

Newsletter 1/2006



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ALDA's focus on Georgia in 2006

After more than two years of preparation, the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) is determined to open the first Local Democracy Agency outside South East Europe, namely in the city of Kutaisi, Georgia. On February 21st, a meeting of potential partners of the new Agency will take place in the premises of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Representatives of the cities of Nantes, Strasbourg (France), Bristol and Newport (UK) together with the Mayor of Kutaisi and other local partners from Georgia will gather to discuss an action plan of the opening and their involvement in the future activities of the Agency. Moreover, representatives of KS, the Norwegian Association of Municipalities; NALAG, the Association of Georgian Municipalities as well as of the Permanent Representations of the member countries of the Council of Europe will be present at the meeting.

ALDA's intention is to open the new Agency by summer 2006 and is therefore finally fundraising to guarantee the first two years of activities. The first projects foreseen include women and youth empowerment, local capacity building in the areas of participatory planning processes, waste management and budget management, local economic development and the exchange of best practices with the international partners.

Throughout the year 2006, ALDA's communication and press work will concentrate on Georgia to raise the visibility of the new Agency. On 31 May 2006, an information day "Georgia: Two years after the Rose Revolution" will be organized in Strasbourg. In addition to this, ALDA staff will participate itself in conferences and seminars related to Georgia.

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A view over Tbilisi, Georgia

ALDA NEWS

SEE Day in London

The Local Government International Bureau (LGIB) organised on the 4th of October 2005 a South Eastern Europe Day in the Local Government House in London. The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies was present with its Vice-President, Dobrica Milovanovic and its Director, Antonella Valmorbida. M. Keith Jones, Secretary of ALDA and lead partner of the LDA Montenegro also presented its activities, the result of the work and the challenges for the future. Mrs. Julia Specht, from Wolverhampton City Council presented the successful work and the excellent cooperation with the Local Democracy Agency in Subotica.

LGIB confirmed its interest in supporting the LDA and ALDA work and defined the guidelines of their activities in SEE, in particular in Serbia and Montenegro and in the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". They are also interested in the future activities in Albania and Georgia as well as in Belarus.

During the meeting, the role of the LDAs was discussed in the presence of participants from Essex County (interested in activities in the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), NI.CO (from Belfast, Northern Ireland), Norwich/Novi Sad Association. There were also representative from the Foreign Office and the Westminster Foundation present.

The following local authorities from the UK are involved in the LDA programme at present:

East Staffordshire Borough Council : lead partner LDA Montenegro, Secretary ALDA, member of ALDA

Wolverhampton City Council : lead partner LDA Subotica, member ALDA

Kent County Council, partner of the LDA Central and Southern Serbia and member of ALDA

Chelsford and Arun : former partners of LDA Kosovo

Bristol and Newport: potential partners for the LDA in Georgia

LGIB: member and part of the ALDA Governing Board

"East Staffordshire Borough Council was the first English local authority with a partnership in Montenegro. We are trying to involve all our citizens in this fruitful cooperation"

**Keith Jones, Secretary
ALDA**

Second Meeting on Decentralisation between France and Croatia

The second meeting France-Croatia on international decentralized cooperation was organised by Cités Unies France, the French Embassy to Croatia and the Union of towns and municipalities of Croatia on 11 October 2005. This event gathered around 40 elected people and civil servants from both countries. Mrs Sonja Bogeljic, LDA Sisak and Martial Paris, ALDA, presented the work of the Local Democracy Agencies and its Association, in particular the pilot project of "Local Economic Development in the Balkans" funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs which ended in September 2005. A follow-up of the project is intended for 2006.



Local Experiences and Perspectives in South East Europe

The Local South-East-Europe Conference, organised by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) with the support of the Österreichischer Städtebund on 14-15 October 2005 in Vienna, was attended by the ALDA President, Mr Gianfranco Martini, and ALDA Vice-President, Mr Per Vinther. The event provided an excellent opportunity to become acquainted with the structures, achievements and challenges of the various National Associations of Cities, Towns or Regions across South East Europe. However, it also made it possible for the representatives of these associations to become better acquainted with the many different initiatives of support offered to the SEE region by the EU, UN, and Governments, and not least local authorities and NGOs from other parts of Europe. During the Workshop "Co-operation in Practice" Mr Vinther made a presentation of ALDA and LDA activities, and Mr Martini addressed the closing session of the plenary on the philosophy behind the existence of the Local Democracy Agencies.

