

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 296 (2010)¹ Sustainable development of mountain regions and the experience of the Carpathian Mountains

1. The importance of mountain areas in the European landscape is often undervalued. They are important homes of natural and cultural heritage and they also provide crucial ecosystem services for the entire population. Their economic development is a priority that requires actions compatible with the protection and respect for the environment.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe reiterates its commitment to an integrated and specific approach to the development of mountain regions which are facing particular structural challenges, notably in environment, transport and socio-economic development. It reaffirms the principles contained in the draft European charter for mountains.²

3. It also recalls that regional authorities should be mobilised into undertaking an active role in the management of the mountain massif. An integrated sustainable development strategy is required to conserve these European regions' natural resources in the face of such problems as pollution, unplanned development and the unsustainable use of natural resources.

4. Strategies for the development of mountains need to have social cohesion at their heart to meet the challenges posed, in particular, by high unemployment, depopulation and population ageing. Respecting and preserving the cultural heritage and linguistic diversity of mountain populations also needs to be taken into consideration.

5. A perspective of territorial cohesion needs to be brought to these integrated policies, with a need to renew multilevel governance and to reinforce co-operation between different levels of governance – international, national, regional and local. Territorial cohesion will be strengthened through co-operation and solidarity links between towns, peri-urban zones and rural areas in mountain regions.

6. Furthermore, as almost all Europe's mountain regions have transnational boundaries, these policies should take into account the entire massif and should be implemented at macro-regional and international levels.

7. The Carpathian mountain range covers seven countries.³ It is home to 16 million people and possesses exceptional natural and cultural wealth. This region faces particular environmental and socio-economic challenges which are exacerbated by the isolation of the region. Indeed, some parts of the Carpathian mountains are border areas which are poorly connected to urban centres in the lowlands. The

total population and area are comparable to other European mountain regions and the position of the region is strategic within the European continent. Therefore, the Carpathians should receive much more attention and appropriate support from the European Union.

8. The Congress congratulates the signatory member states of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) for the work already achieved and the steps that have already been taken towards the conservation and sustainable development of the mountain range, through initiatives such as the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA).

9. Nevertheless, the Congress is convinced of the important role that local and regional authorities have to play in the implementation of the Carpathian Convention. It calls, in respect of the principle of subsidiarity and of multilevel governance, for the better integration of local and regional authorities from the very definition of projects.

10. The Congress fully supports the call of the Ministerial Declaration⁴ for the creation of a stand-alone "Carpathian Space" within the European Territorial Cooperation Programme, such as exists for the "Alpine Space", to support the general objectives of the Carpathian Convention and of other stakeholders engaged in the region. Indeed, the Alpine Space Programme has given rise to many projects, networks and mechanisms relating to territorial spatial development and the economic development of the Alpine regions. The experience and knowledge gained from this programme could be of direct benefit to the Carpathians.

11. The Congress also welcomes the consultation process currently underway for a European Union strategy for the Danube region and believes that a chapter of the strategy should be devoted to the Carpathian region. Local and regional authorities should be mobilised to take an active role in the implementation of this strategy bringing it to the level closest to citizens.

12. Consequently, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe ask member states, in particular, member states from the Carpathian region to:

a. integrate sustainable development in mountain regions into national and regional policy-making and development strategies through mountain-specific policies and involving local and regional authorities in their design and implementation;

b. recognise that for mountain-specific policies to be effective they have to be applied throughout the massif and in a transversal manner. High-level meetings, involving various ministers (environment, social cohesion, regional planning, energy, for example), as well as local and regional authorities and civil society should be organised to co-ordinate macro-regional actions in the massif;

c. ensure that the management and implementation of special policies and programmes for mountain regions are carried out in the most decentralised manner possible and

that the powers and financial resources of local and regional authorities are strengthened in order to promote these policies;

d. sign and ratify Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (CETS No. 206) in order to actively encourage transfrontier co-operation and to enable local and regional authorities to enter into agreements and develop concrete actions;⁵

e. improve the sustainable development and management of mountain regions through appropriate policies which respect the “polluter pays” principle and promote the use of renewable energy, the creation of sustainable tourism and sustainable forest management.

13. The Congress also urges the member States signatory to the Carpathian Convention to increase the participation of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the convention.

14. The Congress furthermore invites the European Union to:

a. pay particular attention to the challenges faced by the Carpathians in the forthcoming EU strategy for the Danube region and ensure the involvement of local and regional authorities and their citizens;

b. create a “Carpathian Space” in the European Territorial Cooperation Programme to support the objectives and implementation of the Carpathian Convention throughout the entire massif, including in countries that are not members of the European Union.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 26 October 2010 and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2010, 3rd Sitting (see Document [CPR\(19\)2](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: M. Kichkovskyy, Ukraine (R, EPP/CD).

2. Recommendation 130 (2003) on the European Charter for Mountains.
3. Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

4. Ministerial Declaration from the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (17-19 June 2008, Bucharest, Romania).

5. Recommendation Rec(2005)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and interterritorial co-operation between territorial communities or authorities.