

# Press Release

## Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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## Congress President a.i. welcomes agreed steps for future cooperation with Belarus

Strasbourg, 05.03.2009 – "I welcome the participation of Belarus observers in the 16<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Congress, which allowed us to agree on some important steps for future cooperation", Ian Micallef, President a.i. of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, stated today.

"During the meeting with Boris Batura, President of the Council of the Republic of Belarus (upper chamber of the Belarus National Assembly) and of the Council for Cooperation of Local Self-Government Bodies, we agreed to organise a round table on the conformity of the Belarus' legislation with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and provide a Council of Europe expert assessment of the draft law on local self-government in Belarus. Such initiatives could be taken in close cooperation with the Lev Sapieha Foundation, which also has observer status with the Congress.

"In our view, these initial steps should lead to broader cooperation between the Congress and the political forces and civil society in Belarus at local level in order to promote democratic changes in that country," he said.

The Council for Coordination of Local Self-Government Bodies in Belarus, which operates under the authority of the Council of the Republic of the Belarus National Assembly, was granted observer status with the Congress in December 2008. The Lev Sapieha Foundation has been holding observer status with the Congress since June 2001.

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: Yavuz Mildon (Turkey, EPP/CD), President of the Chamber of Regions: Ludmila Stîrloaga (Romania, SOC), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD). Political Groups: Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).