In the margins of the conference a number of con-

tacts were established with a view to future support for the work of ALDA and the LDAs.



**ALDA-President Gianfranco Martini and Jeremy Smith,
Secretary-General CEMR**

ALDA present at COMPA Fair in Bologna

For the second time, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies attended COMPA, the European Exhibition of Public Communication and Services to the citizens and business from 3 – 5 November 2005. The Fair, which is located in Bologna, Italy, has been in existence for more than 10 years and has grown to be one of the most important meeting points for all actors involved in the communication and public administration sector. ALDA Project Manager Stefania Toriello organised a stand and was also among the keynote speakers of the conference "Communication for International development" which was organised by the Association of Public Communication with the support of the Italian Representation of the European Commission.

ALDA Fact-Finding Mission to Albania

An ALDA Delegation composed of Mr Per Vinther, ALDA Vice-President, Martial Paris, Assistant to ALDA's Director, Lukas Van Damme, Congress of the Council of Europe and James Beadle, Local Government International Bureau (UK) visited the Albanian cities of Tirana and Shkodra between October 27th – 30th 2005.

The aim of the mission was to have a first contact with possible local partners in Albania, to draft a report which will be the basis for the future actions to be undertaken by the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies in the region, to identify the needs for possible activities, to understand the local situation and possibilities for a future Local Democracy Agency (LDA) in Albania. The LDA programme was presented to potential partners.

The delegation met different international stakeholders active in Albania such as OSCE, European Commission, Council of Europe, as well as NGOs and local or regional authorities of Shkodra.

Based on the report of the mission, the ALDA Governing Board will take the decision to open an LDA in Shkodra.



Meetings with students from Shkodra and a view over the Shkodra where ALDA may open an LDA in the future

Conference in Bari „Europe to the citizens“

In the framework of the **MahIde.net** project (**M**are **H**adriaticum **L**ocal **D**emocracy cross border **N**ETwork), ALDA and Region Puglia organized a conference on „Europe to its citizens“ on 17 November 2005. This project, starting from the metaphor of the Adriatic sea as a place of relations and exchange, had the aim to reinforce the institutional cooperation between social and economic actors of the two shores.

Numerous speakers talked about the relations between Italy and the Balkans in various areas of local governance, among them professor Silvia Godelli, Councillor for the Mediterranean Area of Region Puglia, ALDA's Director Antonella Valmorbida, as well as several regional representatives. One of the objectives of the conference was to discuss the cooperation between public administration and civil society organisations in Italy as well as the Balkans. That this is an issue at stake was reflected by the high number of participants: more than 80 representatives of local authorities and NGOs from Southern Italy had come together to discuss the role of the citizen in today's Europe.

Conference on the values of the European Constitution in Kaunas, Lithuania

Local authorities need to be better involved in the decision-making at the European level. This was the conclusion of the two-day conference "The role of local authorities in the promotion of the values of the European Constitution" which took place on 23 and 24 November in Kaunas, Lithuania. Representatives of local authorities and civil society organisations from all over Europe had come together to discuss the current crisis in Europe and the role that they can play in the process. Various experts enriched the discussion, among them Ignasi Guardans, Member of the European Parliament; Llibert Cuatrecasas, Former President of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional authorities; Charlotte Roffiean, Active Citizenship Network; Murat Seyrek, Ari Movement, Liudas Mazylis, Vytautas Magnus University Kaunas and Eva Heidbreder, European University Institute Florence. A working paper that was based on a survey conducted prior to the event was the basis of discussion. The conclusion from both working paper and discussions are clear: there is a democracy

deficit in Europe at present, the local level must be included in the debates in a better way, because they implement two thirds of EU Directives and they know what kind of problems and challenges arise at present. A final summary paper will be sent to the European Commission.



Meeting of French Cities Active in Serbia-Montenegro

The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies and its French partners active in Serbia-Montenegro (the city of Suresnes, lead partner of the LDA Central and Southern Serbia and the Association Betton Montenegro, partner of the LDA Montenegro) took part in a meeting of the French cities active in Serbia-Montenegro on 2 December 2005.

