**Video statement by the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Anders Knape on the occasion of the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the European Convention of Human Rights**

*(Athens, 4 November 2020)*

I am proud to celebrate today with the Foreign Ministers of the Council of Europe member States the anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights, which was opened for signature just 5 years after the atrocities and destruction of the Second World War.

I would like to commend the Council of Europe and the political leaders of the time for having had the vision and courage to adopt and commit themselves to this binding treaty which has since become one of the most important instruments of human rights protection, not just in European, but worldwide.

The respect of fundamental rights is one of the three pillars of the functioning of our democratic societies and institutions. Ensuring that the citizens’ fundamental freedoms and human rights are promoted, respected and implemented is a responsibility shared by all levels of governance and the elected representatives at local and regional level have an important share of responsibility in this regard.

Their role is evidenced by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, where numerous judgments include a territorial dimension, dealing with freedom of assembly, policing, the right to vote, freedom of expression, the environment and minority rights.

As we see on a daily basis, the role of local and regional communities is all the more important in the current crisis, where the fundamental rights of the most vulnerable and marginalised are endangered by the prevailing sanitary, social, and economic emergencies.

There are many practical examples implemented within the 150000 local and regional communities all over Europe that well illustrate how local and regional authorities can take advantage of their proximity with inhabitants in order to find creative and game-changing ways to ensure respect for human rights by "thinking outside the box".

The Congress has created a "*Human rights handbook for local and regional authorities*" to showcase such initiatives and facilitate the exchange of experience between communities. The first volume was published in 2019 and covers the issue of combating discrimination against refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, internally displaced persons, Roma and LGBTI persons.

A second volume features issues with regards to health, education, work, housing, social security, protection, inclusion and integration, with a particular focus on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Congress will continue to raise awareness on the specific role of local and regional authorities in promoting and implementing fundamental rights, including within its monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self Government. This work is due to complement the work of the European Court of Human Rights and the other Council of Europe entities to ensure the implementation of the fundamental human rights all over Europe.

Thank you.