

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 246 (2008)¹ Social approach to the fight against racism at local and regional level

1. States and regional and international intergovernmental organisations are under a legal and political obligation to combat racism. The fulfilment of this obligation makes it possible to ensure cohesion in the community by fully exploiting the benefits of diversity.

2. At the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Warsaw, in May 2005, member states firmly condemned all forms of intolerance and discrimination and proclaimed their determination to continue establishing effective rules and mechanisms for preventing and eliminating such problems.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has shown a particular interest in Roma and migrants, two of the groups targeted by racism, and is considering ways and means of combating racism at local and regional level. This commitment coincides with the Council of Europe's new anti-discrimination campaign.

4. It is towns and regions which most frequently have to deal with the reality of racism. Local and regional authorities, which are closest to the grass roots, have a degree of autonomy, resources and networks of assistance and solidarity that enable them to launch initiatives which can prove effective in combating racism on the ground.

5. Acknowledging the major contribution that the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe (ECRI) makes in this field, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe urge member states:

a. to ensure that existing anti-discrimination laws are implemented, including at local level, and to strengthen their mechanisms for preventing racism;

b. to give local and regional authorities the means in terms of powers and financial resources to enable them to develop comprehensive strategies for countering racism and discrimination and the ensuing inequalities;

c. to help organisations involved in combating racism to acquire the skills they need to take an effective part in local and regional consultation arrangements;

d. to maintain their vigilance to ensure that political speeches do not incite racial hatred, in keeping with Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on "hate speech", and that all authorities, including the judicial authorities, at all levels – national, regional and local – take full account of the anti-racist message;

e. to implement an active awareness-raising policy with a view to promoting a spirit of tolerance and rejection of racism and discrimination within society;

f. to ensure the participation of national minorities in political life at local and regional level; local and regional authorities should guarantee access for all to political and civil rights, notably the right to vote and to stand in elections.

6. The Congress also recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage those member states that have not already done so to sign and/or ratify the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144 – 1992) as soon as possible and to accept Chapter C, which stipulates that every foreign resident should be granted the right to vote and to stand for election in local authority elections.

7. Finally, it invites the European Commission to safeguard the fundamental rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers through the common immigration policy.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(15)16REC, draft recommendation presented by S. Batson (United Kingdom, R, SOC) and V. Rogov (Russian Federation, L, ILDG), rapporteurs).