After one year of extensive preparations, the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) is pleased to announce the launch of a new pilot project between the French Region Lower Normandy and various Macedonian as well as French partners. For the first time ever, a Region in France establishes a cooperation project with a country in South East Europe.

The new project officially started in September with a Steering Committee meeting in Caen and will be financially supported by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Region Lower Normandy. ALDA is the coordinator of the three-year project which includes cooperation and exchanges in the following areas:

◊ New technologies/local democracy capacity building
◊ Media
◊ Youth
◊ Culture
◊ Sustainable Tourism

In each domaine, ALDA and the Region will be working with partners and experts including the LDA Kosovo (which is to open a Macedonian branch office in the near future), the Courrier des Balkans, the Associations Corba Diffusion, Balkan Transit, Lokomotiva, Loja, Metarmophosis, Savoir-Faire and Decouverte, the Centre Régional des Lettres as well as the the Europe House in Caen among others.

With the project, ALDA continues its activities in the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” even though it has withdrawn the label of Local Democracy Agency from the LDA Ohrid in spring 2007, which no longer presented a proper profile of an LDA (cf. article p. 19). The partnerships built up throughout this project could be a cornerstone in setting up another LDA in the country in the future.

Being a rural region, Lower Normandy has the will to broaden the minds of its citizens towards a European reality and to encourage them to participate in the international exchanges. The project will therefore form a platform of continuous exchange and will lead to the establishment of long-lasting relations among the populations of the two entities. At the same time, it will strengthen the aspect of "francophony" and local governance in all areas of co-operation, and thus develop the citizens’ capacities (both Lower Norman and Macedonian).
ALDA General Assembly 2007 and Conference on Active Citizenship in Sarajevo

That active citizenship is vital for the countries in the Western Balkans on their way to EU integration was one of the main conclusions of the conference 'Active Citizenship in the Balkans: How regional and cross-border co-operation can promote active citizenship' organised by the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 25 May 2007. In cooperation with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe/Thessaloniki Office (SPOT), the Bosnian Association of Local Authorities and the Sarajevo City Hall, almost 140 participants from across Europe (mostly local and regional authorities, NGOs, international organisations) had gathered to adopt a final declaration to foster active European citizenship.

The declaration stressed that it is important to involve citizens in the debates and discussions on the future enlargement of the European Union. Moreover, it encouraged the dialogue between governments and their citizens to foster civic participation at all decision-making levels. New technologies and cross-border co-operation can be an important tool for the countries in South-East Europe in this process. However, governments have to support civic education programmes to promote the concept of active citizenship from an early age onwards. The final declaration of the conference was diffused among local and national governments as well as international organisations.

The conference coincided with ALDA’s General Assembly 2007 during which both ALDA and the LDAs presented their most important projects to their members. As in previous years, the Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe awarded a Diploma of intermunicipal and interregional partnership to new members and partners of the network, recognising their active role in the development of local democracy in South-East Europe and the Southern Caucasus.

A detailed list of the awarded cities and regions can be found on the Congress’ website: http://www.coe.int/t/congress/6-Specific-programmes/1-LDA/diplome_en.asp

The minutes of the General Assembly are available at request:
antonella.valmorbida@aldaintranet.org

“ALDA is involved in concrete projects in the entire territory of Europe. I am often amazed how this became a reality and how it has grown. But the fact that this work does not operate from top to bottom, but from bottom to top is something completely new and created by us – which we have to be very proud of – and which has to be improved constantly, since we are facing a long road”,

Gianfranco Martini,
President ALDA
New micro-credit scheme for the Balkans

With a public presentation in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) and Intesa/San Paolo successfully launched an innovative microcredit scheme for the Balkans through public-private sector co-operation. ALDA’s Executive President Per Vinther and Antonietta Guidali, Intesa/Sao Paolo, signed a three-year agreement which aims at supporting innovative business ideas in South East Europe, in particular those taken by young people. The project seeks to support new and sustainable business ideas in various sectors, in order to help integrate the region further to the European Union. Ethical standards will be applied for the selection of projects which should offer prospects for even more jobs in the future.

The project aims at supporting the self-employment in the region and is composed of two pillars:

- Non-financial services provided by the Local Democracy Agencies: thanks to their profound knowledge of the territory, the Local Democracy Agencies are informing the potential borrowers, training them in business plan drafting and supporting them along the duration of the project. This part of the project is sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway.
- Financial services provided by Intesa/San Paolo branch offices: evaluation of the loans applications and disbursing the loans. This part of the project is sponsored by the Development Bank of the Council of Europe.

The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) and the LDA Sisak organised a seminar on local economic development from 29 May—1 June 2007. The seminar is an activity developed in the framework of the second phase of the Local Economic Development project in the Balkans sponsored by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe/Thessaloniki Office.

18 project managers from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro were trained on different tools for a sustainable development of the region.

The 18-months project which started in January 2007 aims at

◊ supporting local economic development through micro-credits
◊ training animators on local economic and sustainable development
◊ Identifying economic partners from France.

Tourism, women empowerment, and the creation of businesses were chosen as priority topics of the project. Among the sponsored micro-credit projects are therefore the setting up of the tourism route “The Route to Flavour” and a training on organic farming; promotional tools for agricultural tourism, the creation of a rural development centre and the selling of handcrafts in Croatia; promotion of summer and winter tourism in Montenegro; and the establishment of a social cooperative in Serbia among others.

