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## **The Congress supports Pope Francis's call for a "new agora" for dialogue between all civic and religious groups**

Strasbourg, 25.11.2014 – Speaking at the end of the visit by Pope Francis to the Council of Europe, the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC), welcomed the Pope's speech and his call to continue the dialogue to maintain the peace so desired by the founding fathers of the Council of Europe. "This dialogue must be pursued at all political levels – European, national, regional and local, and must also include the inter-faith level so as to encompass all the constituent elements of our societies," said Jean-Claude Frécon.

In his speech, Pope Francis called for the creation of "a sort of *new agora* in which all civic and religious groups can enter into free exchange, while respecting the separation of sectors and the diversity of positions".

"As President of the Congress, I give my unreserved support to the creation of such an agora tying in perfectly with the objectives of the Council of Europe and the Congress which are to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law," said Jean-Claude Frécon.

Pope Francis was received today in the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg (France) by Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Charles Michel, Prime Minister of Belgium (on behalf of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers), Anne Brasseur, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Jean-Claude Frécon, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Dean Spielmann, President of the European Court of Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights and Jean-Marie Heydt, President of the Conference of INGOs.

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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: Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Anders Nape (Sweden, EPP/CCE), President of the Chamber of Regions: Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, 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)