

**ALDA addressing the challenges of today and tomorrow  
Local democracy and citizens participation at the core of the European project**

**Approved by the Governing Board on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2017**

**DECLARATION**

**Open for written comments from the members for the General Assembly, starting  
Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, 9.00<sup>1</sup>**

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Strasbourg, 11th of May 2017

**Europe at the crossroad**

The European project, which started after the end of the Second World War is now challenged in many way. From inside, it faces criticism for not being able to address the economic and social situations of a vast part of the population, which feels at the margin of growth and wealth. From outside it faces the outcries of not reaching out to the people and constituencies in partner countries. The positive and constructive breeze of decades ago is no more blowing and it just seems that everywhere the problems are bigger than our capacity to address them collectively: unemployment (especially youth), reduction of social services, economic and social growth limited to certain groups of people, non adequate education to the challenges of today and more. Political leadership and democracy is hit by criticism, if not real confrontation. Political populism is growing, offering ideas that are opposed to the basic European values. The distrust between citizens and institutions, national and European, is visible and citizens request a change and new and better governance. Instead of a more open society and more integrated Europe, there are trends to close it in narrow national frameworks. Instead of

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<sup>1</sup> *Only written comments will be considered for evaluation during the GA on the 12th of May 2017*

solidarity, social and economic cohesion, some see Europe only through the perspective of their own interests. The European Union lives a delicate and crucial moment at its borders, in the Western Balkans, in the East and in the South. We can decide to live alone and isolated or we could act together with our neighbours for peace, security and development. The EU needs to continue to support and cooperation with neighbouring and developing countries.

### **The role of – the European Association for Local Democracy**

We, as members of ALDA, partners of the Local Democracy Agencies and Delegates, are working every day, in every corner of Europe and in its Neighborhood, to address part of these challenges in constant and restless efforts.

1. The European project is based on a common vision of peace, solidarity, tolerance, dialogue, cooperation, social and economic cohesion, respect for human rights and diversities. **We work for having those global objectives made real at the local level with an active engagement, education and trainings, development projects implementation, with problem solving engaging in constructive and fair manner local authorities, civil society organisations and citizens.** The results of this collective work is a direct better social and economic communities.
2. Local Authorities and local communities, (engaging citizens) and civil society groups are a powerful change maker. They can solve together problems and give a substantial boost to development and growth. Democratic and **Participative communities are successful communities.** Our members active in our projects and Local Democracy Agencies are witnessing these processes every day.
3. The strength of the European project must be also perceived by its values by the neighbours in the South and in the East. By engaging them as partners in our projects and by engaging in direct contacts and exchanges, the prejudices and problems are often better solved. By **working on democracy and decentralised cooperation**, with the work of regional and local authorities and civil society, we create closer and more homogenous communities where cooperation in all different spheres, could be easier and more productive. Our projects and the Local Democracy Agencies are actors of successful democratic change and decentralised cooperation with the EU local communities and neighbouring countries.

### **Commitments :**

The General Assembly of ALDA, meeting in Torun Poland,

- a. Confirms its firm commitment in the European Union project for the future of its citizens. It sees in the activities and partners of the programme Europe for Citizens a great opportunity to improving a sense of belonging to Europe, to prove the added values of the European project and building a stronger European citizenship.
- b. Confirms its firm commitment in supporting local governance for empowering regional and local authorities with responsibilities, resources and leadership and with a consequent and parallel strengthening of local civil society. In this regard, we emphasize the special role of the EU cohesion policy and the need for its continuation as precondition for further social and economic cohesion, and other EU programs that includes also European neighbourhood.
- a. Confirms that the Local Democracy Agencies represents a great instrument for supporting local good governance in the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries and in the Mediterranean area. The partnership support for the LDAs are multiplied by 20 times over several years, representing a unique possibility of support of local governance.
- b. Confirms that it will work actively to become a pan European organisation with members so that to empower even further the association mandate.

### **Recommendations:**

The General Assembly of ALDA, meeting in Torun Poland,

1. Calls for a multidimensional change within the European policies and institutions aiming at a profound outreach to the European citizens, local governments and civil society, safeguarding and improving the representative and participatory democracy and motivating multi-stakeholder discussion of the problems and challenges currently faced by the European Union and the ways forward. Higher focus, targeting and involvement in EU policies of the local and regional level might represent one of the most resultative approaches in reaching out to the people throughout Europe.

2. Calls for the fundamental changes in the EU neighbourhood, enlargement and development policies and aid delivery modalities involving first of all main development actors in partner countries – local governments and civil society – simultaneously consolidating multi-stakeholder dialogue designing EU development policies in partner countries.
3. Call for an essential increase of the share of aid funds channelled for local economic development and supporting advocacy constituency-based organizations represents an essential tool in reaching out to the people in partner countries
4. Calls on EU to consolidate its firm commitment to the decentralization and local autonomy in line with the provisions of the European Charter for local self-governance.
5. Recommends to the European Union institutions and the Council of Europe to open and keep an open dialogue with its citizens in order to reduce the existing gap and use all possible means to make the European project understood and participated. The members and the partners of ALDA and the LDAs are a powerful vehicle for this dialogue.
6. Recommend that the activities on local governance, which could see the participation of empowered and responsible regional and local governments together with civil society groups, could be constantly supported with resources and political backing. The exercise of democracy, citizen's participation and collective problem solving are a powerful instrument for "making democracy" real and create hope and trust among citizens towards institutions. On the other side, the institutions should give citizens the chance to interact and to be promoter of policies and changes by giving them space and tools for participations.
7. Recommends that the European Union and the Council of Europe could further strengthen our relationship and programmes with the regional and local authorities and civil society from the Eastern Partnership Countries and the Mediterranean areas. Investing in relationship with them and supporting their aspiration to democracy and social and fair economic growth represents a direct investment for peace, stability and development of Europe.



8. Recommends the European Union institutions, the Council of Europe and the European national governments to support the engagement of municipalities, regions, and civil society from the EU engaged in supporting actively the Local Democracy Agencies, being their partnership essential for the LDAs and their work.

Torun, 12 of May 2017

ALDA General Assembly