The next step will be field visit of experts to the Local Democracy Agencies.
From ordinary to European citizens—completion of EURaction project

After 8 months of intensive debates, the “EURaction – citizens acting for Europe” project was officially ended with an international conference in Nicosia, Cyprus on 5 July 2007. The event gave “ordinary citizens” from France, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, and Cyprus the opportunity to present the main results of their citizens’ panel discussions, among them concrete proposals directed at European decision-makers and the EU institutions.

Set up in the framework of the European Commission’s Plan D on Dialogue, Debate and Democracy, the project aimed at improving the relationship between the European institutions and their citizens by giving the latter ones a more important voice in European politics. The five partners, namely Index (Cyprus), Partners Polska (Poland), the Municipality of Mogliano Veneto (Italy), the Municipal Training Center (Lithuania) and the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA, France) had been in charge of setting up a citizens’ panel in their cities and to particularly include those citizens who would usually not be involved in projects of a European nature. ALDA had also the role of project’s coordinator.

The citizens came up with very thought-provoking ideas, for example the introduction of a Europe-wide bank holiday on May 9th or European stamps. They also advocated to foster a Europe of consumactors that can have an influence on the quality of products.

A detailed publication with the main results and suggestions will be published at the end of October. A preliminary presentation took place in Brussels on October 11th in the presence of EU representatives. ALDA is also currently working on a follow-up of the citizens’ panels.

New project: Europe in Dialogue with its Citizens

ALDA has launched the new project „Europe in Dialogue with its citizens“ which will continue the actions in the area of active European citizenship. The project foresees a series of nine workshops to be implemented in Portugal, Poland, Italy, France, Cyprus, Spain, Denmark, Bulgaria and Hungary during which case studies of good and best practice examples concerning the European institutions’ communication with their citizens will be analysed.

At an international meeting on 9 May the partners will then present the results of their debate to a European audience including members of the European institutions. A summary of the discussions will also be made available on a DVD in spring 2008.
ALDA part of European Commission’s strategic group on active citizenship

On the 11th of September 2007, ALDA’s Executive President, Per Vinther, and the Director, Antonella Valmorbida, attended the first meeting of the newly established Group of Strategic Partners of the European Commission on Active Citizenship.

The meeting was introduced by Pierre Mairesse, Director for Youth, Sports and Relations with the Citizen at the Directorate General Education and Culture (DGEAC).

ALDA has been implementing numerous projects on Active Citizenship with the support of the European Commission since 2004.

Today, this commitment was granted with trust from the EC. The Group will discuss the issues of the programme on Active Citizenship with the Directorate General on Education and Culture on a regular basis.

The objective is to create a direct contact between the most representative organisations on Active Citizenship in Europe and the European institutions, to exchange best practices between the partner institutions and to promote the participation of European citizens.

An important role will also be played by ALDA in defining the part of the programme on Active Citizenship that will start in 2008. In the future, a crucial role will be played by our organisation with respect to the accession process of new EU member states coming from South East Europe.

First seminars within new Youth Project

ALDA’s new project “Youth—the right direction” aimed at promoting the EU Youth Programme in the Balkans and in the Southern Caucasus got under way this summer with a series of seminars organised in South East Europe.

In cooperation with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the Municipality of Muzaki, a kick-off seminar was held Thessaloniki in June 2007. 30 young people from Albania, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Georgia gathered to get acquainted with the EU Youth Programme (“Youth in Action 2007—2013). Moreover, they were given the opportunity to develop new skills as multiplicators and youth workers.

A similar seminar was held in Sisak (Croatia) from 25—27 September 2007. This time experts from Northern Ireland and ALDA staff trained the participating youth workers in project drafting, networking and how to set up an information point for young people.

A third seminar will follow later this autumn.

Participants of the two youth seminars in Sisak (above) and Thessaloniki (below)
Meeting of Cards Beneficiaries in Rhodes

The European Commission invited representatives of all Cards Media projects from South East Europe to Rhodes, Greece, on 21 and 22 June 2007 in order to discuss the progress of the numerous TV projects. The event coincided with the Rhodes International Film and Arts Festival "Ecofilms" during which some of the first documentaries were screened. In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to exchange best practices concerning co-productions in South East Europe and to make contacts with TV stations for further screening of their documentaries.

ALDA Project Manager and Press Officer Dorothee Fischer took part on behalf of the project "Together - the Balkans in Europe, Europe in the Balkans" which ALDA is implementing in co-operation with the LDAs of Central and Southern Serbia and Kosovo as well as the TV stations ARTE (France/Germany), TV92 (Serbia), TV Hana ("the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), TV21 (Kosovo/UNMIK) and the production company Krug (Serbia).

The four documentaries of the project Together were shot and edited between May and September 2007 by teams of ARTE and Balkan journalists. The post-production of different language versions for a final DVD to be distributed at an international closing event in Brussels on 7 December 2007 is currently under preparation. In addition, the four documentaries will be broadcast on the partner TV stations of the project and during other visibility events in South East Europe. ALDA and the LDAs are still looking for further partnerships to screen the documentaries on other TV stations in the region or abroad and to participate in film festivals/events.

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First study visit to Lecce within PEARL.EU project

On 24 September, a first study visit between local and regional authorities from Italy and the Balkans was held in Lecce, Southern Italy, in the framework of the project Pearl.EU which was launched last May. The topic chosen for the visit was "The participation of citizens in complex programmes" (La partizipazione dei cittadini ai programmi complessi). The Italian partners include the municipalities of Bari, Gorizia, Monfalcone, Ravenna, Tavagnacco (Ud), Trieste, Udine, Venezia, the provinces of Bari, Brindisi and the Region Puglia. The partners from the Balkans are: the LDAs of Mostar, Prijedor, Sisak, Osijek, Verteneglio, Zavidovici, Central and Southern Serbia and Montenegro, the municipality of Mostar, Prijedor, Skutari, Verteneglio and the Baranja Osijek county.

