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## **Declaration by Congress President on proposed Crimean Referendum**

Strasbourg, 7 March 2014 - Reacting to the announcement of a referendum in the Crimea on 16 March on whether it should join the Russian Federation, Congress president Herwig Van Staa declared:

"I cannot but deplore this initiative. To hold a referendum, at such short notice, using closed questions, without consultation with the national authorities and in the unauthorized presence of military forces, in flagrant violation of international law, is a travesty of the democratic process and one that I condemn. It would be a serious step backwards for the democratic development of this region.

As President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Europe's Pan-European Assembly of elected representatives of Europe's towns and regions, I strongly support the development of greater regional autonomy in our member states. Moreover, in its 2013 Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, *on Regions and territories with special status in Europe*, the Congress urges member states to make greater use of the special status model to address the specific needs of regions with special historical and cultural characteristics, of which the Crimea is a striking example.

I would like to point out that the Crimea already enjoys a special status of autonomy within Ukraine. If the people of Crimea wish to further deepen and extend that autonomy, the legal framework exists, within the Republic of Ukraine to revise those constitutional provisions. The Congress would be ready to assist and advise on any such developments."

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)