

19th of March 2024, Mons

Pawel Adamowicz Award

Maddalena Alberti, Director ADL Zavidovici, laureate 2024

Ladies, Gentlemen, and other Attendees,

It is with profound gratitude and a deep sense of responsibility that I stand before you today, representing the association ADL Zavidovici. And on behalf of the organization, I would like to thank you for the award. It is a great honor for us to receive the Mayor Pawel Adamowicz Award.

Adamowicz's legacy inspires us to further our commitment to fostering solidarity as the foundation of an open and inclusive society. He emphasized the importance of demonstrating solidarity with other European countries and showing our solidarity with refugees.

We are living in post-normal times: times in which facts are uncertain, our core values are disputed, therefore stakes are high, and decisions even more urgent.

We are living in a moment of poly-crisis. A quarter of humanity today are caught in 55 wars and conflicts around the world, including here in Europe, in Ukraine, in Palestine, and elsewhere. There is an increasing distrust towards democracies and a new wave of isolationist politics is haunting Europe. The situation may seem hopeless, but we need to find courage – the courage expressed by those who went through hardship.

During 1993, the Standing Conference (now known as the Congress) of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe adopted resolution 251 which supported the creation of the “Embassy of Local Democracy”. Three years after, in 1996, the Local Democracy Embassy was established in the city of Zavidovici in Bosnia and since its creation the ADL Zavidovici has been a member of ALDA, the European Association of Local Democracy, which has served as the promoter and incubator of local democracy across Europe and beyond. We are deeply thankful for their enduring efforts and commitment.

Almost for two decades, ADL Zavidovici has been at the forefront of reception of asylum seekers and refugees, alongside the cooperation work at local, national and international level to respond to numerous emergencies, such as the most recent one with refugees from Ukraine. In light of the ongoing conflict in Gaza, we are fully prepared to extend our support and hospitality to those fleeing the war, ready to host refugees in need of safety and refuge.

At the local level, together with the Municipality of Roncadelle and many other municipalities, we are currently co-designing and coordinating anti-discrimination services and networks.

At the international level, we continue to promote activities of local democracy in the city of Zavidovici, but at the same time we are expanding our partnerships through innovative projects, aiming to build strong support for European cities' integration services. Together with the

municipality of Gdansk we also share the partnership within ALDA supporting LDA Mariupol and its citizens in these difficult times.

But, yet again, we live now haunted by the threat of war in Europe.

This threat goes deep into politics that prioritizes walls, fences and securitization of our borders. We are building a fortress Europe instead of an open Europe, whose very same identity is built in the universality of human rights and creativity of democracy.

It is concerning to read, for instance, the recent news echoed by numerous human rights organizations about the recently approved EU Artificial Intelligence Act. This piece of legislation does not extend the prohibitions on AI systems to the migration context. This exclusion allows for the use of AI lie detectors at borders, a virtual policeman designed to strengthen Europe's borders, which has been shown to trigger false positives. These new invisible walls and controls pose a danger to our future.

We should not forget the past. As the saying goes: "History repeats itself; first as farce then as tragedy". When tragedies occur, it is too late. Hence, we should resist the politics of walls, persecutions, control, and expulsions.

In these times we need to be not only brave but resilient and perseverant. Things do not happen quickly but the change is the result of a constant and long-term commitment. Structural changes require structural work, and they are slow in motion but durable in time. As history teaches us, courage is a virtue characterized by an 'endurance in the impossible'.

Let the impossible become possible.

Thank you!