The Pearl.EU project has been designed within the new Adriatic Neighbourhood Programme with the goal of creating an Adriatic EuroRegion. Through interactions between the local authorities of the Adriatic Basin, and dialogue between its citizens, European territorial cooperation in accordance with the objectives of the European Commission’s reform proposals for economic and social cohesion policies for 2007-2013 can be achieved. In particular, the strengthening of common competencies between the Italian and Balkan public administrations through this innovative project is a viable way to increase local economic and sustainable development, increase the communication of best practice exchanges and solutions, and in addition, help to improve the communication between administrations and citizens.
Peace Clip nominated for Prix Europa

A one-minute TV spot that the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) produced within its Campaign „Cities for Peace and Democracy in Europe“ has been nominated for the Prix Europa. The TV spot exists in six languages (English, French, German, Greek, Polish, Italian) and was distributed through the partners’ network as well as through several websites (YouTube, ALDA website...). The Campaign consisted of more than 50 events in 15 European countries between May 2006 and February 2008.

The storyline of the spot is based on a short history of Europe expressed through football. It was shot in September 2006 during a youth meeting organised by the Local Democracy Agency Kosovo. The directors are Willie Schumann, freelance film-maker from Hamburg (Germany) and Dorothee Fischer, ALDA press officer and project manager.

The Prix Europa was initiated by the Council of Europe and the European Cultural Foundation in 1987 and has grown to be the most important prize for European TV, radio and internet productions.

The final winners will be selected by an online voting system which is open until 19 October. We invite all ALDA members and partners to vote for our spot:

http://www.rbb-online.de/_/fernsehen/beitrag.jsp?key=6420729.html

Thematic Working Groups for ALDA members

ALDA is currently setting up new thematic working groups for its members to increase the best practice exchanges among them and to offer a further platform for debate. This will also facilitate other services to its members such as the drafting of tailored projects on selected issues and common position papers.

The proposed topics for the working groups include:

- Local government issues, good governance, decentralisation
- Participation of civil society, active citizenship and civil society empowerment
- Human rights protection and awareness, including women’s rights/gender equality
- The situation in South-East Europe
- The situation in the Caucasus
- Local economic development
- Enlargement of the European Union

If you want to sign up for any of the above mentioned working groups or suggest the setting up of further groups, please contact Martial Paris, ALDA Project Manager and Regional Coordinator:
martial.paris@aldaintranet.org
Training on human trafficking in Georgia

"Human Trafficking for Sexual and Labour Exploitation" was the subject of a 2-day training held by the LDA Georgia on 28 and 29 June 2007, which was directed at members of the Parliament and local authority representatives in Georgia. The training was organised in co-operation with the Council of Europe's Office in Tbilisi, and the Council of Europe's Legal Task Force. The goal of the training was to familiarize the participants with all aspects of human trafficking in order to build up their capacities to combat the phenomena. Three experts, namely Igor Gaon (Council of Europe), Nino Laplashvili (Georgian Ministry of the Interior) and Maka Dzamukashvili (Council of Europe Legal Task Force) animated the training.

Unfortunately, human trafficking is one of the most serious problems facing Georgia today. Women, children, and men are trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour. Many Georgian victims are trafficked to Turkey but also to the United Arab Emirates and the USA. Victims from the Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and other former Soviet states are trafficked to and through Georgia to Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Greece and Western Europe. According to the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), at least 500 Georgian women are trafficked abroad every year.

At the end of the training, the participants agreed that much stronger actions should be taken by state and local authorities to prevent human trafficking and to assist the victims. The group proposed that at the national level the Ministries of Health and Labour should be further involved in the issues and that the government should include civil society organisations, local authorities as well the national and local media in the combating of human trafficking. At the local level, awareness should be raised through information campaigns and seminars directed at the local population comprehending schools and local politicians. Further, the seminar participants advocated the setting up of a database about those who have gone abroad and more transparency in all areas of public life to prevent illegal activities. Another important measure will be an increased protection of the victims of human trafficking who are sometimes outlawed in Georgian society.

At the end of the seminar all participants confirmed their strong commitment to take immediate action. It is among the priorities of the LDA Georgia to continue working with different governmental and non-governmental organisations to organise further trainings for different stakeholders and to support local authorities in eradicating the problem of human trafficking.
Launch of project on gender equality in Georgia

The Local Democracy Agency in Georgia initiated a new project on gender equality directed at representatives of local authorities, schools and the media. Having started in July 2007, the project will last for 6 months and will be implemented with the financial support of the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Although according to the Georgian legislation women and men are equal, in many areas of public life the principle still needs to put into practice. The cases of discrimination range from disadvantages on the job market to a lack of women in the political decision-making processes, not to mention domestic violence that mostly women are facing.

Therefore, the LDA will concentrate its activities on women empowerment by building up their capacities with respect to their rights and by advocating the introduction of gender equality principles by local administrations.

The project foresees 12 one-day trainings for approximately 250 people from Kutaisi and its surroundings. In addition an information brochure and a final manual on women’s rights advocacy will be produced through the project.

