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Inclusion of the Roma community: the Congress requests more competences for local and regional authorities

Strasbourg, 20.10 2011. – The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution and recommendation on “The situation of Roma in Europe – a challenge for local and regional authorities” on 19 October 2011, during its 21st Session. The adoption of these texts, which are addressed to both the European local and regional authorities and Council of Europe member States, is part of the follow-up to the first Summit of Mayors on Roma, which was held in Strasbourg (France) on 22 September last.

In its recommendation, the Congress calls for the elaboration of national strategies, involving the local and regional authorities in devising them, and sets out provisions for their effective implementation on the ground. The main aim is to ensure that local and regional authorities have the requisite powers and resources to act.

“We as elected representatives are the closest authorities to our compatriots and are really best placed for devising policies to facilitate Roma access to education, employment, housing and healthcare” John Warmisham, Congress Rapporteur on Roma/Travellers, stressed.

The recommendation also proposes that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe introduce a European programme, in co-operation with the Congress, geared to reinforcing capacities at the local and regional levels. This would complement the Roma Mediator Training Programme (ROMED) and operate as part of a pan-European co-operation process involving all local and regional authorities.

The Congress thus reaffirmed, in its resolution, its commitment to establishing a co-operation frame, the first step being the setting-up at the Summit of Mayors of a working group to launch a “European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion”. It also called for the creation of similar networks at national level

Addressing the Congress during this debate, General Rapporteur of the Summit of Mayors on Roma José-Manuel Fresno, said that “the future Alliance should help sharing practices, strengthening capacities, identifying solutions and ensuring that available resources arrive at grassroots level”. John Warmisham concluded by pointing out that the adopted resolution “will provide a frame and guidelines for the action of this Alliance”, and calling on the municipalities and regions represented in the Congress to join this new co-operation frame.

Lastly, stressing that local councillors often came up against legal obstacles, the Congress invited governments to consider recognising Roma as a “national minority” in order to ensure their protection under international law, particularly where access to rights at the local level was concerned.

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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: 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).

