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New edition of the European Local Democracy Week promotes inclusive communities at grassroots level through human rights activities

Strasbourg, 26 January 2012. – At a meeting organised by the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Paris, representatives from municipalities, national associations and European networks assessed the results of the 2011 edition of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) and agreed on action in the field of citizen participation in 2012. The new ELDW edition will continue promoting “human rights” at grassroots level in order to foster and strengthen, in particular, social cohesion in local communities.

The European Local Democracy Week – a pan-European initiative launched by the Council of Europe in 2007 with the major aim of encouraging dialogue between local elected representatives and citizens – is steadily gaining popularity and reputation, as seen in 2011. “The number of participating municipalities, the variety of activities and the concrete commitment of our institutional partners show that the 2011 edition was a success”, stated John Warmisham, political co-ordinator of the Week and member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities which is the institution of the Council of Europe in charge of the overall co-ordination of this annual event. The involvement of national local government associations in this event and the specific commitment of so-called “12 Star” cities (e.g. Brussels and Namur/Belgium, Utrecht/Netherlands, Katowice/Poland, Amadora/Portugal, Mola di Bari/Italy and Strasbourg/France) were highlighted as concrete improvements compared to previous editions.

With regard to the leading theme of the new ELDW edition, to be held from 15 to 21 October, Congress President Keith Whitmore proposed to live up to the success of the 2011 edition by promoting social cohesion in local communities under the overall thematic umbrella of “human rights at local level”. It was also agreed that participating municipalities will be encouraged to develop – based on this leading theme – targeted programmes and activities according to their own priorities such as involving vulnerable groups, improving the inter-generational dialogue, ensuring public service quality etc. “The overall aim is to develop local democracy by achieving a real culture of human rights at the grassroots”, concluded Keith Whitmore.

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: Keith Whitmore (United Kingdom, ILDG), President of the Chamber of Regions: Herwig van Staa (Austria, EPP/CD), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC)

Political Groups: Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People’s Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).