Public relations training for Georgian local authorities and media

In July 2007, the LDA Georgia started a new project on public relations for local authorities and media representatives. The eight-month project aims at increasing the transparency of local authorities by improving the communication between representatives of local self-government bodies and the media. The access to information and freedom of expression is vital in this democratic process, as is the compliance with certain human rights and democracy standards. Journalists and local authorities should not work against each other, but build up better relationships with each other, also to increase public awareness on important local governance issues.

The project will consist of 12 one-day seminars to take place in Kutaisi. It will be completed with an information campaign and the production of a manual for local authorities.

LDA Montenegro publishes two human rights manuals

Finishing off the »Minorities Rights in the new Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro« project, a brochure with the same title was published in September 2007. The publication collects opinions expressed by individuals, NGO representatives and independent experts on four local round tables directed at the members of Montenegrin Parliament. In addition, high officials and scientists from three states of the region participated in the project by giving introductory lectures to round tables and by assisting in the drafting process of the manual. The publication also contains the results of a survey on minority rights conducted among 500 people in 6 Montenegro towns.

A second publication, titled »Udherrefjes i vogel per te drejtat e njeriut« (A little guide on human rights), is a compilation of articles and workshops for young people on human rights translated which was for the first time translated into Albanian. The publication had already been published in Montenegro two years ago. But since there is a significant number of Albanian minorities living in Montenegro, the LDA decided to publish a second language version of the manual which is used extensively for trainings and seminars in secondary schools.

With the new publications, the LDA is also planning to expand its cross-border activities in Kosovo and Albania.
LDA Osijek partners and French experts visit Erdut Municipality

On 21 September, the Local Democracy Agency in Osijek (Croatia) invited its partners on a field visit to Erdut Municipality.

Participants of this meeting were Eva Affolter-Svenonius, from Lausanne (Switzerland), Hans Stalder, a counsellor of the Swiss Embassy to Croatia, Zoran Gucunski from the city of Osijek, as well as representatives of the Italian Association Pro Loco, ALDA and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

During the first session of the meeting, the new priorities of the LDA's work were presented, namely local rural development and tourism. New areas of cooperation between the international partners were discussed among them a project on culture and tourism with the Italian partners that both the LDA and the Municipalities of Osijek and Erdut will be involved in.

One week prior to the partners’ meeting, two French experts had visited Erdut Municipality in the framework of a project on local economic development which is sponsored by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and coordinated by ALDA.

The LDA Osijek has concentrated its activities towards the capacities of rural areas and has established a Centre for Sustainable Rural Development in Erdut, a village in Erdut municipality. An improvement of the infrastructure, training people on EU funds, fostering employment in organic farming, networking as well as cross-border co-operation will be the focal points of the new Centre.

The French experts assessed the development potential of the Erdut territory and provided the LDA with a list of recommendations for their future work.

LDA Osijek Delegate participates in TV Debate

On 26 September 2007, Miljenko Turniški, Delegate of the LDA Osijek (Croatia) was guest of the „Akvarel“ show on the newly established Osijek TV. During the 40-minute information programme on European issues Mr Turniski presented the current priorities of the LDA with respect to European issues, local capacity building through non-formal education and rural development.

Another guest of the show was Jovan Jelic, Mayor of Erdut Municipality with which the LDA Osijek is cooperating in the fields of local economic development and rural tourism.
Fair on old crafts and customs

In the framework of its project From Synergy and Social Cohesion to Development of Rural Tourism, the Local Democracy Agency in Osijek (Croatia) organised a Fair on Old Customs and Crafts in Erdut municipality. The project was funded by the National Foundation for Development of Civil Society, Croatia, and is part of the LDA Osijek's programme on rural development.

This year's Fair is the third one of its kind, initiated and organised by the LDA Osijek in cooperation with Erdut municipality, the Tourist Association of Erdut municipality and implemented with the help of numerous volunteers.

The "hidden agenda" of this project also includes the re-establishment of trust, communication and cooperation in this war-ravaged multi-ethnic community populated mostly by Croats, Serbs and Hungarians. At the same time, the project aimed to contribute to the development of the region by encouraging its participants and beneficiaries to take a proactive approach on rural tourism. Although tourism has never been well developed in Erdut municipality, the area bears quite a high potential for it with its huge natural and cultural reserves.

Demining the minds

The Local Democracy Agency in Osijek (Croatia) has started a new project titled «Demining of Minds - Building Social Cohesion in Eastern Slavonia in theory and practice» which is financed by the Swiss Embassy in Croatia, Causes Communes Vaud (Switzerland) and the National Foundation for Development of Civil Society, Croatia. The project will be carried out in Erdut municipality in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia. The focus of the project will be laid on the re-establishment of social cohesion and capacity building in Eastern Croatia, but will also deal with cross-border relations in the wider region. Another aspect will be rural development with a particular emphasis on capacity building among young people and women. The cross-border dimension of this project will be achieved through the involvement of municipalities and associations along the Danube border regions between Croatia and Serbia.

The project is a follow-up of the "I can Demine 1m2" project which started in 2005 and is now in its final phase. More than 10 000m2 of land around Osijek were demined throughout the project thanks to the generous fund of the Swiss association.
Study on waste management in Sisak-Moslavina County

The Local Democracy Agency Sisak (Croatia) is currently conducting a survey on the waste management strategy in the Sisak-Moslavina County. It analyses the citizens' attitudes on waste management, their level of environmental consciousness including the schools' education on the topics.

The project will be implemented in a period of four months collecting best practice examples and other relevant information, and conducting an opinion poll among the local population.

The poll will be carried out in one local administrative unit of the city of Sisak.

