



## ***REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE***

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### ***FINAL CONFERENCE MOSTAR, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:***

#### **PARTICIPATION AND INTERCULTURAL GOVERNANCE AT LOCAL LEVEL IN THE BALKANS: CHALLENGES AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES**

From 30<sup>th</sup> March - 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2011., Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the opening session the participants were addressed by **Mr. Ljubo Beslic**, Mayor of the city of Mostar. In his welcoming speech, he stressed the importance of the events promoting intercultural governance in the city that has gone through armed clashes and destruction during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and whose remnants are still visible. However, efforts are constantly being made to alleviate and overcome the consequences of the recent past and the city is seeking the solutions in support to development oriented policies that would suit the needs of all the citizens. **Mr. Slavko Parac**, President of the City Assembly of Subotica, greeted the participants on behalf of the Lead partner, the city with the centuries long history of multicultural coexistence among local national communities in the border area connecting Serbia, Hungary and Croatia. The consequences of the recent conflicts in the region however imposed the need for the local government to open up new space for improving intercultural dialogue, multilingual education and promoting diverse cultural identities that are all incorporated in local development strategy. **Mr. Jovo Jelic**, greeted the participants on behalf of the Osijek/Baranja county-Croatia. He informed about the efforts aimed at overall economic reconstruction and interethnic confidence building in the war affected zones in the region, reiterating the need for intensified cross-border and regional co-operation links between different local communities. **Ms. Suzan Arslan** wished a successful work to the conference on behalf of DG Enlargement-Regional Programmes, and informed the participants about the P2P Programme and Civil Society Facility (CSF) developed in order to support the regional co-operation initiatives with the view of overall democratic transformation of the Western Balkan societies aspiring to EU integration. She also noted that the co-operation of civil society with local authorities, as demonstrated within this project, is an important prerequisite of democratic governance that could contribute to further stability and sustainable development in the region. During the second part of the opening session, an overview of the project activities and some of the key results achieved was made by Ms. Stanka Parac Damjanovic, Project manager. Main project outcomes and publications are available on: [www.regionalicc.net](http://www.regionalicc.net).

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## Thematic panels

The conference gathered more than 80 participants, representing CSO-s and local governments from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, UK, Italy, Norway, Hungary and Moldova. **Mr. Owen Masters**, CoE expert was facilitating the Panel 1 on the participation of minorities, during which the case studies presented were from Hungary, Serbia, Moldova. Examples of activities of the Croat minority association in Szeged, efforts of the Roma education centre aimed at inclusion in Subotica, and confidence building measures initiated on both sides of the river Dnjestre in Moldova. **Mr. Gunnar Mandt**, Director of the European Wergeland Centre, Norway was the facilitator of the panel: From multicultural coexistence to intercultural governance, that provided an overview of innovative mechanisms and institutional structures in support to democratic governance at local level in culturally diverse local communities. Examples from Norway, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia were presented, and comparisons made in regard with local governance models in traditional multicultural communities facing with the post-conflict reconciliation process in the Western Balkan region with cultural diversity as a result of migratory waves to EU member states taking place over the last sixty years. Specific attention in presentations was given to education (both informal and formal) and culture, as the areas falling within the scope of competencies at local tier of governance. The panel 3 facilitated by **Ms. Jlenia Destito**, Ipres Institute for socio economic researches, Italy, was devoted to municipal service provision with the case studies ranging from participatory planning process, education and public information provision in minority languages, preservation of cultural identities, financing policies and housing for migrants. Presentations included case studies from Devon (UK), Subotica, Kovacica (Serbia), Szeged (Hungary) and the host city Mostar.

During the session 4, which was facilitated by **Mr. Vehid Sehic**, Citizens' Forum Tuzla (BiH) issues related with the role of civil society in intercultural dialogue and reconciliation process were discussed. The panelists, CSO representatives and experts from the three countries included in the action gave an overview of recent developments as regards the political, social and economic factors relevant for the progress made in regional co-operation initiatives. Specific attention was given to the potential role of civil society as the catalyst of the democratic change and an actor capable to bring EU integration values closer to the citizens and this way help reduce inter-ethnic distance in post-conflict societies. Therefore, education for democratic citizenship with particular emphasis on youth and opening of a new space for dialogue engaging widest possible actors in regional co-operation programmes could bring more tangible results in the long run.

During the concluding session, facilitated by Stanka Parac Damjanovic, ALDA Regional Programmes Coordinator, an overview of on-going programmes was made on TACSO regional co-operation and technical assistance to CSO-s in Western Balkan and Turkey, the potential role of Hungarian EU presidency in promoting EU enlargement, as well as other regional initiatives of interest for the CSO-s and local governments, such as the Danube strategy, functional euroregions connecting the countries of the Western Balkans and EU member states ( such as DKMT Euro-region).

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BE-ME Perspective was designed as a thematic session facilitated by Mr. Frank Challenger and as an opportunity to view the documentaries on the three cities (Subotica, Osijek, Mostar) made during the project as an illustration of efforts made by the local governments to promote cultural heritage of national communities and support their participation in policy decision making process. Personal testimonies and narratives from different sections of local societies constitute the main background of the documentaries thus illustrating the present challenges and everyday problems of ethnic, religious minorities in the Western Balkan region and as a comparison, in the city of Wolverhampton as well.

### **Round Table in the city hall Mostar, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2011**

The delegation composed of the representatives of the city of Subotica and Osijek Baranja county paid a visit to the city hall Mostar, where they were addressed by **Mr. Murat Coric**, President of the City Council. He presented the local elected bodies operating since 2004., and also some of the main local policies in areas of social and economic development, considering the heavy legacy of conflicts and visible remnants of the destruction in the city. The local government is facing with large scale infrastructural works particularly in water supply and sewage system, while also there is an evident need for improvements in housing and agricultural development.

Much has been done in connecting the city with a wide range of international partners, including the cities in Europe and in the Western Balkans, while the good governance, citizen participation, promotion of cultural heritage of the national communities are among the priorities in these co-operation programmes. Good economic links have also been established with a number of cities, including Kragujevac in Serbia. There is certainly an interest to increase the scope of potential partner cities and establish co-operation with Subotica and Osijek. Therefore, as Mr. Coric reiterated, networking among the cities is the future of this region and will certainly contribute to stability, economic prosperity and improved outlooks for EU integration.

### **Study visit to Mostar, Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2011**

After the conference, a group of participants had an opportunity to visit the historic sites and cultural monuments in the downtown area of the city of Mostar.

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