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Congress President Keith Whitmore: Strong local and regional structures in the Arab world increase security in Europe

Strasbourg, 23.03.2011. - On the occasion of the urgent debate which was held during the [20th Congress Session](#), focusing on the changes currently underway in southern Mediterranean countries, Congress President Keith Whitmore pointed to new opportunities for the democratic development of this region and for Council of Europe member countries.

"These changes bring encouragement and satisfaction to all members of the European family of democracies. The momentous events in the Arab world have shown that there are more reasons for optimism, than reasons for anxiety about the future. - Even though the last battle for more democracy, for fundamental freedoms and human rights is not yet over. In this respect, I would like to support what was expressed by the 2nd Euro-Arab Cities Forum in Malaga, Spain, some weeks ago, in which the Congress participated: We strongly condemn the atrocities committed against the civilian population in their struggle for more democracy. A struggle that still wages on in Libya today", Keith Whitmore said.

"The Arab world is today at a crossroad and the Council of Europe Congress stands ready to offer its experience in the field of decentralisation and devolution to those who are interested in strengthening territorial democracy. I am convinced that strong local and regional structures in the southern Mediterranean area will bring modernisation and democratisation for these countries and their populations and – as a consequence – also more stability and security for Council of Europe member states. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is ready to contribute, in the framework of its specific competences, to a new neighbourhood policy in this respect", concluded the President.

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).