The survey’s results will be publicly presented at a press conference in the presence of representatives of Sisak-Moslavina County and administrative departments for environmental protection. Moreover, the results will be published in a brochure to be disseminated among public institutions and non-governmental organisations in the Sisak area. It will also be available for download on the LDA Sisak’s website (www.lda-sisak.hr)

The project will undoubtedly help the Sisak-Moslavina County to enhance its future actions in the area of waste management and environmental consciousness.

Let’s recycle us!

The Local Democracy Agency Sisak (Croatia) together with a network of European partner NGOs organised a youth exchange on sustainable development, recycling and environmental issues in Parnu, Estonia from 10—19 July 2007.

The topics were developed through practical workshops, including visual arts, and videos on recycling, deforestation and critical consumption. They were rounded off with a theatre performance on recycling and critical consumption.

The exchange aimed at raising young people’s awareness on the important role each one of us plays in putting European environmental policies into practice.

The trainers were Paula Rauzan (LDA Sisak), Stefania Macchioni (Going to Europe), Domagoj Kovacic (Youth Centre Livno) and Anna Koryakina (Life Zone). They trained young people between the age of 16 and 25.
For a community without domestic violence

For the past five years, the LDA Sisak (Croatia) has been very actively involved in the combat of domestic violence, mainly by through its SOS telephone hotline for the victims of domestic violence.

The new project “For a community without domestic violence” is a complement to these previous efforts. In addition to continuing its first aid to the victims and their families through the free SOS telephone hotline, the victims can now also seek help in an innovative internet forum the LDA has just set up. Moreover, institutional and non-institutional help through training of experts working with the victims as well as a broad awareness campaign including a short story competition are foreseen.

The project will not only involve experts, but the whole community as such. This will be mainly done through the cooperation with the local media—a monthly radio show will report about the progress of the project at a regular basis—and an intersectoral working group for the abatement of domestic violence will be set up.

Lasting for seven months, the project will be implemented in the areas of Sisak-Moslavina County in partnership with the City of Sisak and the Centre for Social Care in Kutina. It is sponsored by the Ministry of Health and Social Care as well as the Governmental Office for Gender Equality of the Republic of Croatia.

Fostering Ethno-Tourism and Employment of Women in Hrvatska Dubica

In the framework of the local economic development programme coordinated by ALDA and supported by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Local Democracy Agency Sisak (Croatia) launched the project “Fostering Ethno Tourism and Employment of Women in Hrvatska Dubica”.

The project aims at fostering women’s employment, in particular those over 40 years of age, while at the same time supporting a sustainable ethno-tourism. Hrvatska Dubica has good conditions for developing rural and ethno tourism due to its preserved nature, the river Una and traditional ways of living. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate among women in particular in handcrafts professions is very high.

During the implementation of the project, a part of an old house will be reconstructed where handcrafts and souvenirs will be sold in the future. The house will also function as a resource centre for ethno tourism in Hrvatska Dubica in which the LDA Sisak will hold business trainings for women as well as glass painting workshops.
Local Partnership for Tolerance

Since July 2007, the Local Democracy Agency in Subotica (Serbia) has been intensively engaged in the implementation of its first EU project “Local Partnerships for Tolerance” in partnership with the city of Subotica and the Centre for multiculturalism.

The one-year project was designed to support capacity building of neighbourhood community centres in Subotica to address issues of intercultural dialogue and tolerance in a multiethnic local environment. The action foresees to develop tools and mechanisms for conflict resolution at community levels through an increased the participation of citizens and the reinforcement of civil society organisations at the local level. The key components of the project are dialogue, cooperation and partnership building between the local civil society and neighbourhood community centres, as the tier of local government closest to citizens. In many ways, the entire project is genuinely local by its nature, but also incorporates the promotion of EU standards and values in human/minority rights protection and citizen participation at the local level.

So far, a round table on intercultural tolerance was organised in Subotica on 31 August 2007. In addition, a survey on citizen participation in neighbourhood communities was conducted among 36 neighbourhood communities in Subotica and a training of trainers on the topic “Capacity building for community centres: Diversity management skills for local elected/appointed councillors and civil society groups” was held between 17 and 21 September 2007.

As a next step, training for elected Councillors and civil society groups in five neighbourhood community centres will be organised in the following weeks.

The results of all the activities will be incorporated in a Guide on Intercultural Tolerance to be published in 2008.
LDA Subotica Partners’ Meeting

On 14 and 15 September, the Local Democracy Agency Subotica (Serbia) organised its Fifth Annual Partners’ meeting with representatives of Wolverhampton City Council (UK, Lead Partner), Buskerud County Council, Fauske and Nordland municipal councils (Norway) and the host city authorities.

The programme consisted of visits to the Local Economic Development Office and a Business Incubator as well as Neighbourhood Community Centres and a variety of civil society organisations. The recently established co-operation project with local institutions in Subotica was the main topic of the meetings with a particular focus on: local cross-sectoral partnerships for economic development and youth volunteers’ exchanges.

The partners agreed on a new action plan for the LDA which foresees jointly developed projects aimed at capacity building of the local civil society and local authorities.

Furthermore, the LDA Subotica will be included in a co-operation programme between Norwegian and Serbian municipalities.

Event on Youth in Action in Kosovo

The Local Democracy Agency Kosovo organised an information event on the Youth in Action Programme of the European Union on 10 September in Gjilan/Gnjilane (Kosovo/UNMIK). More than 60 people representing 40 youth and student NGOs attended the event which was co-organised by the Kosovo Youth Development Project, the Department of Youth in Kosovo and the French Liaison Office.

