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Declaration of the Council of Europe's Bureau of the Congress on the Lampedusa tragedy

Strasbourg, 31.10.2013 – In response to the recent tragedies in the Mediterranean, in which hundreds of migrants have died, the Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted on 31 October 2013, on the occasion of the 25th Session of the Congress in Strasbourg, France, a declaration on "Emergency in the Mediterranean: the tragedy of Lampedusa". This declaration follows a motion submitted by twenty-one Congress members belonging to the Italian, French, Romanian, Turkish, United Kingdom, San Marino, Netherlands and Portuguese delegations.

The declaration notes that thousands of migrants have perished in the last ten years in the Strait of Sicily in particular and stresses the role played by local and regional authorities, which are often called upon to take urgent action in response to these situations without possessing the necessary resources. It asks governments to support a change in the legislation relating to immigration and the right of asylum in order to promote the lawful entry, safety, reception and integration of migrants.

The declaration lays particular emphasis of the need to work together with the European Union to ensure that this issue is the subject of European policies leading to joint management of migration based on shared responsibility and a gradual opening up allowing immigrants to enter lawfully.

"This question is a matter of real concern to Italy, but also to the other countries in the region such as the Republic of Malta, and more generally to the 47 Council of Europe member states", stressed Congress President Herwig van Staa. "Italian local authorities will not be alone in managing the immigration emergency in the Mediterranean, in particular on Lampedusa", said Emilio Verrengia (Italy, EPP/CCE), Vice-President of the Congress.

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)