidarity within the regions.

3. In light of the above, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers invite the respective national authorities of member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. involve regions in the policies of territorial solidarity by delegating part of the competences to the regional authorities in order to implement tailored financial equalisation procedures or equivalent measures as the conventional method of assistance for weaker territories, in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and notably the provisions contained in Article 9;

b. protect financially weaker territories by introducing a system of financial support for specific local and regional authorities under certain conditions, through financial equalisation procedures based on clear and transparent criteria as provided in Article 9.5 of the Charter;

c. promote policies of territorial solidarity by consulting with local and regional authorities, as provided in Article 4.6 of the Charter in conjunction with Article 9.6, namely on common visions of territorial solidarity and the best strategies for achieving greater territorial solidarity between and within regions, putting into perspective interdependence and co-operation between the various territories;

d. support the strengthening of regions’ capacities to devise and implement territorial solidarity measures to bridge gaps in wealth and access to public services between and within territories, thus laying the foundations for a sustainable model of development;

e. call on member States which made a reservation to Article 9.5 to ratify this provision where its application is relevant.

1. Approved by the Chamber of Regions on 16 June 2021 and adopted by the Congress on 17 June 2021, 3rd sitting (see Document CPR(2021)40-05, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Harald SONDEREGGER, Austria (R, EPP/CCE).

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and the explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to Council of Europe member States.