

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 136 (2002)¹ on the International Year of Mountains - A new political project for Europe's mountains: turning disinherited mountain areas into a resource

1. On the occasion of the International Year of Mountains, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe has adopted the following statement on the future of Europe's mountain regions with a view to providing the inhabitants of the mountains with an adequate quality of life and promote the sustainable development of mountain regions.

The Congress

2. Recalls that the draft European convention on mountain regions prepared by the CLRAE has not yet been approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The question of giving Europe's mountains a common direction to achieve sustainable development, as originally proposed by mountain local authorities, therefore remains open. Nevertheless, the Congress wishes to give value to the work prepared, during these years, on mountain regions – namely the economic, social and environmental components characterising them. Hence, it would be desirable to prepare an instrument that, even if not a convention, draws on the principles set out in the draft convention on mountain regions produced by the Congress. The Congress will endeavour to achieve this aim during the International Year of Mountains;

3. Considers that Europe cannot afford to continue relegating what millions of people and the public institutions representing them have built up in mountain areas to the fringes of the new economy and the global market. Europe's mountains therefore want to shed their traditional definition as depressed areas and present themselves as a resource in which states, regions and the European Union invest in cultural, political, and financial terms;

4. Considers that Europe's mountain regions must build the framework for an environment friendly development that meshes with the human capacity to create methods for utilising natural resources which involve adapting them to productive purposes, and learning to live with them and preserve them. A key factor here is developing the entrepreneurial capacity to create production systems that evolve in innovative technological directions;

5. Considers that the lack of proper policies on sustainable development causes the decline of these regions leading their inhabitants to desert them, with serious consequences for the ecological and social equilibrium of all the territories of greater Europe, and underlines that the decline and the abandonment of mountain regions has direct and negative consequences on the population of the plains, above all as far as water resources and natural disasters are concerned;

6. Asks all local and regional authorities of the forty-four member states of the Council of Europe to support the efforts towards the safeguarding of mountain resources for the benefit of future generations;

7. Considers as a strategic objective the legal recognition of the specific nature of mountains in the new phase of European integration in 2004 and invites the members of the Convention on the future of Europe to take into consideration this objective. Mountains should be considered as an integrating factor across the whole continent; the perspective of a specific

European Union intervention programme for mountain areas as part of the reform of the structural funds for the period 2007-2013 should be supported;

8. Given the specific nature of mountains, considers that there is a need for a body of European legislation designed also to reduce the economic and structural disadvantages affecting production and social conditions in mountain areas by comparison with other parts of the continent;

9. Also considers that these objectives will have to be coupled with legal, social and economic recognition: it is essential to have a body of European legislation that is mindful of mountain areas, gives a clear, objective and homogeneous definition of the criteria for classifying them and that fosters conditions for improving the quality of life and the provision of services in mountain regions;

10. Declares itself favourable to a forceful political initiative to release the CLRAE Convention for the Protection of the Alps (the Alpine Convention) from the deadlock, due to the signatory countries' differing interpretations of the implementing protocols by mobilising for this initiative local and regional communities of mountain regions;

11. Further intends to draw the attention of local and regional authorities of mountain areas on the possibility of launching partnership projects between mountain regions in different countries of western and eastern Europe, and declares itself ready to make its know-how available to support such projects. It is necessary to further a new co-operation between states, regions and towns that share mountain resources by building new institutions and networks. Effective cross-sectoral co-operation is needed in order to achieve a balance between development and preservation.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 6 June 2002, 3rd Sitting (see Doc. CG (9) 9, draft resolution, presented by Mr E. Borghi and Mr M. Doric, rapporteurs).