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Congress delegation set off for Tunisia to discuss future co-operation to promote grassroots democracy

Strasbourg, 5 March 2012. – A delegation led by Congress President Keith Whitmore will discuss lines of co-operation to support the Tunisian democratisation process, in particular the development of local and regional democracy, on 6 and 7 March in Tunis. Besides representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe the delegation includes the Secretaries General of the Standing Committee for the Euro Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities (COPPEM) and the Arab Towns Organisation (ATO), Lino Motta and Ghassam Samman respectively.

Meetings are scheduled on Tuesday 6 March with the Mayor of Tunis, Seifallah Lasram, the Minister of the Interior, Ali Larayedh, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Rafik Abdessalem, and the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly, Moncef Hadidane.

This Congress visit also comes under the Council of Europe's action plan, with a view to examining the place to be given to local authorities in the different stages of this process. The Congress is paying particular attention to the taking into account of the local and regional dimension in the drafting of the Tunisian Constitution. It would like the new legislation on local authorities to draw inter alia on the principles set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. In respect of the electoral process at local level, the Congress is ready to provide its expertise, whether during the pre-election phase, the observation of local elections or post-observation assistance.

The delegation will also include Antonella Cagnolati, Director of the Congress, and Michele Raimondi, Director of programmes at COPPEM. She will be accompanied by Abdelkarim Misbah, former Governor of Gabès (Tunisia) and Director General of the IFEDA Centre.

On the occasion of this visit, Keith Whitmore will also be meeting Sandro Fratini, who manages the Association of Regions of Europe (ARE) branch opened in Tunis in 2011. Other meetings are also scheduled on Wednesday 7 March with Wided Bouchamaoui, President of the Tunisian Union for Industry, Commerce and Crafts (UTICA) and Hmaied ben Aziza, Rector of the University of Tunis.

This visit is being made in the context of the co-operation already taking place between the Congress, COPPEM and ATO, which made up the organising committee of the Euro-Arab Cities Forum held in Dubai (United Arab Emirates) in 2008 and in Malaga (Spain) in 2011.

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).