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Resolution 2285 (2019)[1]

Sustainable urban development fostering social inclusion

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Cities and towns that meet everyone's needs provide the foundations of prosperous and peaceful societies. The Council of Europe member States must use the political momentum created by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to promote their achievements, bridge the remaining gaps in building inclusive urban communities and thus fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 11 (make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable).

2. With the rapid urbanisation of our societies, it is important to make full use of the arising opportunities and to minimise the risks. Today, almost 75% of the European population lives in urban areas, and this figure is likely to edge past the 80% mark by 2050. On one hand, cities allow for economies of scale, efficient use of resources, social innovation, intercultural dialogue and solidarity. On the other hand, they generate pollution and other burdens on the environment. The influx of population puts pressure on the available space and on the job and housing markets, which can and does lead to exclusion, segregation and social unrest.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly is concerned about urban sprawl, which exerts massive pressure on the environment and undermines the quality of life in urban areas. Cities are increasingly affected by global warming, to which they are also major contributors. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, cities are responsible for 75% of global CO_2 emissions. Air pollution causes hundreds of thousands of premature deaths in Europe every year.

4. Urban development often involves addressing conflicting needs and interests and requires effective mechanisms for negotiation and decision making. The goals of economic development can, but must not, conflict with environmental protection. New arrivals to cities are often perceived as a threat to the well-being of the existing population. Failure to respond promptly to such challenges and to provide viable solutions that address everyone's concerns can lead to disenchantment with democratic institutions, actions of protest and violence.

5. In this context, the Assembly notes with concern that in many countries the public sector is reducing its role as a land owner, investor and regulating authority, which likewise reduces its capacity to shape the public space. The Assembly deplores, furthermore, the lack of transparency and accountability in existing decision making on urban development.

6. As a general rule, all key partners should join forces and build synergies. Governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities and non-governmental organisations have complementary roles and need to work closely together.

7. Global and European commitments to sustainable development should be used by the Council of Europe member States as a guiding framework and impetus for action. The Assembly expresses its full support for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the New Urban Agenda endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2016, which represents "a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future – one in which all people have equal rights and access to the benefits and opportunities that cities can offer". The Assembly recalls that the European Urban Charter II, adopted by the Congress of

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee*, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 24 May 2019 (see Doc. 14887, report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Ms Sybille Benning).

Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 2008, highlights that “towns and cities are the crossroads of civilisations”; they are meeting places, “where differences are free to interact and find expression in a spirit of mutual respect”.

8. The Council of Europe provides a unique platform for sharing good practices and setting up common standards on democratic governance at the European level through its institutions – the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of International Non-governmental Organisations – and this platform should be further strengthened.

9. The Assembly is convinced that sustainable urban development must focus on people above all, and welcomes the emergence of “Human Rights Cities”, which have adopted the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as guiding norms of governance. Sustainable development, human rights and intercultural dialogue are intrinsically connected. The city should be an incubator where these approaches nurture and mutually reinforce each other.

10. In light of the above, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:

10.1. with regard to domestic law:

10.1.1. develop and strengthen national policies and strategies for inclusive and sustainable urban development;

10.1.2. ensure that the public sector has sufficient influence and regulatory authority;

10.1.3. introduce incentives and reduce barriers for local authorities to give priority to social cohesion in their urban development projects;

10.1.4. promote human rights-based urban development to ensure that no one is left behind, and pay attention to the specific needs of children, the elderly, women, migrants and refugees, the poor and people with disabilities;

10.1.5. develop an enabling legal and institutional environment for sustainable urban development, including grass-roots initiatives;

10.1.6. promote mixed use of urban space, combining housing, employment and recreational functions, to reduce the use of transport and improve the quality of life;

10.1.7. facilitate interaction among different groups of the population through urban development planning, for example by means of quotas for social housing within large building projects;

10.1.8. support research on sustainable, inclusive and human rights-based urban development;

10.1.9. promote solidarity – within the city limits, with surrounding areas and with partner cities abroad – by means of redistribution mechanisms, “city diplomacy” and other appropriate means;

10.1.10. promote good governance in accordance with the Council of Europe’s 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance;

10.2. with regard to participation:

10.2.1. promote social dialogue and citizen participation in defining the principles of quality urban development, putting in place relevant policies, and monitoring and evaluating their implementation;

10.2.2. make full use of e-democracy tools to enable transparent and inclusive participation of the population in local governance;

10.2.3. ensure that local elections provide an effective vehicle for representing the diverse needs of the population, including those of vulnerable groups;

10.2.4. take into consideration the Committee of Ministers Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making (CM(2017)83-final) and Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 on the participation of citizens in local public life;

10.2.5. promote and use the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (Congress Recommendation 128 (2003)), the Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool and the child-friendly version of the Urban Agenda "The Cities of Our Dreams", drawn up by the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, in co-operation with other partners;

10.3. with regard to their commitments under international law:

10.3.1. adopt and promote the European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance (Congress Resolution 433 (2018));

10.4. with regard to international co-operation:

10.4.1. take part in the Council of Europe Intercultural Cities programme, which supports cities in reviewing and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies;

10.4.2. make full use of the facilities for co-operation provided by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Committee for Democracy and Governance (CDDG) and the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance;

10.4.3. take advantage of the opportunities for support provided by the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) to its member States and their local authorities through financing, technical assistance and partnerships for sustainable and inclusive growth, climate action and the integration of refugees, displaced persons and migrants;

10.4.4. take part in the Europe Prize competition, which is the highest distinction that can be bestowed on a European town for its action in the European domain.

11. The Assembly calls on national (and where appropriate regional) parliaments to:

11.1. support action to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 through the development of legislative frameworks, budgeting and democratic oversight;

11.2. reaffirm their commitment to the human rights-based approach to urban development by systematically seeking to analyse inequalities and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power;

11.3. encourage inclusive public debate and support the development of effective and transparent decision-making mechanisms for urban development.