

Strasbourg, 27 January 2011

AP/CAT (2011) 08

OPINION

**of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of
the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement
(EUR-OPA)**

on

CONGRESS RECOMMENDATION 298 (2010)

“Coastal towns and cities tackling threats from the sea”

Opinion of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)

on

Recommendation 298 (2010) of the Congress on “*Coastal towns and cities tackling threats from the sea*”

The Bureau of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement :

1. Takes note with satisfaction of the sustained interest of the Congress in addressing the effects of climate change on the vulnerability of European citizens, in particular those more at risk from rising sea levels and coastal flooding.
2. Notes that climate change is making European towns and cities more vulnerable to coastal and marine risks as the result of a combination of factors including environmental degradation, erosion, high occupation of coastal areas, rising sea levels and increased frequency of extreme events.
3. Notes that such changes need to be addressed by strong and well financed policies of risk reduction, paying particular attention to design climate-change adaptation policies in coastal areas and to improve risk governance, in particular through a greater synergy between central and local and regional authorities.
4. Notes that local and regional authorities have important competences, particularly in planning, that permit to increase the resilience of coastal towns and cities to natural hazards and calls them to exert them responsibly, notably by avoiding new developments in areas that may be affected by storms or coastal flooding.
5. Calls the attention of the Congress to the results of the 12th Ministerial Session of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) held in St Petersburg on 28 September 2010 and in particular to the new priorities set for 2011-2015, including the reduction of vulnerability from marine risks and the adoption of a specific recommendation on reducing vulnerability in the face of climate change which, among other issues, requests governments to promote the mapping of risks, paying attention to areas and regions that may become more vulnerable as a result of climate change, including coastal and urban areas.
6. Notes that the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) has a sustained interest in the resilience of coastal towns and cities, recalling the workshop held in Murcia (Spain) in October 2009 on “climate change impact on water-related and marine risks” and announcing a new event to be held in Biarritz (France) in October 2011, focused on the vulnerability of coastal ecosystems to global change and extreme events, which should help to better understand the interaction between environmental factors and risk of disasters in coastal areas.
7. Welcomes the invitation of the Congress to work on the ethical aspects of resilience to disasters, and notes that the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) has decided to continue working in that field during 2011.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



19th SESSION
26-28 October 2010

Coastal towns and cities tackling threats from the sea

Recommendation 298 (2010)¹

1. Europe's coastal populations are increasingly anxious about threats from the sea: rising sea levels, worsening of coastal flooding, growing severity of storms and increasing frequency of extreme events which are among the most serious consequences of global warming and which jeopardise the well-being and future of the populations of coastal towns and cities.

2. Many Council of Europe member states are already facing the consequences of erosion of their coastline and increased risks of flooding which would directly and indirectly affect coastal residents. Serious consequences are also to be feared for coastal infrastructures, buildings and ecosystems.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe continues to express its great concern about the growing speed of global warming and the increasing extent of its consequences. It is convinced that efforts to combat this problem must receive greater attention from policy makers and become a priority at every level of governance.

4. Coastal regions are densely populated and play a vital part in many countries' prosperity, because of their significant populations and socio-economic activities. The concentration of populations in coastal areas is steadily increasing and needs to be taken into account in adaptation policies.

5. The Congress considers that local and regional authorities have a major role to play in reacting to the specific challenges facing coastal areas. The magnitude of the predicted changes requires better anticipation and the development of a new risk culture and new governance practices. In this respect, it draws attention to its previous work on coastal management² and on building the adaptive capacity of local and regional authorities.³

6. The complexity of the problem and all the interaction involved necessitate a more strategic approach and a combination of different adaptation measures, according to the actual situation in each region. Practical implementation must be based on an interactive and multidisciplinary approach encompassing all the relevant components of maritime climate contributing to the impact of change, and must rely on widespread participation by all stakeholders.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 28 October 2010, 3rd sitting (see Document [CG\(19\)13](#), explanatory memorandum) Rapporteur: I. de La Serna Hernaiz, Spain (L, EPP/CD).

² Recommendation 160 (2005) on coastal management and local and regional authority policy in Europe.

³ Recommendation 231 (2008) on climate change: building adaptive capacity of local and regional authorities.

7. In this respect, the Congress would like to draw attention to the principles set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), a protocol opened for signature on 16 November 2009.

8. A prior understanding of the problem is one of the greatest difficulties for the public authorities, together with the implementation of integrated and more consistent coastal management and planning policies. Indeed, while some of these policies depend wholly on national authorities, they do effectively require real involvement by local authorities so as to guarantee greater consistency in the activities of the various sectors and levels of governance.

9. The Congress also notes that combined demographic and economic pressure on coastal areas frequently leads to non-decision making which inevitably aggravates the risks.

10. The Congress points out that states are duty bound to ensure that the law is strictly applied and to do more to meet the cost of preventive measures, to involve local and regional authorities from the very beginning in the devising of any prevention and adaptation strategy, and not to leave them alone to cope with the pressures that they face.

11. Moreover, it welcomes the resolution adopted at the 12th Ministerial Session of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) under the title "Ethical Values and Resilience to Disasters", which recognises "the value of applying best ethical principles in disaster risk reduction, in improving the resilience of societies".

12. Consequently, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

a. invite the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) to continue its work with a view to the preparation of a draft Ethical Charter on Resilience to Disasters and take note of the role and experience of local and regional authorities in prevention and in adaptation of their areas;

b. include among the Organisation's priorities the study of relations between human rights and climate change in Europe and decide to hold a conference to consider the issue from various angles (human rights and legal affairs, environment, social cohesion, etc), as advocated by the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH).

13. The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage the member states which have not yet done so to:

a. draw up a national climate change adaptation policy to ensure the safety of populations and property, and including – in those countries which have a coastline – specific measures for coastal areas;

b. sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

14. The Congress also invites the Committee of Ministers to request that member states:

a. take, as a matter of extreme urgency, and with the assistance of local and regional authorities, priority measures to improve the resilience of coastal urban areas, after assessing the impact of climate change on all the relevant components of the maritime climate prior to any action;

b. draw up integrated and more consistent strategies for coastline management and for adaptation at local and regional levels, appropriate to the human and material implications and giving greater recognition to the local and regional dimension, taking care to:

- i. give their institutional and financial support to local and regional authorities in their practical implementation of these strategies;
 - ii. integrate into these policies the concept of reasonable risk, the principle of responsibility and the moral and ethical values implied by the scale of the threats;
 - iii. ensure the transparency of the decision-making process and the participation of all stakeholders, including the population and private decision-makers, in work on a long-term shared vision and on innovative planning solutions;
- c. support research into vulnerability and into marine climate trends, making the findings accessible at local and regional levels, and develop international and inter-regional co-operation, as well as exchanges, in this field.

15. Furthermore, *the Congress requests the European Union* to take greater account of the local and regional dimension in its climate change adaptation policies, and to foster exchanges of knowledge and good practice.

16. Finally, *the Congress invites the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe* to support its efforts to get local and regional authorities more genuinely involved from the policy-making stage onwards, so that action can be more efficient and more consistent.