



ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCIES

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**Position Paper
Association of the Local Democracy Agencies
2006-2009**

**The Local Democracy Agencies Programme as a Stakeholder for Peace and
Democracy in an Enlarged Europe**



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Introduction

With its Position Paper approved by the General Assembly held in Subotica (Serbia) in June 2003, the Association of the Local Democracy Agency established the guidelines for the LDA programme in South Eastern Europe in several directions :

- a) To support the enlargement of the European Union in the region based on the active participation of civil society and local authorities with the support of the LDAs
- b) To increase the role of the LDAs in the local economic development in the region
- c) To put a specific focus on youth in LDA activities
- d) To open the LDA programme to other regions of Eastern Europe
- e) To be of assistance to the local authorities in building up a Europe from below.

The timing was particularly appropriate since it coincided with the Thessaloniki Summit where, for the first time, the European Union leaders confirmed the essential role of the Western Balkans in order to complete European Enlargement.

Today, we are on the eve of new challenges in South Eastern Europe. They are the testimony that the situation has moved from a status quo to a more dynamic one, such as :

- the definition of a new status for Kosovo
- the referendum on independence in Montenegro
- a possible constitutional reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- the advanced negotiations of Croatia to join the European Union
- the granted status of candidate country to "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"
- the progress on Stabilisation and Association Agreements for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro with the EU
- the ongoing work of the International Criminal Court in the Hague with several criminals still at large and the transfer of war crime cases to national courts in the region.

Meanwhile, the general context has also radically changed.

The long-prepared fifth enlargement of the European Union was realized in May 2004 and brought the EU to the considerable number of 25 Member States. The decision-making process in the European Union itself and its smooth daily functioning, however, is not fully completed and adapted to this major change. In spite of – or maybe because of - this important achievement, the enlarged Europe is facing a difficult time: temporary or permanent failure of the European Union constitution, budgetary problems and questioning, a seemingly never closing gap between EU institutions and the citizens, low turn-outs in the different Parliamentary elections. In a word, the European Union is seen by most as a technical mechanism dealing with economy and market regulations (another super Ministry) and not as an opportunity for improving living together in harmony and dignity.

On the other hand, new instruments for "working together in Europe" are now at our disposal. The common efforts brought to a common understanding and level of regulations and laws in Europe (and even in the future enlarged Europe). The common European policies are now taken fully into consideration the Western Balkans and giving the



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countries of the region the appropriate support included in the future programmes 2007-2013. Even the structural funds in Europe will focus on regional cooperation and will include fully a revised policy of cooperation with the Western Balkans.

The Summit of the Council of Europe held in Warsaw in 2005 confirmed among in its action plan issues such **strengthening democracy, good governance, promoting democratic citizenship in Europe, youth cooperation and intercultural dialogue**. The Association of the LDAs and ALDA are particularly devoted toward these objectives and will then be important partners for the Council of Europe in these fields.

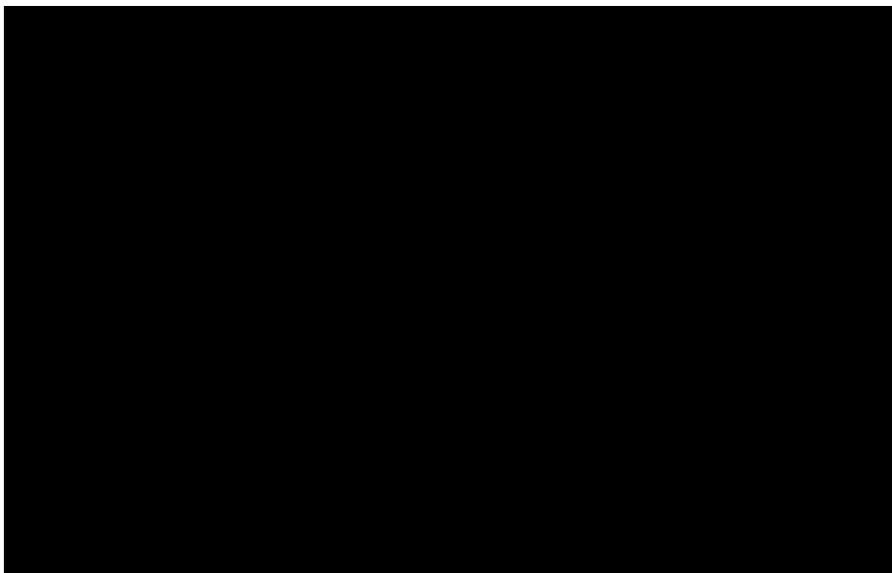
In the work of Democracy and Good Governance, the guidelines of approved action plan indicates the need to **enhance the participation of NGOs in Council of Europe activities as an essential element of the civil society's contribution to the transparency and accountability of democratic governments**.