The main objective of the event was to increase young people’s knowledge of the opportunities that the EU Youth Programme offers to them. Today, Kosovo is the region in the Western Balkans with the lowest participation.

Therefore, former European volunteers shared their positive experiences with the participants and encouraged them to take part in similar initiatives.

The LDA Kosovo which is also the contact point of the Salto Youth will continue its activities in the area of youth with two trainings on project writing and funding to take place in November 2007.
New youth project between Polish NGO and two LDAs

The LDA Mostar and LDA Central and Southern Serbia will be involved in a new co-operation project with the Polish NGO International Initiatives Bureau based in Cracow. The project will consist of a study visit and training in Poland, attended by 30 young people aged 18 - 30 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. They will visit numerous non-governmental organisations in Cracow and acquire new skills in the area of project management, project funding and European integration. The partners hope to establish long-term contacts for future projects.

Working with a "new EU member state" is particularly interesting for the two LDAs, since they can profit from the "lessons learned" on their way to EU integration. In addition, it enables young people to travel who would normally not have the opportunity to do so and who would still be blocked through the on-going visa requirements.

The activities will take place this autumn.

Resource Centre to support the democratisation process in Mostar

A new Resource Centre to support the democratization process in Mostar was opened by the Local Democracy Agency Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 25 September 2007, funded by the Italian Region Puglia and in partnership with the Municipality of Mostar.

The Centre forms part of a three-year regional programme “Partnership for cooperation" initiated by the Mediterranean Department of Region Puglia.

The Resource Centre will support the democratization process in the region by strengthening local governance, building capacities of civil society organisations and by offering a link between the city administration and its citizens (including citizens of different ethnic groups). Several trainings, round table debates, seminars and radio programme with civil society organisations and civil servants from Mostar and Italy will be organised in the following months.

Open Doors of Bosnian Municipalities

The LDA Mostar participated in the first Bosnian Fair of Municipalities which was held in Gradacac from 20 – 22 June 2007, organised among others by Danish Refugee Council and the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the B&H Federation and the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Republic Srpska.

The event was officially opened with a conference on the structural reform of Bosnia and Herzegovina that included such renowned speakers as Ljubo Belic, former Mayor of Mostar and various European Ambassadors. In addition, various presentations and workshops on citizens’ centres, national income delivery, urban planning, economic development, financial management and EU integration took place.

The LDA Mostar shared a stand with the Municipality of Mostar, focusing on the partnership between governmental organisations and the NGO sector.
LDA Mostar at OSCE Conference


The main aim of the conference was to develop a stronger cooperation between NGOs and governmental organisations, in particular in the area of education. A small NGO fair on the second day completed the event.

Souvenir Srebenica—new cooperation between LDA Mostar and Rimini

The Local Democracy Agency of Mostar has established a new cooperation with the Italian Municipality of Rimini in order to implement joint activities dealing with democratic values and the preservation of peace, especially targeted at young people and schools.

From 1 – 7 October, the Municipality of Rimini organised a whole week dedicated to peace involving schools, municipalities, NGOs as well as the provinces of Rimini and the Region Emilia Romagna. The week ended with a symbolic March of Peace in Perugia, Italy.

All the events had the objective to stress the importance of tolerance and of international cooperation. A particular focus was given to the remembrance of the recent tragedies of the 20th century, since a loss of those memories from one generation to another represents a huge risk for the stability and peace of democratic countries.

One of the most tragic events in this respect happened in Srebenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995. the Municipality of Rimini therefore decided to dedicate one single day to this tragedy, involving students from Rimini in the projection of the documentary film "Souvenir Srebenica" by the Italian director Luca Rosini. The film was projected in both Mostar and Rimini, followed by a video conference between representatives of both cities.
A preparatory meeting within the new project “COARPA” (Cooperatives promoting gender balance) was held in Zavidovici (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 3 September 2007.

The LDAs of Osijek, Central and Southern Serbia and Zavidovici are partners of this initiative as are the Community Montana Valle Roveta (Italy) and the Women Information Centre of Nis (Serbia).

The project aims at increasing the participation of women in cooperatives and the handcrafts sector. It also promotes social and economic development and trans-border cooperation in South East Europe.

One of the first activities will be to give “ethnic branding” to protect women workers. Best practice exchanges and trainings will follow soon, too.

News from LDA Prijedor

The Local Democracy Agency Prijedor (Bosnia and Herzegovina) was involved in a variety of activities in the past months including

◊ a Civic Forum in June
◊ an exhibition of art works by Mesud Hodzic, member of Civic Forum and a retired professor of arts
◊ Participation in a Fair in Trento
◊ The organisation of warm meals for people in need
◊ Youth workshops
LDA Prijedor is looking for new partners

The Local Democracy Agency in Prijedor in Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently looking for new international partners to strengthen its network. The lead partner of the Agency is the Italian Association Project Prijedor which already started the relations with the Municipality of Prijedor prior to the opening of the Agency in the year 2000. The first projects dealt mainly with humanitarian aid after the war, but have now gradually shifted to local economic development including projects on microcredits, greenhouses, agricultural exchanges.

At the beginning, the LDA worked also with the Diputación of Cordoba in Spain and the City of Saulieu in France, but due to new administrations in these entities, they have lost interest in the Agency. New partners, however, include the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy) and the trade union Spi-Cgil. Nonetheless, the Agency wishes to enlarge its international partnership and include other European partners in their work to enrich the relations and the exchange of experiences in order to have a stronger impact on the community of Prijedor.

