

SPEAKING POINTS FOR AMBASSADOR MITJA DROBNIČ, HEAD OF
DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO MONTENEGRO

ALDA General Assembly – 15th Anniversary

Saturday, 9 May 2015, Podgorica

Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is my pleasure today, the day the European Union celebrates the 65th anniversary of the "Schuman Declaration" by which the idea of creating a European coal and steel community was launched as a first step towards a more united Europe, to also congratulate the organisation behind this event, ALDA, for its 15th birthday and to thank it for its work towards the achievement of the same goal.
- Civil society organisations are an indispensable link between citizens and authorities (both at local, regional, national and European levels) in so far as those organisations are often the place of political apprenticeship and civic engagement, as well as a major channel for citizens' participation. Such intermediary structures, representing issues of general interest for all or specific parts of the society are necessary to reach out to citizens and to ensure appropriation of the European project.
- That is why the "Europe for Citizens" Programme (EFCP) has been supporting, since its creation, town twinning and civil society projects that encourage citizens of the European Union as well as from participating countries in the Programme – such as Montenegro, since October 2014 – to take part in building Europe through exchanges, debates, reflection, learning and other activities.
- The European Commission also considers that think tanks, policy research organisations, platforms of pan-European organisations, and civil society organisations have a specific role to play in providing reflections on European issues, on European identity and values, and in fuelling debate at European level, generating ideas and recommendations on how to approach complex issues. For these reasons, since its creation, the EFCP has been proposing a structural support funding scheme to those organisations, which, as ALDA, make a tangible contribution to this objective.

- The European Commission also carries out an open and regular dialogue on all areas of Union action with citizens and civil society. It does so in a decentralised way. As far as the "Europe for Citizens" is concerned, the dialogue developed with 50 key European organisations and think tanks, and, since the beginning, ALDA has taken an active part in this dialogue, in particular to advocate for reinforcing avenues for citizens participation.
- Through its 15 years of existence, ALDA, its members and Local Democracy Agencies, have worked closely with the host city authorities and with diverse local stakeholders and have succeeded in building inter-municipal, cross-border and regional cooperation networks, thus contributing to making the EU integration process more accessible to EU citizens and imposing itself as a reliable partner in the actions promoting social and economic reforms on the way to EU accession.
- The Commission is particularly happy that, in line with the spirit of the Europe for Citizens programme, and thanks to its support, ALDA has contributed to :
 - developing citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity;
 - fostering citizenship and improving conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level.
- Since 2006, ALDA was one of the pioneer organisations that tested an innovative tool to promote citizens' participation, namely "citizens' panel", with the support of the "Europe for Citizens" Programme.
- Looking at its achievements, particularly in favour of civic participation and democratic engagement, we wish ALDA a very happy 15th birthday!