

Peja/Pec, 2 August 2010

**Speech by Günther KRUG, Vice-President of the Congress
of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe**

Dear colleagues, Dear friends,

It is a great day.

On behalf of the Congress I am so pleased to be with you on the occasion of the signature of the partners agreement for the opening of the LDA Kosovo.

President of Congress, Jan Micallef asked me to convey its best regards.

The main objective of LDA Kosovo is to bring together local and civil society organisations, in this way providing the assistance necessary to help to promote a smooth and stable transition towards democracy.

The Congress is fully committed to working with Local Democracy Agencies in order to develop and strengthen democratic stability in this region.

We know, South-East Europe is a key area for the development of democratic stability for the whole European continent.

The role of the Local Democracy Agency is to conceive and develop concrete support programmes to strengthen local democracy, foster respect for human rights beyond community barriers and further sustainable development in the Western Balkan region.

The promotion of tolerant and trust-based relationships is one of the main targets to be achieved.

ALDA has already done tremendous work helping to advance the process of transition after years of confrontation and mistrust in South-East Europe.

Democracy requires transparency and accountability throughout the policy-making process. Local Democracy Agencies provide ideal platforms to mobilise citizens' participation, and the exchange of information and experience within the framework of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies.

Citizen needs should be dealt with by local authorities, while keeping in mind that all citizens are equal in human rights, in respect of their ethnic, cultural, religious or social backgrounds.

It gives me great pleasure to learn that Tavolo Trentino con il Kosovo confirmed the willingness to become Lead Partner of the LDA Kosovo, I congratulate.

The 10th anniversary of Tavolo Trentino active involvement in Kosovo offers an excellent opportunity to sign a "Letter of Intent" which will make the opening of the LDA Kosovo official, helping to further develop common projects and activities within the region.

Other partners have clearly indicated their interest, such as the Region of Istria (Croatia), the Canton of Neuchatel (Switzerland), the Municipalities of Yalova (Turkey) and the Association of Municipalities of Kosovo (AMK).

As far as the NGOs are concerned, I would like to pay tribute to the commitment of “Tavolo Trentino con Kosovo” / Province of Trento, “Reggio Terzo Mondo” (Kosovo and Italy), AIBI, “amici dei bambini” (Kosovo and Italy) and Alfa Formation (France), who decided to join forces as to foster the development of a democratic culture throughout Kosovo.

We all know the famous expression “that all politics are local” . Well, so is democracy – our citizens gain their first democratic experience at the local level, and it is at this level where they learn about, and interact the most, with democratic structures. It is at local level where the networking of elected representatives, joining their efforts, represents a real force to be reckoned with, and brings about the most tangible results.

The work of LDAs in the field and their on-going commitment is indispensable for improving the situation of our citizens in this region and must be further pursued and developed, but also has to adapt its action to the growing challenges of today.

The fruitful experience of on-going cooperation between ALDA and the Congress should inspire future initiatives and actions to make the best use of limited resources at our disposal. The Congress stands ready to examine new projects and initiatives to be proposed by ALDA and to be jointly implemented by the Congress in the years to come.

We have a common goal/ an efficient and independent local self-government that attends to the needs of its citizens.

The quickest way for us to reach it, is to pool our knowledge, experiences and in some cases resources. This decision to open the LDA Kosovo will give us the opportunity to do just that.

Finally, on behalf of our President, I wish to reaffirm once again that the Congress remains your committed partner in this work for a better and stronger local democracy in South-East Europe, for a better quality of life for our citizens, and for a better response to their concerns. This is our common goal, and this is our common cause.

Thank you very much.