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Congress President calls on Europe's local and regional authorities to commit to Roma integration

Strasbourg, 2 August 2013 – “We are reminded, on 2 August, the day of remembrance for the hundreds of thousands of Roma massacred by the Nazis during the Second World War, of the need to build a Europe of peace and tolerance, involving all levels of governance”, in the words of Herwig van Staa, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

“Even today, Roma populations are victims of discrimination in our own cities and regions. It is our firm belief that a joint commitment by European authorities to implementing practical activities on the ground will help to combat prejudice. This is the objective of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, which now brings together 120 cities and regions from 23 different countries. We call on the local and regional authorities of Europe to join this Council of Europe initiative”, he added.

The Council of Europe has also marked International Remembrance Day of the Roma Genocide, with a ceremony in front of its headquarters building in Strasbourg, France, with the participation of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues, Jeroen Schokkenbroek, and the President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, Rudko Kawczynski. M. Schokkenbroek announced that the organisation is examining a proposal from the European Roma and Travellers Forum to encourage all member States to officially recognise and commemorate the Roma Genocide. The Congress welcomes and supports this initiative which will contribute to the remembrance of the Roma Genocide at European level.

The Alliance was launched in March 2013 at the instigation of the Congress and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and brings together cities and regions which are prepared to make a commitment to running local programmes for Roma inclusion and tackling the prejudice and racism to which Roma are subjected. In September 2013, the Alliance will begin implementing a new joint Council of Europe and European Commission project called ROMACT, the aim of which is to set up local Roma integration policies based on an approach combining housing, employment, education and health. It will focus initially on five countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia) and draw on work already carried out by the Council of Europe (through its ROMED project) and by the Open Society Foundation (through its MERI programme).

Website of the Alliance: www.coe.int/roma-alliance

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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)