

Towards ALDA 20²⁰ years

4 webinars, 4 geographic areas of action for local democracy
at the dawn of ALDA's 20th anniversary

WESTERN BALKANS' LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN EU ACCESSION AND THE BERLIN PROCESS

Friday, July 10th, 2020 | 2 pm CEST

REGISTER HERE: https://bit.ly/WB_ALDA20years

Interpretation available in **Albanian** and **BHS**

Dear Members and Partners,

we hope that our message finds you well in this moment when everybody is slowly but effectively exiting the lockdown caused by the spread of the COVID-19. The last months have been difficult for everybody, and we experienced a revised and somehow limited version of our work and social life; nevertheless, all over the world, local communities and the international civil society have shown an excellent sense of solidarity, mutual support and resilience.

Our work has never stopped, and so haven't our lives: we aptly kept -and continue keeping- alive our efforts in linking communities, supporting actions for the building of better communities, and putting in place activities, turning virtual communications into a means for sharing best practices and advocating for a more sustainable and inclusive future for all of us, as we have been doing for the past 20 years. With the summer ahead and the final months of the year in front of us, it seems we will have the opportunity to slowly return to our usual activities, too, gathering together in person the different stakeholders involved in our work, our members and partners.

Considering the importance of 2020 for ALDA, which is celebrating its 20 years of activity in the fields of citizens participation, good local governance and sustainable communities, and the fact that the future will –now more than ever- bring new challenges in our work for all of us, we decided to pave the way to our Annual General Assembly (which will take place in Brussels in October) by organizing online meetings and webinars to take a moment and celebrate the results we have achieved in the past 20 years, and reflect together on the future challenges in the different geographical areas we are operative in.

In this framework, we are hosting four online meetings of about 90 minutes each, with a focus on our four geographical areas of action -Europe, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership and the MENA region- and we will be extremely glad to have the opportunity to have you on board with us during this very important moment. Thank you!

Antonella Valmorbida,
Secretary General

ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy



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The Western Balkan context

The Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 confirmed the **political will for the Western Balkans to be part of the European Union**, and set the foundations for the EU accession process. Even though it is considered as a highly political and mainly institutional process, the EU accession is envisaged to be an open and inclusive mechanism involving different stakeholders from state institutions, decision-makers to a variety of non-state actors such as civil society, media and academia.

Despite the changing geo-political context and diverse obstacles encountered, the EU integration process **remains a priority in the Region**. The latest green light for the start of the negotiating talks with Albania and North Macedonia proves the commitment of the EU towards the area, and the new methodology introduced by the European Commission last year is expected to give a new dynamic to the process. Although all WB6 countries are facing different challenges, their development depends on the **shared political, social and economic context of the Region**.

Launched in 2014, **the Berlin process** is an initiative to encourage regional cooperation between Western Balkan countries in order to facilitate reconciliation and good neighborly relations as pre-conditions for EU accession. This multi-stakeholder approach involves the States as well as the business community, the civil society and the young generation. Different bodies were created for this interaction purpose, such as [Western Balkan Fund](#) and the [Regional Youth Cooperation Office](#).

The role of Local Authorities in the EU accession and Berlin process.

Within the EU, the Local Authorities are responsible for the implementation of 60-70% of *acquis communautaire*. They implement EU strategies and policies related to environment, waste management, air and water pollution, social affairs, culture, education and other fields within their competences. The Local Authorities are **the first citizens' interlocutors** to respond to their needs and problems, which makes them the **most suitable promoters of EU values**. The Local Authorities are main stakeholders in important processes in Western Balkans such as Public Administration Reform or fight against corruption.

In the context of a worldwide crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemics, the Local Authorities have an even more important part to play for their citizens in the new political, economic and social context. They shall play a significant role in **nurturing local democracy and participatory decision-making** in times when democracy is at stake and people lose confidence towards the institutions. The Local Authorities are pillars of the social dimension at the local level to provide social services to all citizens and ensure cohesion and cooperation of all stakeholders: by supporting local initiatives, they will become catalysts of local economic development.

Despite their uncontested importance, the Local Authorities are **invisible stakeholders in the EU integration processes**. The local decision-makers are rarely represented in high-level dialogue between EU and accession countries.

The channels of direct communication between the EU institutions and Local Authorities are very limited and rarely functional. EU funding is available for Local Authorities but their participation in EU projects remain a



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challenge due to lack of administrative capacities. Moreover, Local Authorities are not systematically included in planning of IPA and other programs.

The Berlin process was expected to be open and inclusive and many stakeholders found their place, but this is not the case for the Local Authorities. Even though decentralised cooperation is a common practice among municipalities in Western Balkans, it is not yet perceived as a tool for regional cooperation and development. Involvement of Local Authorities in the Berlin process is expected to **encourage an inclusive bottom-up approach** to the EU enlargement processes.

This webinar will aim to answer the following questions:

- What is the role of Local Authorities in the EU accession process of Western Balkans?
- How can the Local Authorities be included in the Berlin process and play a more significant role in regional cooperation?
- How can the EU improve dialogue with local decision makers and make EU integration processes more inclusive?
- What can Local Authorities do to improve their position in the EU accession process and reinforce their capacities in EU related questions?

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Webinar agenda

Opening speech

ORIANO OTOČAN, ALDA President

ALDA's 20th anniversary and its activity in the Western Balkans: a foreword;

A presentation of ALDA's new logo, Activity Report 2019 and LDA Activity Report 2019

ANTONELLA VALMORBIDA, ALDA Secretary General

PANEL DISCUSSION moderated by IVANA PETROVSKA, ALDA Director of Skopje office & SEE Regional Programmes Coordinator

ANDREJ ZERNOVSKI, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia

COLIN WOLFE, Head of Unit WB Regional Cooperation and Programmes (DG NEAR)

NATAŠA VUČKOVIĆ, Director, Foundation Center for Democracy

MARK SPEICH, CIVEX President, Committee of the Regions

Questions & Answers

The future of ALDA and its action plan in the Western Balkans

ANTONELLA VALMORBIDA, ALDA Secretary General

Questions & Answers

Final remarks

The webinar is organized within the framework of the project "Regional Youth Compact for Europe" supported by DG NEAR and coordinated by the Foundation Center for Democracy. The webinar is part of the strategic objectives of the Balkan Network for Local Democracy, a network created by ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies from Western Balkans to support regional cooperation and EU integration.



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