

## International Democracy Day – 15 September 2021

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

“On this International Democracy Day, celebrating one of the core values of the member states of the Council of Europe, I would like to call attention to the importance of defending our local democracy. As a matter of fact, cities and regions build a democracy of proximity: local elected representatives understand the needs of their citizens, and citizens can most quickly witness their vote’s impact. Moreover, numerous opportunities of commitment and involvement of citizens in public action exist at this level. However, local democracy is currently facing some undeniable difficulties: threatened by the curtailing of freedom of speech and assembly during the COVID-19 pandemic, local democracy is also sometimes the victim of mistrust on the part of citizens. It is, therefore, imperative to ensure the application of democratic principles, at every level of governance – European and national, but also regional and local – and to promote cooperation between them.

This is indeed the Congress’ objective: to support the vitality of local democracy. The *European Charter of Local Self-Government* promotes quality local governance across the European continent; the *Additional Protocol on the right to participate at public life*, already ratified by 20 member states, acknowledges as a democratic principle the day-to-day citizen participation; and the *Reference Framework for Regional Democracy* states general guidelines for more democratic regions. Beyond texts, the Congress coordinates many missions to observe elections, along with participative initiatives that bring elected officials and citizens closer, such as the *European Local Democracy Week*.

Facing the challenges of today’s democracies, the Congress is therefore assuming its responsibilities and continuing its efforts, together with local and regional elected representatives. I believe that its work will bear fruit.”