In the past years, the LDA of Prijedor has represented a gateway to the rest of Europe for the citizens, associations and institutions of Prijedor. The activities promoted by the LDA through the support of and the exchange of experiences with its partners encompass the following sectors:

◊ memory and reconciliation
◊ local development
◊ environment
◊ transparency in the public administration
◊ social sector
◊ poverty reduction

The positive results of the activities have been widely acknowledged by both local institutions, international organisations and associations of Prijedor alike. Being partner of the LDA Prijedor has represented the local authorities and partner institutions a unique opportunity for relations and exchange of experiences through with schools, museums, nature parks and youth associations. It also enabled the partner communities to open up, to understand the social and international challenges caused by globalisation and to debate issues of local governance with their Bosnian counterparts. To be partner of the LDA Prijedor also means being part of the network of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies supported by the Council of Europe’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

If you are interested in joining the LDA Prijedor partner network, please send an e-mail to: progetto.prijedor@libero.it

Local Democracy Agency Ohrid loses its “LDA” Label

The ALDA Bureau and Governing Board have decided to withdraw the "LDA" label from the Local Democracy Agency in Ohrid ("the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"). The activities of the Agency underwent an evaluation process at the end of 2006 and had been accorded a temporary label at this stage. It was most of all regretted that the Agency had lost its international partner network - one of the main characteristics of a Local Democracy Agency - and that little if nothing had been done to network with new partners in Europe. Since after the six-months probation period with the temporary label the situation had not changed and the communication between the LDA and ALDA had deteriorated, it seemed unavoidable to exclude the LDA Ohrid from the LDA network. Having obtained an important expertise in training local governments and NGOs, the organisation may continue its work independently, however.

The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies regrets this step and confirms its strong will to continue working in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" through other projects and eventually a new Local Democracy Agency. In September, ALDA started a new co-operation project between the French Region Lower Normandy and various Macedonian partners. In addition, the Local Democracy Agency in Kosovo/UNMIK is involved in various trans-border projects in the Kumanovo/Skopje region.
Setting up a new LDA in Albania—Call for partners

The 11 Local Democracy Agencies, working successfully to promote democracy and the respect for human rights in the Balkans and the Southern Caucasus within the network formed by the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies, are relying on an active partnership to support their daily operations. Partners are typically local and regional authorities, NGOs, or universities from across Europe.

So far, the network of LDAs has not included Albania. However, as this country is part of the European Union Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans just like the other LDA host countries in the Balkans it has been natural to consider extending the network also to Albania. Following an ALDA led fact-finding mission to Tirana and Shkodra in October 2005, the Governing Board in December 2005 endorsed a recommendation by the ALDA Bureau of such an extension with the opening of a Local Democracy Agency in Albania (based in Shkodra) as soon as possible and hopefully in early 2008 at the latest.

The main axes of activities of the LDA will be:

◊ Training for local authorities and civil society such as participatory planning process, urban planning; budget and human resources management
◊ Local economic development
◊ Sustainable tourism
◊ Women Rights Advocacy
◊ Exchange of best practices on local government issues with the international partners

The ALDA is currently fundraising for the setting of the LDA Albania and is identifying partners (local and regional authorities, NGOs, individuals) to support the upcoming activities.

The partners:

• Provide core financial support
• Participate in activities where they have the skills and capacities
• Encourage their own partners to participate in the work of the LDA
• Promote the work of the LDA in their own community and encourage wider participation

For more information, please contact Martial Paris, ALDA Regional Coordinator, martial.paris@aldaintranet.org
Welcome to Bydgoszcz

By Agnieszka Dybowska, Municipality of Bydgoszcz

Bydgoszcz is a city in Central Poland, the capital of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie province, on the Rivers Brda and Vistula. Bydgoszcz, on the main water route, has been growing, developing and attracting new respectable residents. The Bydgoszcz Canal, built more than 200 years ago, runs through the city and is its major tourist attraction. The 15th and 16th centuries marked a period of the city’s prosperity: the royal mint, several tanneries, weaving workshops and carpenter’s shops and the bustling inland harbour made it an important commercial centre.

Subsequent centuries witnessed unprecedented industrial development. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries new residential houses as well as public and industrial buildings emerged. Today unique Art Nouveau and eclectic architecture is found throughout the city, mostly in the city centre.

Ubiquitous green areas are part of the city’s image. Bydgoszcz is often called a green or a garden city. It owes this title not only to the parks, old avenues of trees within the city, but also to the Myślicinek Forest Park on the outskirts; its 800 hectares of forest include the Polish Fauna Garden, a botanical garden, an equestrian centre and tennis courts, just to name a few.

Today the city, with its population of nearly 400 000 people, is an industrial, commercial, cultural, educational and sports centre as well as an important road and railway junction and inland harbour. The international airport has been in operation since early 2004.

The magic charm of the city, its green parks, bustling lifestyle as well as the hospitality of the residents make you feel at home.

Bydgoszcz is very proud of being the first Polish city joining the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA). We strongly believe that through the participation in ALDA Bydgoszcz will be able to make new contacts across Europe. We would like to share with other local and regional authorities as well as NGOs the experience we made in the transitional process towards democracy and how today the citizens participate in all areas of local governance. Bydgoszcz already has a variety of international partner cities, including Krzemienczuk and Czerkasy (Ukraine) and Pawlodar (Kazachstan). We have strongly believe in the reinforcement of other cooperation contacts, in particular our partners from Kragujevac (Serbia) and Reggio Emilia (Italy). We are interested in the promotion of human rights and the protection of a multicultural society.

