

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 263 (2008)¹ Responsible consumption and solidarity-based finance

1. The “Revised strategy for social cohesion” of the Council of Europe defines social cohesion as “the capacity of society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation”, and emphasises that all stakeholders in society share responsibility for its attainment.²

2. Likewise, the report of the High-level Task Force on Social Cohesion in the 21st Century recommends that the Council of Europe commit itself to “building a Europe of responsibilities that are both shared and social” by taking, *inter alia*, action to increase citizens’ sense of social responsibility “especially in their employment, consumption and investment patterns and life styles”.

3. Resolution 226 (2007) of the Congress on the development of social cohesion indicators – the concerted local and regional approach, moreover defines “social cohesion areas” as municipalities or regions where public and private stakeholders, including citizens themselves, seek solutions and undertake to respond together to expectations in terms of well-being for all, on the basis of indicators devised in consultation with the citizens and of shared responsibilities defined by common consent.

4. The Council of Europe and the Congress regard responsible consumption and solidarity-based saving as essential forms of expression of shared social responsibility, in which all the stakeholders in society – public authorities, citizens, businesses, institutions, etc. – are concerned.

5. The Congress considers that public authorities and citizens can involve themselves in social cohesion by creating an ethical economy and new forms of solidarity. Thus, practices determined by lifestyles, choices of consumption and savings options are seen to develop, typified by an effort to incorporate values that have a positive social component into individual and communal economic behaviour patterns.

6. The Congress is convinced that municipalities and regions should send out a strong signal to the community in this respect, particularly through their procurement policies, by facilitating the processes of information and consultation and by acting to support people who are economically vulnerable or in difficult circumstances.

7. Accordingly, the Congress calls upon the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member states to:

a. set an example by becoming responsible consumers on their own territory and, in particular, by:

i. offering, within their organisations and the establishments under their responsibility (for example schools, hospitals, retirement homes), products meeting ethical criteria;

ii. encouraging local businesses to develop responsible consumption and a responsible economy, for example through:

– an appeal to corporate ethical values and the introduction of social clauses into public contracts with regard to their terms of award and/or performance, while facilitating the application of such practices through links between businesses, integration mechanisms and local and regional authorities;

– the introduction of social responsibility as a condition for the award of official subsidies to businesses, under mutually binding contracts stipulating the number of jobs to be created, with the obligation to refund subsidies (or convert them into loans) in the event of early suppression of jobs or total or partial relocation;

– mutual arrangements for smaller authorities’ procurement activities, through common buying consortia that include social (and environmental) clauses in their calls for tenders;

– assistance for small firms so that they can participate in public contracts through “apportionments”, that is, splitting up part of the contract to support local activity and, in this context, developing instructional material (guides) for these firms to use;

– incentives to all forms of collective organisation of local businesses to promote their social responsibility and responsible consumption (local labels, common advisory and monitoring services, public information, etc.);

b. make responsible consumption a vehicle for creating jobs and synergies between players, for example by:

i. reducing distances between producer and consumer, particularly by providing arable land and premises;

ii. supporting to forums for exchanging and recycling services and second-hand items and for employing little-used skills, such as Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), time banks and skills marts;

iii. offering incentives to forms of collective savings reinvested according to ethical criteria in the creation of economic activities and jobs at local level;

c. encourage citizens to take a responsible attitude in their activities (working and recreational), in particular by:

i. offering facilities for information on goods and services, exchanges or participative democracy practices enabling the making of informed choices;

ii. ensuring visibility for the fair-trade, solidarity-based local market, for example through publication on the Internet of the entire local output with social value added;

iii. promoting all collective forms of responsible consumption and their networking;

d. promote solidarity towards the more vulnerable and their access to responsible consumption, for example by:

i. setting up solidarity food-stores, with subsidised jobs and premises provided, to bring the cost of food within the reach of people living below the poverty line;

ii. supporting local solidarity funds to help the most disadvantaged people attain responsible consumption;

iii. developing microloans, and microcredit generally, for persons excluded from the conventional banking circuits,

through partnerships with professionals and, if necessary, social support measures for the beneficiaries;

e. help stakeholders to co-operate based on common ethical principles, in particular by:

i. setting up regional ethical committees involving all stakeholders: associations of local authorities, consumers, employers and trade unions, NGOs;

ii. preparing charters of the social responsibilities shared among the various stakeholders involved in a given territory.

8. Lastly, the Congress asks its Committee on Social Cohesion to complement this work with a study of the prevention of irresponsible consumption as exemplified by lifestyles causing obesity, abuse of medicines, excessive television viewing and over-indebtedness.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(15)14RES, draft resolution presented by P. Dee (United Kingdom, L, ILDG), rapporteur).

2. This definition is taken from the report of the High-level Task Force on Social Cohesion in the 21st Century: "Towards an active, fair and socially cohesive Europe" (November 2007).