Our achievements in the past three years

Since 2003, the network of the Local Democracy Agencies has been and has developed further its strong role and methodologies in the Western Balkans. The programmes are run with the support of a **multilateral decentralised cooperation** where local authorities and their communities from all over Europe are fully active to support democracy and human rights in the region. The focus on the method, which includes a shared vision of stakeholders (from all the sides), the programming and the implementation are the keys to success. The Local Democracy Agencies are all locally registered NGOs and very **much locally owned** (where the Delegate or the staff are locals) giving them the opportunity to ensure self-sustainability and close connection with the local needs and dynamics throughout more than 13 years for some of them. The **constant presence** in a location for so many years assures an excellent knowledge of the territory and its citizens and is a guarantee for the quality of the programmes implemented. Furthermore, it is a **regional network** that can ensure a logistic support for larger programmes that need to have a regional impact. The **link with the international level** (in particular with the Council of Europe) is an added value for the whole network.

From the Local Democracy Agencies

Map of the LDAs





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Today there are 11 LDAs in the Balkans with more than 150 partners from all over Europe, committed and active in the promotion of human rights and democracy, A new LDA is about to be opened in Georgia (Kutaisi) and we are working to establish a 13th LDA in Albania (Shkodra) in 2007.

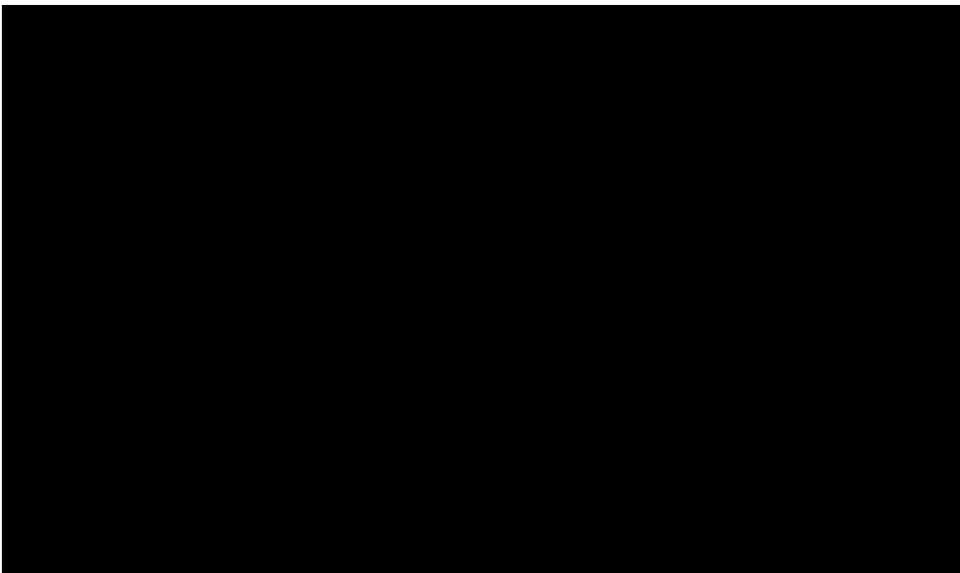
In these last years, the work of the LDAs has focused on **supporting local authorities** and improving their cooperation with civil society. Our activity has been particularly important in strengthening their capacities and competencies in the process of decentralisation of powers and competencies as well as making them actors for the new programmes financed by the European Union funds.

