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## **Day of Democracy: Daems (Council of Europe), “strengthen links between citizens and institutions”**

“It is at the level closest to citizens, within our cities and regions, that local democracy offers a unique opportunity to engage citizens in decision making. That is why we must defend it and ensure that democratic principles are respected at all levels of governance”, the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Anders Knape, said to mark the International Day of Democracy. Democracy “must be practiced daily through concrete measures”, he went on to say, ensuring “a real partnership between the different levels of governance and with the citizens in our States”. This right is enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, a document ratified by 20 European countries that recognise “the exercise of the individual right of citizens to participate in the affairs of local communities”. The aim of the Congress is that all 47 CoE member states ratify it. “The situation” caused by COVID-19 “has intensified the lack of trust in our institutions”, further exacerbating “social and digital divides, inequalities and marginalisation of the most vulnerable”, said the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Rik Daems, in a statement marking the International Day of Democracy. “Extraordinary times call for extraordinary mobilisation” in reaching out to “citizens to renew and strengthen the links between them and their governing institutions”, in addressing “the threats to democracy”, and in having a “forward-looking and human-rights compliant political agenda”.

Sarah Numico