As a member of ALDA we hope to host international meetings or conference ourselves. The first step in this direction is a project of ecological educational activities we are going to initiate.
Monfalcone and the 40 cooks—Launch of transborder cooperation project

With an intercultural evening at the Italian Institute in Strasbourg, the Municipality of Monfalcone, member of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies, started a new transborder project *From Cherso to Carso between Friuli Venezia Giulia, Slovenia and Croatia* on 29 May 2007.

“It is very important that the municipalities between Italy, Croatia and Slovenia work together. 60 years ago, during the Second World War, this was unthinkable with a concentration camp being located in the city of Trieste, the only one outside the German territory”, recalled Gianfranco Pizzolitto, the Mayor of Monfalcone. The Ambassadors of Croatia, Slovenia and Italy to the Council of Europe also underlined the importance of such trans-border activities and Gianfranco Martini, ALDA President, stressed the excellent work done by the Local Democracy Agencies in this respect. The evening was rounded off with a food and wine tasting prepared by 40 young cooks from Monfalcone.

Among the first activities of the project is a common exhibition prepared by various partners, including ALDA and the Local Democracy Agency of Verteneglio (Croatia). It will be shown in all the partner countries, but had its premiere at the Council of Europe during the annual session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (29 May – 1 June 2007).

The overall objectives of the project are to foster trans-border co-operation between Slovenian, Italian and Croatian municipalities ranging from an improved infrastructure and public transport system to strengthening the rights of linguistic minorities and other capacity building activities.
ALDA relies on its stagiaires (interns, trainees, fellows) to achieve its mission. The stagiaires are most frequently students joining ALDA to gain professional experience, working under the expert guidance of the ALDA staff. Regardless of their background and their path into ALDA, stagiaires are welcome and provided with all necessary assistance to both enjoy their stay and to benefit both personally and the organisation.

To contact ALDA about traineeships, please use the coordinates in the editorial textbox on the front page.

ALDA Stagiaires' Corner

New intern in Strasbourg

“So what are you doing working here?” This is a question that has been posed to me several times over the past few weeks. As a Canadian working for ALDA in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, I can understand the confusion. However, my answer is simple; yes I am Canadian, but I am also European...however neither really matters.

I have been working as an intern for the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies in Strasbourg since September 12th. When searching for an internship, I first outlined my personal and academic interests, then tried to find an organisation that corresponded to my background. I have been studying for my master's degree at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow Poland, where I have focused my research around processes of Democratization in the European (EU) periphery. Studying in Poland provided me with an excellent opportunity to observe the changes that have occurred as a result of the country's accession to the European Union in 2004. Poland is now firmly within the fold of the EU, they have made incredible improvements in order to adhere to European Union standards. The same process is occurring still in places like the countries of the Former Yugoslavia, a region where ALDA is heavily engaged.

ALDA’s role of supporting local democracy, human rights, and sustainable development throughout Europe relates directly to my academic interests and my professional ambitions, so when the opportunity to work as an intern was presented, I did not hesitate to say yes.

The Council of Europe and indeed the greater European project at large is one of an eclectic nature. Respect for diversity and cultural pluralism in many ways defines the efforts of organisations like the ALDA, and the Council of Europe. Countries and people who may not share the same language or cultural practices unite nevertheless in a campaign to promote common values and a higher standard of living for those citizens who also share in those common values. The fact that I am now part of this endeavour does not feel to me as strange as it may appear to others, because behind the North American accent is a European heritage. However all of this is of much less importance than the presence a parallel value system.

As a dual Canadian/British citizen with a Polish family history, I feel at home working for an organisation that transcends national borders in order to promote pan European Democracy. I have never felt constricted by one national identity, which is an experience that I believe provides me with an objective perspective useful in the development and implementation of ALDA's projects.

I feel lucky to have been given the chance to work with the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies in the Council of Europe, and I hope that in the coming months I can make as significant a contribution to ALDA’s work, as ALDA is making to my professional development.

Michael Nowicki
Association of the Local Democracy Agencies Intern

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New ALDA Members and LDA partners

• NGO “IPSIA”, Italy (Partner LDA Mostar)
• Luigi Vulcano (individual ALDA member)
• Municipality of Rome (ALDA member)
• Prahova County, Romania (ALDA member)

ALDA and LDA Agenda

11 October ALDA Bureau Meeting in Brussels

11 October Presentation event active citizenship pilot projects in Brussels

18 October Screening of documentary by Osservatorio sui Balcani, Council of Europe, Strasbourg

20—25 October Youth seminar in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

22—27 October Training activities Russia project

29 October Pearl.EU Scientific Committee, Bari, Italy

31 October Conference on the Balkans, Lausanne, Switzerland

1—2 November Training Russia project

6—8 November Pearl.EU Conference and stand at Compa Fair, Bologna, Italy

6—7 November Liedra Network Annual Meeting, Brussels

12—16 November Study Tour Russia

14—16 November Coordination meeting microcredit project, Belgrade, Serbia

26 November Pearl.EU Third Scientific Committee, Sisak, Croatia

27 November Final press conference Russia project

27—28 November Training for LDA Delegates, Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina

30 November Conference on Kosovo status in Vienna, Austria

7 December Final conference Cards project, Brussels

11 December ALDA Governing Board, Strasbourg, France

18 December: Final conference Russia project

Local workshops active citizenship project still to be scheduled.
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