Specific capacity building programmes have been run **on youth entrepreneurship and local economic development**. The specificity of these programmes is that we brought the added values of the decentralised cooperation and the large negotiations and work we do with local authorities and civil society into these topics.

Another major achievement is the **cooperation established and consolidated between local authorities and civil society in Europe**. Most of the activities are based on exchanges of best practices, people-to-people programmes, shared knowledge and joint programmes.

The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies

Network of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies





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The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), the umbrella organization of the LDAs, has since 2003, further developed its' capacities in supporting the LDAs themselves but also as an actor promoting :

- the role of local authorities in Europe (and their work with civil society)
- promoting human rights and the rights of minorities throughout Europe
- active European citizenship

With its 130 members from all over Europe, ALDA today is a recognised and well-established network of reference of local authorities committed to promoting democracy and human rights in Europe.

ALDA has been recognised as such by the main European Institutions (the European Union and the Council of Europe) that included our network in their policy papers as well as through their funding opportunities. ALDA responds to the specific needs of its members and is active in the programmes for human rights and democracy, with a specific focus on civil society participation and active citizenship. Furthermore, it is today active in the lobbying on the European Union policy making.

ALDA has achieved its objective of extending its activities beyond the countries of the Western Balkans.



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Strategic guidelines

1. Core focus

60 years after the end of the Second World War, Europe has achieved unpredictable wealth, stability and peace. We strongly consider that those are the basic values, for which we act together. The technical aspects of the European Union construction and enlargement should be considered as tools to that end. However, the process of this enlargement and further construction should focus more on those strong ideals without which no technical step is put into a relevant context and thus doomed to fail.

The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies is a particular actor, bringing together civil society and local authorities that experienced the aftermaths of the war in the Balkans and **we consider that peace and democracy are the most important values for living together in Europe.**

At the core of our actions are the local governments that are actors for peace, democracy and good governance. The local governments, "polis", are understood in a broad sense, encompassing also the civil society and the community actors. We consider them as fundamental and capable actors in promoting these values of Europe.

A special focus should currently be directed to rebuilding an understanding of what the **European Union and European citizenship could mean and be.** A democratic gap exists between the European institutions and the citizens. Better to say, a gap between the higher institutions and the citizens. In particular **young people** (meaning young active forces of the society) consider their interests and existence better understood and represented in other instances than those that are the official decision-makers. This is a gap that can not continue to exist without undermining the democratic stability. We have to start a dialogue and a debate with these forces, in order to understand them better, and to translate their opinions into innovative solutions for the community.

We have a fundamental respect for every citizen and her/his right to enjoy a peaceful and prosperous life. Our action is devoted to promoting democracy and to the participation of citizens in the decision-making at the local level as the instrument, which offers the best solution for a society that respects diversity.

In particular, in the framework of our activities, we should assist and further the wish, the work and the establishing of the conditions for the countries of South East Europe to join the European Union.

ALDA and the LDAs will endeavour to create a bridge between communities in Europe to promote understanding, knowledge and skills based on the respect for human rights and democracy.

2. Methodologies

In our activities of international cooperation, we consider essential **to facilitate the relationship between donors and beneficiaries** and base our efforts on respect and consideration of necessities on both sides. A strong focus should be given to the listening approach and joint planning of the solutions. **The importance of relationships** should be stressed, by placing the citizens at the core of our action, and a systematic institutionalisation of every context should be avoided.

From our experience, a special emphasis should be placed on making the procedures, legislation and administration in Europe and future member states compatible. The LDAs and ALDA are active in this field at the local level.



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We consider it important also to merge, or at least improve the coordination of **the policies regarding South Eastern Europe and the rest of the Mediterranean Sea**. Often, they seem to issue from different worlds of policies and programmes.

As for our work in Eastern Europe, a better understanding of the CIS countries would be necessary.

