

## **Local Government Development in South Caucasus**

Per Vinther, Kutaisi, November 30, 2010

- It is a great pleasure to welcome on behalf of ALDA all participants and speakers to this conference here today and thank the Mayor of Kutaisi for hosting our conference and the continuing support by the local authorities for the work of the LDA Georgia in Kutaisi.
- And thanks to The Congress, GTZ and NALAS for their cooperation and support to make this conference possible.
- In ALDA we are happy that we can continue to participate in the work started at the conference in Kutaisi a year ago to discuss the development of local democracy and local government in South Caucasus.
- I am impressed that we have such an interesting group of participants and speakers present at this conference. I believe this is a valuable opportunity to exchange experience and develop ideas on how to support the development of local good governance and civil society in South Caucasus and I encourage all of you to make good use of this opportunity.
- ALDA is pleased to announce that we now work actively in all three countries in South Caucasus and we are happy that LDA Georgia has worked successfully in Kutaisi for well over four years. We firmly believe that it will be possible to also open LDAs in Armenia and Azerbaijan in a not too distant future. Our work in South Caucasus is very important to us and has become one of our top priorities.
- We believe that the cooperation and experience we can offer through our network of Municipalities, NGOs and other partners throughout Europe will prove of great benefit for the development of local democracy in South Caucasus.
- As always I would like to stress that such a process works both ways: This cooperation and experience sharing is beneficial, not only for local government development in South Caucasus, but also in terms of bringing more knowledge and understanding of the South Caucasus countries to European municipalities. This exchange helps bring South Caucasus closer to the rest of Europe.

- Since the 90es ALDA has had a very rich and successful experience in the Balkans and I believe that the positive results we have achieved with decentralised multilateral cooperation and the LDAs in the Balkans can be used in a positive and constructive way in South Caucasus. At the same time we are quite aware that South Caucasus is not the Balkans and that the countries in South Caucasus are very different from one another, and we therefore emphasize an individual approach to each country in its own right.
- I would like to stress that we in ALDA have always seen our activities in the Balkans as a **process** not just a project! We do not believe in lasting benefit of launching a project one year and be gone the next year. Sustainable improvements in democracy require time and perseverance and – importantly – the acceptance by the local population that a modern democratic society is what they want for themselves. Our approach to South Caucasus will be the same. A **process** in which we together with local politicians and citizens embark on contributing to lasting, transparent, accountable local good governance.
- During this conference we will be hearing local government representatives from several European countries, in particular from Associations in South East Europe. I know their interventions will be interesting and lead to equally interesting discussions among all of us to reflect on what is needed and which steps can be taken to support local government development in South Caucasus.
- As part of this process we are planning to conduct follow-up trainings in cooperation with the associations in all three countries and we hope to use this conference to identify exactly what the needs and interests of these associations are in order to shape these training projects accordingly.
- Let me mention that ALDA during the past year has been very active in the Eastern Partnership process of the EU and has built the basis for an increase of activities in South Caucasus. We look forward to discuss our activities throughout the past year in more details with you, and to develop plans to continue these activities and bring them to bear on our work in South Caucasus.
- Specifically on the programme of the conference: First half day about the LDA Georgia experience, then after lunch discussion of results and lessons learned since the conference last year. And then more specific discussion about the work of national associations and how they work...