

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 286 (2009)¹ Transfrontier co-operation in Europe

1. Transfrontier co-operation between local and regional authorities is an important part of the Council of Europe's work to promote democratic stability and good neighbourliness between states and regions and thus the Organisation's values of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, including minorities' rights, and the safeguard of cultural diversity. Transfrontier co-operation is a key political task for the Council of Europe that needs to be implemented at regional and local level in partnership with the national bodies in each area.

2. Since the Congress' last report on the subject,² the state of transfrontier co-operation in Europe has changed decisively. Efforts towards cross-border co-operation have been intensified considerably; the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation Rec(2005)2 on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and international co-operation between territorial communities or authorities; the Matching Opportunities for Regions in Europe (MORE) project was set up to assist local and regional authorities in their transfrontier co-operation plans; the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 1829 (2008) on transfrontier co-operation; and the Congress launched two euroregions.

3. Organised and implemented by local and regional authorities, transfrontier co-operation is exercised by those authorities closest to the citizens, in full respect of the principles of subsidiarity and partnership. Thanks to this proximity, co-operation is focused on the preoccupations of the communities, citizens and structures in these areas and can deal with the specific issues encountered by border regions.

4. The specific knowledge and competencies of other local actors, such as non-governmental organisations, local businesses, trades unions and other structures, are the foundations for transfrontier co-operation. They contribute to the socio-cultural and economic development of border regions, for example through the learning of one's neighbour's language, co-operation between schools and youth organisations, the development of business clusters, the exchange of innovative ideas, jointly funded research, and so on.

5. Borders can divide areas with a common culture just as they can divide areas with different cultures. Where cultures differ, transfrontier co-operation can bring these together within border areas, giving rise to exchanges between groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and thus contributing to social and cultural integration, mutual trust and the development of a culture of tolerance which can only be beneficial in the prevention of conflicts.

6. Europe's diversity, reflected in its social and cultural life as well as in its administrative and political structures, meets in transfrontier exchanges. These differences, which cannot be overcome through the harmonisation of national laws, can be reconciled thanks to co-operation at local and regional level across borders, thus helping to prevent cross-border conflicts and to overcome psychological barriers.

7. Transfrontier co-operation thus contributes to greater social, economic and territorial cohesion in Europe.

8. Different funding programmes from the European Union, such as the Interreg Programme, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) make an important contribution to the successful implementation of cross-border co-operation programmes.

9. As for the Congress, it is conscious that these types of co-operation offer enhanced possibilities for citizen participation due to the proximity of local and regional authorities to citizens.

10. The Congress underlines the fact that transfrontier co-operation does not require the creation of additional administrative levels but can be organised either on an ad hoc or long-term basis, based on a formal or informal agreement, with or without a specific legal status.

11. Moreover, the Congress is convinced that public-private transfrontier partnerships can contribute to the economic development of border regions. In addition, transfrontier co-operation can further European integration, the economic development of European regions, the strengthening of social and territorial cohesion and the promotion of the active participation of all citizens, as well as intercultural dialogue.

12. The Congress notes the successful results of cross-border co-operation programmes and projects which deal with problems specific to border regions, and the long-standing co-operation between other cross-border structures, such as in the Upper Rhine area. It has itself launched its own euroregional initiatives, namely the Adriatic Euroregion and the Black Sea Euroregion.

13. Bearing in mind these facts, the Congress considers transfrontier co-operation must be one of its priorities over the next ten years.

14. Thus, it instructs its Working Group on Inter-regional Co-operation to monitor the development of interterritorial, that is to say transfrontier and inter-regional, co-operation in its different forms. In particular the working group could analyse the operation and evolution of the various co-operation structures which exist, for example euroregions, as well as study specific themes, such as minorities in border areas, and transmit its findings to the relevant bodies of the Congress and/or Council of Europe as appropriate.

15. Moreover, the Congress invites local and regional authorities in the Council of Europe member states to:

a. build on historic and cultural links by engaging in cross-border co-operation so as to build bridges and trust between

all citizens and to promote intercultural dialogue and good neighbourliness between regions and states;

b. set up cross-border co-operation structures where necessary, or adhere to existing ones, for example euroregions or similar arrangements, to address the issues specific to border regions, or join forces to benefit from expertise and best practice from both sides of borders, for example in the provision of health care, emergency response structures and environmental protection;

c. help reduce disparities between regions by promoting regional economic growth through co-operation with local businesses, chambers of commerce, universities and research institutions to improve infrastructure, transport, tourism, education, research and co-operation between small and medium-sized enterprises, to open up the job market and create additional jobs in border regions through transfrontier co-operation ventures;

d. improve the mobility of European citizens by working with national governments in order to find solutions to the constraints posed by borders, such as current visa regulations, customs clearance regulations and bottlenecks at crossings;

e. promote exchanges of experts, especially with east European countries, to provide technical and administrative assistance, as well as exchanges of best practices, by ensuring the availability of adequate national and European funding for developing such exchanges.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 13 October 2009, 1st Sitting (see Document CG(17)5, explanatory memorandum presented by K.-H. Lambertz, Belgium (R, SOC), rapporteur).

2. Promoting transfrontier co-operation: an important factor of democratic stability in Europe, rapporteur: H. M. Tschudi, 2002.