We consider it our objective to promote and lobby for an emphasis on “bringing people closer together” :

- by supporting programmes that face the cultural aspects of our work (often based on technicalities and administration). This is also focusing on the understanding and interest for languages and cultures.
- by also considering and bearing in mind in our programme also the infrastructural problems (roads, routes of the airlines, etc).

The work will be implemented based on decentralised and multilateral cooperation, on the LDA principles :

1. partnership with European local governments and civil society
2. a local long term presence (LDA)
3. local ownership of the programme.

Our action would be mostly based on :

1. capacity building and training activities followed by concrete implementation
2. exchanges of best practices and know how
3. pilot activities
4. awareness campaigns
5. networking, lobbying and advocacy.

Geographical coverage

As for the geographical coverage, the Association and the LDAs will continue to work in **South Eastern Europe as a strategic region for Europe**, for its peace and prosperity. We will work with determination for its inclusion in the European Union, both inside the European Union Institutions and in the countries of the Balkans to bring them up to the appropriate standards. The objective is to consolidate the network in the next years to be a reference in future years and to add a presence in Albania by 2007.

The target of extending the LDA network to the **South Caucasus** should be reached in 2006 and further activities might evolve from this first experience.

Other individual initiatives (like Belarus) can be realized following the mandate of ALDA.

Last but not least, there will go special attention towards our members and partners **within the European Union Members States** through different programmes and events.



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What will we be doing?

The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies would be active at two different levels :

1. in field work, by supporting and promoting the work of the Local Democracy Agencies (in particular in the Western Balkans and in the South Caucasus)
2. with its members, throughout Europe to promote peace, democracy and human rights with a specific focus on active European citizenship.

1. Work with the Local Democracy Agencies

The Local Democracy Agencies are the instruments for ALDA activities in the region. They represent a clear and concrete embodiment of multilateral decentralised cooperation. We consider of fundamental importance **to strengthen their operational capacities by supporting their partnership network and their skills**. They will have **a major role to play in the future process of the enlargement of the European Union** in the region (Western Balkans) by:

- connecting local actors with European partners
- being supporting Agencies with knowledge and skills
- promoting the idea of European citizenship
- focusing on the role of civil society at the local level
- focusing on human rights in their actions.

The same objectives will apply to the LDA Georgia, based in Kutaisi (to be opened in September 2006).

The focuses of the Local Democracy Agencies will be to:

- support **local authorities** as decision-making bodies for their local community and good governance. A special focus will be put on the possible and effective decentralization process.
- support the **empowerment of civil society in order** to allow them to be reliable and active partner in the decision making and in the implementation of public policies
- promote **local economic development** in the region based on a balanced and participative process
- be an active stakeholder for **a future enlargement of the European Union** in the region
- be a strong advocate for the abolishment of the EU **visa regime** for the region.



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2. Work with its members, throughout Europe, to promote peace, democracy and human rights with a specific focus on active European citizenship

ALDA can count on 130 members and they represent a real asset of local authorities and civil society committed to supporting democracy and human rights in Europe today and in the future. The focus will be given to :

- Improve, understand and exchange points of view on European citizenship and democratic participation, in the EU Members States and in the aspiring member states.
- Strengthen local authorities and civil society to cooperate in a participative and inclusive manner, in particular addressing concretely the questions of youth, gender and free media.
- Strengthen the capacity of local authorities and civil society to be active in international cooperation
- Improve the capacities of local authorities and civil society in working with the transborder cooperation approach.
- Lobby and be active at the European level to strengthen the role of local authorities and civil society in the decision making process and to focus on the concept of “Europe from below”
- Focus on being a coordinating and networking instrument
- Promote harmonization of legislation and procedures between European Institutions and the regions where the LDAs are located.
- Be a strong and reliable partner of the Council of Europe, in particular the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and other European and international institutions active in the region (EU, OSCE, UN, etc).



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Reference documents and concepts:

1. Communication from the European Commission : Consolidating Stability and making prosperity, COMM (2006) 27 final
2. <http://europa.eu/comm./enlargement>
3. http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/activecitizenship/index_en.htm