

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 190 (2006)¹ on water management: a European contribution to the 4th World Water Forum

1. Water is essential to life and is the common property of all human beings. As a finite and vulnerable resource, water is indispensable for the environment and for the planet's sustainable development.

2. The water resources available at present are seriously compromised in terms of both quantity and quality, and in coming years the global water crisis will assume an unprecedented scale. Achieving sustainability, equality of access and democratic governance in water management constitutes, accordingly, one of the greatest challenges of the early 21st century.

3. The Congress is concerned that the health of the Earth's aquatic ecosystems is on the verge of breaking down, that over 1.2 billion people (nearly one in five) have no guaranteed access to drinking water, that over 2.6 billion are deprived of basic sanitation services and that waterborne diseases are the chief cause of infant mortality worldwide.

4. To meet this challenge, recognised by all international bodies, the Congress believes there is a need for a new water culture, entailing radical changes in our scales of values, our conception of our relationship with nature and even our ethical principles and lifestyles.

5. Water is by nature public property; it is not a commodity, nor is there an infinite supply of it. Because water is of social, environmental, economic and cultural value the Congress reaffirms that water management demands an integrated approach, co-ordinated cross-sectoral action and sharing of responsibility among all levels of government (local, regional and national).

6. Furthermore, water management is a highly political issue and requires the commitment of all levels of power – local government, central government, parliament, international governmental organisations – and that of scientists, heads of business, representatives of non-governmental organisations and all European citizens in general.

7. In this respect, the Congress especially welcomes the commitment to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals undertaken by the heads of state and government of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe in the Declaration and the Action Plan adopted at the Organisation's 3rd Summit (Warsaw, 17 May 2005), which recognises "everyone's entitlement to live in a balanced, healthy environment"² and the member states'

commitment to "improving the quality of life for citizens" by developing and supporting integrated policies in a "sustainable development perspective".³

8. The Congress recalls that local and regional authorities, in particular those of the European Union, will be given increasing responsibility for managing water services and resources, and the issue of water in general. In this regard, governments will be responsible for planning the action necessary to implement the existing European instruments, and for the real institutional and financial involvement of local and regional authorities, which is paramount for the management of the resource.

9. Although decentralised water management is essential, the usually transfrontier nature of river waters and catchments in Europe and elsewhere in the world requires an international response to these challenges. For this, the Congress stresses the need to foster improved co-operation in Europe, in particular across borders, at all levels of governance and to facilitate access to information, knowledge and expertise for local elected representatives and local and regional government staff.

10. In this respect, the Congress recalls the contribution of the Council of Europe through the European Charter on Water Resources adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2001, replacing the European Water Charter adopted in 1967, and the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, adopted in Madrid in 1980. The Congress also welcomes the initiative of the European Commission which, through its Water Framework Directive adopted on 23 October 2000, establishes a regulatory framework applicable in its member states to ensure integrated and sustainable management of water resources.

11. The Congress welcomes the regular holding of a World Water Forum and the theme "Local actions for a Global Challenge" of the 4th World Water Forum which took place in Mexico from 16 to 22 March 2006.

12. The Congress expresses its satisfaction with the results of the forum, in particular the place given to local and regional authorities in the debates, the ministerial conference and the corresponding declaration, which underlines the principal role of public actors, notably local and regional authorities, in meeting the challenges raised by the water issue and in improving access to safe drinking water of good quality.

13. The Congress notes with satisfaction the Parliamentary Assembly's interest in these issues and the satisfactory co-operation developed between the elected assemblies of the Council of Europe, on the occasion of the conference jointly organised on "Water management: a shared responsibility" on 20 and 21 October 2005.

14. In view of the above, the Congress recommends:

that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

a. continue the involvement of the Council of Europe in including in the work programme of the intergovernmental

sector activities promoting an integrated and sustainable water management;

b. participate in the international efforts in this field and monitor the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the 4th World Water Forum, ensuring in particular the application of the instruments of the Council of Europe related to these matters;

that the member states of the Council of Europe:

a. develop and support integrated, participative policies for managing the quantity and quality of water resources;

b. improve governance in water matters and facilitate the decentralisation of decision-making processes, in compliance with the European Water Framework Directive and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, as defined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

c. enable local and regional authorities to assume these responsibilities and therefore delegate the appropriate

powers and resources and enhance their technical, human and financial capacities.

15. The Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to:

a. pursue its efforts to draw national parliaments' attention to the need to implement appropriate legislation consistent with the principles set out above;

b. pursue and develop its co-operation with the Congress on issues of common concern regarding sustainable and integrated water management, and to this end, envisage setting up a joint working group on common strategies.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 31 May 2006, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG (13) 8, draft recommendation presented by K. Whitmore (United Kingdom, R, ILDG), rapporteur).
 2. Action Plan, IV-3.
 3. Action Plan, II-7.