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## **Council of Europe Congress launches the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion**

Strasbourg, 13.03.2013 – A major priority of the Council of Europe, to improve the situation of Roma people, will move a step closer to being realised with the launch of the *European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion* during the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

The Congress, which together with the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Roma Issues is implementing the work of the Alliance, will hold its Spring Session from 19 to 21 March, bringing together more than 300 local and regional elected representatives from 47 Council of Europe member states.

Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, the President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, Rudko Kawczynski, and the Deputy Mayor of the founding participant City of Heraklion, Despoina Syggelaki - together with Congress President Herwig van Staa - will address the audience at the ceremony on 20 March (6:00 pm, Hemicycle). A video message by EU Commissioner for Regional Policies Johannes Hahn will be screened, and high-level representatives of cities and regions participating in the Alliance will attend the launching event. The launch will take place in the framework of a current affairs debate on combating social exclusion at local and regional level.

### **A Press Conference will be held on Wednesday, 20 March 2013, at 10:15 am (room 17)**

Participants:

- Herwig VAN STAA, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
- Jeroen SCHOKKENBROEK, Special Representative of the General Secretary of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues
- John WARMISHAM, Thematic Rapporteur on Roma/Travellers, Member of the Congress
- Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI, Deputy Mayor of the City of Strasbourg, founding participant of the Alliance
- Darko RUDAS, Roma City Councillor, Murska Sobota, Slovenia, founding participant of the Alliance

### **Press contacts:**

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Further information about the Alliance is available at [www.roma-alliance.org](http://www.roma-alliance.org)

The programme can be downloaded at: <http://tinyurl.com/cu8ufsc>

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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: Herwig Van Staa (Austria, EPP/DC), President of the Chamber of Regions: Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, IDLG), 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), European Conservatives & Reformists Group (ECR)