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Strasbourg, 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2011

**Moral report of the President on the activities 2010**

We can with pride look back at another successful year in 2010. In spite of the persistent financial crisis it has been possible to maintain a high level of activities both for the individual Local Democracy Agencies and for the ALDA network as a whole. The worry remains, however, that the number of partners for each LDA will continue to shrink making it difficult for them to make ends meet. In spite of this they are all doing an amazing job with many worthwhile projects as you will be able to see further on in this report.

As set out in the policy paper on enlargement of the LDA network the Association is investing a lot of time and resources in preparing the ground for such enlargement to Armenia and Azerbaijan, using LDA Georgia as a stepping stone for the achievement of this objective. We are confident that an LDA Armenia will join the network in 2011, due to a good deal of welcome interest and support from French municipalities and others as well. On the contrary, the uncertain democratic situation in Azerbaijan has made us accept that we need to proceed with additional care in that country. All this, however, falls well within the framework of our involvement with the Eastern Partnership of the EU where ALDA and LDA experience has a strong voice thanks to the fact that our Director is co-chairing the Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum.

ALDA continued its cooperation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe with the aim of bringing the Associations of Local Authorities of the countries of South Caucasus to increase their mutual cooperation for the benefit of cooperation at the national level. A second conference with this objective was held in Kutaisi late last year, and a further conference is scheduled for early 2012. This is clearly a difficult

process but I am convinced that with a little bit of good will some concrete progress could be achieved.

Promoting civic participation and active citizenship in general has also been a large part of ALDA activities in the past year. We feel that involving our members and partners in this kind of activity goes hand in hand with ALDA philosophy also reflected in our efforts to promote democracy in South East Europe and in South Caucasus. Active citizens are needed not only to hold politicians accountable but also to generate new ideas for the benefit of the community. Through the EU programme "Europe for Citizens" we have obtained not only funding for specific projects in this field as you can read in this report but also much needed operational support for which we are extremely grateful.

At this point I would like to express a whole-hearted thank you to members and partners across Europe for their confidence in and unfailing support to the Association. Equally, I would like to thank the European Institutions whose support we are enjoying but also for their belief in the benefit of what we do: the Council of Europe and the Congress, the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions and many more, too many to mention them all. Last but not least I would like to express my recognition of the tireless work and commitment of ALDA staff under the guidance of the Director, Antonella Valmorbida. Without this commitment our achievements might not be quite as spectacular. In the same vein I thank the LDA Delegates and their staff for their equally strong commitment in the field!

I would like to conclude on a forward looking note with reference to recent developments in South East Europe. With the arrest of some of the last alleged war crimes suspects still at large the region, in which ALDA and the LDAs have been active for more than seventeen years, should finally reach the point where the countries can concentrate on EU membership and good neighbourly relations. A situation where justice is not only done but seen to be done, where there is no longer a need to point fingers and argue about who is aggressor and who is victim, where rule of law is a matter of fact and where all citizens can enjoy all of the universal fundamental rights. We might not be quite there yet but once we are all those members, partners, ALDA and LDA staff who have remained committed to our task and continued to support and encourage us to achieve more both in terms of quality and quantity will rightly be able to feel that they have contributed in some small or not so small way to this positive step towards a brighter future for all.