

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 250 (2008)¹ The need for regional cultural identity

1. Regional cultural identities are a natural and necessary counterweight to worldwide movements towards economic and cultural integration, commonly known as globalisation. European regions and Europe as a whole have a fundamental interest in promoting regional cultural identities, since these form the bedrock of Europe's cultural diversity.

2. National governments have a responsibility towards regions to make it possible for them, by giving them the necessary space and instruments, to form and to promote their identity. At the same time that identity is promoted and developed at the regional level, it should be the object of continual evaluation by the region itself. Whereas many regions have a strong, historically-based and lively identity, others have an identity that is relatively weak. This can contribute to social dislocation, since the degree of development of identity directly affects the social integration of a region. Strong regional identities need not detract from the strength of a national identity. On the contrary, the national identity has to be sufficiently open and flexible to incorporate and accommodate the specific characteristics of the regions that make up the state.

3. In promoting identity, a balance needs to be found. The regions themselves bear the main responsibility for preserving a sufficient degree of openness. They need to recognise the presence of different cultural groups on their territory and the contribution that these groups make to the region's identity, including those who are perceived as recent arrivals and temporary residents. Governments should help regions to face the challenge of developing inclusive identities.

4. Language is a key element in identity. Where regional and minority languages are actively supported and promoted, they make an important contribution to the unique and special character of a region. A sense of place is also a vital element in identity formation; landscape and heritage, the natural and built environment deserve to be treated accordingly.

5. Because of their unique characters, regional identities have a natural tendency to define themselves in relation to each other and, often for historical reasons, are not automatically attracted to each other. The Council of Europe needs to develop instruments to ensure the compatibility and positive interaction of individual regional identities. This includes awareness-raising activities, such as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and promotional

measures to acquire and improve intercultural communication capacity.

6. In the light of the above, the Congress,

a. bearing in mind its previous work on the cultural policies of European regions, in particular the Florence Declaration "Culture and regions: cultural action in the regional context" (May 1987), adopted by the Council for Cultural Cooperation and the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe on 16 May 1987, and the 6th Economic Forum of the Regions of Europe (Weimar, 3-4 May 1999) on culture as an economic factor;

b. bearing in mind the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (to be adopted at the May 2008 session of the Committee of Ministers);

c. convinced of the value of strong regional identities for the well-being of regional populations and for the social and economic development of regions;

d. convinced of the need to develop regional identities which are inclusive of all social, ethnic and cultural groups;

e. believing that the diversity and cultural heritage of their populations are among a region's key assets,

7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage member states to:

a. recognise the importance of strong regional cultural identities for the political stability and prosperity of regions, for the creativity, vitality and the well-being of their citizens, for successful integration into the national arena and for achieving a balanced policy towards all the regions of the country;

b. recognise that strong inclusive regions, which have succeeded in encouraging citizens of diverse origins to identify with and to be identified with their region, demonstrate a capacity for innovation and are able to use the resources and skills of their population, using the cultural diversity and creativity of their populations to raise the attractiveness and bring a strong competitive edge to the region;

c. ensure that regions have sufficient means at their disposal for forging strong identities, which are at the same time inclusive and sensitive to all the groups on their territories, and pay proper attention to the principles of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the protection of minorities and respect for their cultural rights, remaining aware of the dangers of ethnocentrism;

d. ensure that state cultural administrators are sufficiently trained in the complex nature of identity formation, so that they can avoid the pitfalls and dangers of exclusion and alienation and be aware of the risks;

e. ensure that civil servants with regional responsibilities receive special training, before taking up their duties, in relation to the specific cultural identity of the region in which they will be working;

f. encourage public regional media to contribute to the positive development of regional identities and take steps to ensure that these have adequate support;

g. recognise the importance of language for cultural identity, urge those member states which have not yet done so to ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional

or Minority Languages and promote the use of regional languages by the administrations of the regions concerned.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 28 May 2008 and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPR(15)4REC, draft recommendation presented by K.-H. Lambertz (Belgium, R, SOC), rapporteur).