

## 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Social Charter –18 October 2021

### Statement by the President of the Congress, Leendert Verbeek

“60 years ago, on the 18th of October, 2021, in Turin, the European Social Charter was adopted. This day marks a milestone for European countries, and for international law in general. Indeed, this Charter achieved the legal architecture of human rights which the Council of Europe strived to build. Following the political and civil rights outlined in the European Convention of Human Rights, the social rights – which aggregate key issues such as health, housing, education, welfare, employment, and social protection – were also recognized as fundamental. This recognition was a crucial step in making their progress possible across the European continent. As we are celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter, the on-going challenges it addresses could not be more relevant and pressing today as we face a world where inequalities are rising and where the rights to health, housing, and employment are declining.

These challenges continue to be ever crucial to overcome, yet we must admit that the implementation of the Charter remains unsatisfactory and irregular across the continent. The monitoring procedures doubtlessly improved following the Turin process, becoming increasingly accessible and efficient. Moreover, the Charter has, of course, been enhanced by the integration of new rights in 2009. However, the Charter now needs to develop an effective local anchorage. By recognizing the unique status of local and regional communities and by integrating them to monitoring procedures, we would be empowered to effectively face social issues at every level.

Local and regional authorities play a key role in the promotion of these daily rights. Local communities are often the one to oversee social policies, such as education or housing. Moreover, their intimate proximity with citizens allows them to better help people endangered by social risks, as demonstrated by the health crisis. This proximity is also an opportunity to exchange with citizens, and to relieve social tensions. Hence, communities have all the assets to be at the frontline of the defence of social rights.

Acutely aware of this opportunity, the Congress stands by the communities to help them consider social issues in their policies. The work of the Current Affairs committee, the fact-finding missions, and the publication of Human Rights Handbooks dedicated to social rights and the fight against discrimination exemplify it. Our commitment is not about to stop. Improved inclusion and the reduction of inequalities are part of Congress' Priorities for the five years to come.

On the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Social Charter, we acknowledge the Charter's great accomplishments. Now, we must consider the upcoming social challenges, which will only increase in number and intensity. We will need all the energy and involve all levels of governance to face them. Hence, the Congress stands by the Council of Europe and the European Committee of Social Rights for the defence and promotion of these most valuable rights.”