

Press Release

Communication Unit of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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Congress moves with force on sustainable development issues

Malaga, Spain, 13.03.2008 – Meeting for its Spring Session in Malaga, Spain, on 13 and 14 March, the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities debated a wide range of issues underpinning sustainable development policies in Europe including sustainable consumption, adaptive capacity to climate change, urban biodiversity and services of general interest in rural areas.

The Congress stressed that the unrestrained growth in the consumption of goods and services was resulting in a growing scarcity of certain natural resources and irreversible damage to the environment, ecosystems and health. Changing collective and individual behaviour towards responsible and ethical consumption is essential to reduce the risks facing current and future populations, the Congress said, calling on local and regional authorities to implement strategies for social and environmental sustainability and ecologically-sound economic growth. Territorial authorities should encourage environmentally responsible behaviour and lifestyle among citizens and work with the private sector and associations on these issues. The Congress invited member States to review legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure that the polluter pays. They should introduce fiscal and financial incentive and disincentives and evaluate policies to ensure that environmental hazards are not merely displaced to another location.

The Congress also focused on the need to build adaptive capacity to climate change and expressed its serious concern about the inevitable impacts of climate change and that local and regional authorities are on the frontline when dealing with the consequences. It reaffirmed the need to develop, on the one hand, adaptation action plans which anticipate climate change and protect people, property and infrastructures, and on the other hand, mitigation policies to reduce greenhouse gases. The Congress emphasised the need for social equity and local and regional solidarity through cross-regional disaster-management arrangements, and cross-sectoral bodies to implement adaptation.

Maintaining services of general interest in rural areas is seen as a key factor of territorial cohesion. The Congress invited local and regional authorities to ensure that geographically disadvantaged areas and the most vulnerable populations have access to services of general interest. To do this they should make full use of the opportunities offered by information and communication technologies as well as developing multi-purpose service poles and mobile services. They should elaborate transportation systems which reduce car-dependency, improve mobility for disadvantaged or vulnerable groups and facilitate polycentric development within, between and around regions.

The Congress' work on urban biodiversity is pioneering in its emphasis on the importance of biodiversity in towns and cities. The Congress report highlight the benefits of urban biodiversity such as for climate regulation and water retention. It also provides an agreeable environment which contributes to people's cultural and geographical identity. The Congress recommended implementing master plans to promote biodiversity in urban areas involving all stakeholders, taking into account the interdependency between urban and rural areas, and promoting green and compact cities to avoid their sprawl into natural zones.

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The Congress has two chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. It brings together 318 full and 318 substitute members representing more than 200 000 European territorial communities. President of the Congress Halvdan Skard (Norway, SOC), President of the Chamber of Regions: Yavuz Milden (EPP/CD, Turkey), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities : Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD). Political Groups : Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).

The European Urban Charter II: Manifesto for a new urbanity sets out a body of common principles and concepts enabling towns and cities to meet the current challenges facing urban society. It offers citizens a new vision of towns and cities as places which celebrate diversity, creativity, innovation and sustainability. Our towns and cities should foster the greatest possible solidarity within and between themselves the Congress said.

More information: www.coe.int/congress-session

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