



T +33(0)390215240

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congress.com@coe.int

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EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn : "Decentralisation is vital to prosperity at national and European level."

Strasbourg, 25.03.2011 - During a debate on co-operation between the European Union and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, held on 24 March, Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, called for a strengthening of co-operation activities with the Congress based around three key points:

- to build on the strengths and the assets of both organisations, and in particular on their complementarity;
- to determine a strategic direction for regional and local authorities in Europe, in particular at the EU macroregion level, for example the Danube region, and the Euroregions created by the Congress, notably the Black Sea Euroregion;
- to build bridges and to help other countries through decentralised approaches and partnerships, particularly with regard to the challenges facing the Mediterranean basin.

The aim is to reinforce Europe's stability through strong local and regional structures. In this context, the Commissioner called for a genuine implementation of multi-level governance.

The election observation exercises conducted by the Congress, which regularly include the participation of delegations from the EU Committee of Regions, constitute a concrete example of this co-operation. "The Congress's longstanding experience has made it possible to develop European standards for improving the democratic process at the local and European levels, for example under the European Charter on Local Self-Government."

In view of the new EU regulation on territorial co-operation, Mr Hahn invited the Congress to engage in the consultation process which will be soon be launched. "We must make better use of the complementarity between our two institutions, which play an essential role in ensuring peace in Europe" he stated.

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-Paul 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).