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Local and regional democracy at the heart of the priorities of the Ukrainian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

Strasbourg, 16.05.2011 – At its meeting in Antalya, Turkey, on 13 May 2011, the Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities welcomed the priorities presented by the new Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, which underline the importance of local and regional democracy in Europe.

"The priorities presented by the Ukrainian Chairmanship confirm the need to strengthen the democratic process at local and regional level in Europe," said Congress President Keith Whitmore. "As guarantor of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, our Congress is at the forefront for assisting in the implementation of this priority," he added. "We must therefore pursue our cooperation and dialogue with the Committee of Ministers to improve the situation of democracy in our communities."

"We are committed to working alongside the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional government, to define an agenda in common to advance democracy in areas where governments and local and regional authorities can and must join forces," he added.

The Ukrainian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers presented its priorities on 11 May 2011. One area of focus will be to ensure the effective implementation of the principles of local self-government in European countries, using the strengths of the Council of Europe as a standard setter in this area.

The European Charter of Local Self-Government is the first international binding treaty that guarantees the rights of communities and their elected authorities. It is thus a unique legal instrument to defend autonomy and independence of territorial communities in Europe and forms the basis for further developments of grassroots democracy. The Charter was opened for signature in 1985 and came into force in 1988; to date it has been ratified by 45 of the 47 Council of Europe member states.

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).