

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 264 (2008)¹ Social approach to the fight against racism at local and regional level

1. European towns and regions are confronted with all sorts of racism, from violence and hate crimes to more subtle forms of racial or ethnic discrimination. The targets of this everyday racism may be ethnic minorities that have a long history within the country in question, immigrants or groups that have a connection with the country's colonial history.

2. Despite the progress made in terms of legislation and policies, public authorities need to be more vigilant and to take a proactive approach.

3. Observing that the overall picture as regards contemporary forms of racism and racial discrimination is complex and worrying, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe (ECRI) has called for additional measures at local level, particularly in its General Policy Recommendation No. 7 (13 December 2002) on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination.

4. The Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144), which was opened for signature in 1992 and has, to date, been signed by 13 and ratified by 8 of the 47 member states, seeks to promote an integrated society that involves all citizens in local decision-making procedures. The convention requires, for example, that foreign residents be given the right to vote and stand for election in local elections.

5. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe reaffirms that all citizens, including those belonging to minorities, must be able to exercise their civil and political rights fully, in particular the right to vote and stand for election in local elections. It also seeks to promote intercultural dialogue and reiterates its commitment to promoting equal treatment for all, integrating all members of the community and preventing racism and discrimination in a visible and concrete manner.

6. Local and regional authorities have the means to achieve these aims through their various roles as employers and providers of services, when awarding public procurement contracts and as providers of funds for local and regional non-governmental organisations and, sometimes, as law makers. They can therefore set an example and send out strong messages both to those targeted by racists and to other local and regional players.

7. In view of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member states to

continue taking active steps to combat all forms of racism, in particular:

a. by ensuring that the relevant international rules and national laws are applied at local and regional level;

b. by developing strategies in their different spheres of expertise; this includes:

i. the framing and implementation of comprehensive action plans and programmes, based on the analysis of local and regional needs, and the testing of any existing equality policies (for example, by testing employers' reactions to job applications from candidates with foreign-sounding names);

ii. the implementation of these action plans through specific measures in the following fields:

– antidiscrimination committees and/or ombudspersons: by giving political responsibility for drawing up, analysing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing local and regional programmes and policies for promoting equality and combating discrimination to a local and/or regional committee on which there is an ombudsperson responsible for dealing with complaints;

– provision of services: by providing services (in particular social services, health care, child care, schools, care for the elderly and for people with disabilities, policing and housing) in which there is no direct or indirect discrimination, by taking account of this criterion in the career progression of those responsible and by severely punishing racist and discriminatory behaviour;

– employment: by ensuring that local and regional government employees to some degree reflect the diversity of the local and regional population;

– public procurement contracts: by introducing an anti-discrimination clause in public contracts, stipulating that the contract may be cancelled if there is any failure to comply with this requirement, and by refusing to work with service providers (for example banks or insurance companies) that practise discrimination;

– subsidies: by granting subsidies to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) only on condition that they abide by the authorities' anti-discrimination policy;

– permits: by making the granting of permits/licences (for the sale of alcohol, for example) subject to anti-discrimination conditions, with the possibility of withdrawing the permit in the event of discriminatory practices;

– education: by increasing pupils' awareness of one another's cultures and by taking the anti-racist message to schools and by teaching about the country's history of racism and discrimination;

– civil society: by providing effective support to anti-racist networks and networks of local and regional players combating racism, for example NGO-run anti-discrimination bureaux, so that they can set up awareness-raising,

information and training programmes and contribute to cultural events celebrating diversity;

iii. the evaluation, monitoring and review of local and regional action plans and programmes and provision of the necessary resources;

iv. the involvement of NGOs which represent the targets and victims of racism in the entire process and assistance in developing their skills and ability to co-operate with local and regional authorities;

c. by including in their analyses and action plans the 10 points adopted by the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism,² launched by UNESCO, in the fields of prevention and positive action, monitoring and vigilance, participation in the decision-making process, mediation and punishment, and by becoming a member of the coalition;

d. by ensuring that “integration” measures, including criteria such as knowledge of the national language, do not discriminate against particular communities and do not, in the long run, lead to their exclusion (for example, through their being denied social benefits).

8. Finally, the Congress, stressing the need for towns and cities to combine their efforts, will closely follow the activities of the European Coalition of Cities against Racism and seek appropriate ways of strengthening co-operation between the two organisations.

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

2. www.unesco.org/shs/citiesagainstracism.