



FINAL 21 December 2010

Working on the progress of local democracy in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Conclusions of the Kutaisi conference November 30 – December 1, 2010

The Conference of Local Authorities Associations of the South Caucasus held in Kutaisi, Georgia on November 30 – December 1, 2010 was initiated by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Association of Local Democracy Agencies in order to address their common objectives in the South Caucasus, to strengthen local and regional democracy and to support the work of Local Democracy Agency Georgia in Kutaisi. This action is also a direct follow-up to Resolution 272 (2008) adopted by the Congress on 'Local consequences in the conflict zone in the South Caucasus: support from European local and regional authorities'. The conference follows the conference held in Kutaisi October 2009.

The partners who co-organised and supported the conference were; the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), the LDA Georgia in Kutaisi, the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS) as well as the different national associations and non-governmental organisations from South Caucasus who were present during this event and gave their feedback and input to the discussions. GTZ contributed to support additional participants at the conference.

Furthermore the Congress stressed the importance of strengthening local democracy and calls for efficient coordination of the different players and tools used. The Congress welcomes the leading role of partners such as Strasbourg in Kutaisi, in view to elaborate targeted projects on key issues such as financial problems, youth participation, transport, health, tailor-made training programmes, etc. In addition, the Congress underlines the importance of the development of local democracy and looks for further common activities as part of the follow-up to local and regional elections.

During the conference the participants carried out a review of the activities they have conducted since the previous conference held in October 2009 to assess the development of local democracy in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia during the past year and concluded that:

1. National Associations, as representative the body of local and regional elected people, have - on the one hand - a key institutional role to play in promoting decentralisation, and - on the other hand - , they should strongly facilitate the mission of their respective members and to support them in shouldering their responsibilities

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towards the citizens in order to involve them more effectively as local players and partners.

2. The National Associations of Local Authorities in South Caucasus benefit from exchange of information and shall work in the future in the framework of cooperation with ALDA and the Congress.

3. The Network of Local Authorities Associations of South East Europe (NALAS) offers their expertise for the development and strengthening of their fellow Associations in the South Caucasus.

4. The Governments of the South Caucasus countries are invited to commit themselves to further reforms towards stronger local self-government and to identify key priorities, with a view to encourage targeted, demand-driven support by the international community.

5. A specific activity to be supported is transborder cooperation between interested countries and the activities of the Euroregion Eurocaucasus.

6. There should be a focus on Capacity building for elected representatives and professional associations; reinforcing democracy at the grass-roots level through increased participation of citizens and civil society in local public life and providing local authorities with resources adequate to the tasks allocated to them. To work together with ALDA on specific capacity building activities for improving citizens' participation, with a particular view on gender perspective and balance in political decision making processes. A possible instrument to apply is the Code of Good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process developed by the conference of the International non-governmental organizations of the Council of Europe, and the European code of conduct for political integrity of local and regional elected representatives.

7. The participation next year in the European Week of Local Democracy will provide an opportunity to share good practices of local democracy in the region. One activity in this context could be the celebration of the 5-year anniversary of LDA Georgia through a conference on Local Democracy in Tbilisi.

8. The participation of the South Caucasus countries in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) of the European Union provides an additional framework for advancing the common causes in the local democracy area resources.

9. They confirm the importance of contributing on an equal basis and with their own experiences with propositions and initiatives between interested partners.

10. It is important to strengthen the role of the LDA Georgia in Kutaisi within the region as one of the key actors to promote local democracy and cooperation between local authorities and civil society in Georgia. They confirm the importance to work on a process to establish an LDA in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It should be studied under which possible forms LDAs can operate in these countries in order to find the format that will work most efficiently with the local needs with particular emphasis on issues of participatory design and implementation of bottom up development plans. While working to establish these new LDAs it is important to ensure that they will play a complementary role to other actors in the areas where they will be operating.