The meeting was organised by Cités Unies France and the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia. The city of Nevers hosted the meeting. Mr Jean-Louis Testud from Suresnes, Mr Yves Arnaud from the Association Betton-Montenegro and Mr Martial Paris, Assistant to ALDA's Director, presented the ongoing activities of ALDA and the LDAs in Serbia-Montenegro. They pointed out the advantages of the LDAs network and invited the other cities to join.

Governing Board and General Assembly ALDA

The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies held an extraordinary General Assembly in Suresnes, France, on 12 December 2005, to have the financial report and the accounts of the year 2004 approved by its members. In addition, the draft budget for 2006 was presented.

The event was preceded by a meeting of the ALDA Governing Board, during which the opening of new LDAs in Georgia and Albania were discussed. It was decided the opening of the new Local Democracy Agency in Kutaisi, Georgia, should be among ALDA's priorities for the year 2006.

First Meeting of Potential German Partners in Berlin

With the support of the German Ministry of the Interior, Deutscher Städtetag (German Association of Cities) and the German Section of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, ALDA organised the first meeting for potential German partners in Berlin on 15th December 2005. Representatives of several German local authorities, political foundations and the GTZ were present to exchange their experiences in the area of decentralised cooperation and to analyse why so few German partners are involved in the ALDA network so far. The participants all confirmed that there is no lack of interest in decentralised cooperation in Germany, but many German local and regional authorities are only involved in bilateral projects so far, a majority of them taking place in England, France and Poland. They are only gradually

realising the added value of multilateral projects in other European regions that networks such as the one of ALDA and the LDAs offer.

Several possibilities for a follow-up with German partners were discussed, among them a closer cooperation with the Fellbach-Haus, a youth project in the city of Suva Reka/Suhareke in Kosovo initiated by the City of Fellbach.



Two Mahldenet Meetings in Sarajevo and Zagreb

Two focus groups of the Mahldenet on local democracy in the countries of the Mediterranean Sea were jointly organised by Regione Emilia Romagna (Italy) and ALDA. The first focus group on the theme "One stop shop for productive activities" took place in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 16 December 2005. The meeting gathered representatives from the economic and social world as well as local authority representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The second focus group on 19 December 2005 dealt with the topic "Negotiated planning for local development". Representatives from Croatian local authorities as well as civil society organisations and enterprises took part in the meeting.

The aim of the Mahldenet programme is to reinforce institutional cooperation between stakeholders from Italy and its counterparts in the Balkans in order to increase the opportunities of interaction between economic and social actors from these regions. Through this, a Europe of the citizens will be constructed.



Seminar on EU Policies and Tools in the Western Balkans

On 20 and 21 December 2005, the Association of the Local Democracy organised a two-day seminar "EU Policies and tools in the Western Balkans – Opportunities for local governments" in cooperation with the LDA Central and South Serbia, ANCI (the Italian Association of Municipalities) and CESPI. The seminar took place in Krugujevac, Serbia-Montenegro.

Representatives of Serbian local authorities, NGOs and international organisations had the opportunity to learn more about EU policies and funding opportunities. The different speakers presented also the new trends for 2007-2013.

Seminar on EU Affairs in Mostar

The Local Democracy Agency Mostar together with ALDA and ANCI, the Italian Association of Municipalities, organised a seminar on "EU Policies and Tools in the Western Balkans – Opportunities for Local Governments" which took place in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 19 and 20 January 2006. More than 30 representatives of local authorities from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina gathered to improve their knowledge on EU funding for the Western Balkans and EU integration. The seminar aimed at contributing to the development of local authorities in the country. At present they often do not have the required knowledge on current EU policies for the Western Balkans and lack the skills to receive financial assistance from EU institutions. Representatives of international and national organisations were also present to share their experience with the participants

ALDA Governing Board in Vicenza

The first meeting of the ALDA Governing Board in 2006 took place in Vicenza, Italy, on 27 January. The event was held in the City Hall of Vicenza, the city itself having become member of the Association in 2005. The Mayor of Vicenza, Enrico Hullweck, therefore officially opened the meeting.

Discussions on the budget for 2006, an improvement of cooperation between the different LDAs as well as latest developments in the LDAs in Prijedor and Niksic were on the agenda among other topics. Furthermore, a meeting with members of ALDA from the Veneto Region to exchange best practices on active citizenship rounded off the event. A meeting of the ALDA Bureau preceded the Governing Board in the morning of the same day.



New ALDA DVD

ALDA has published a new film DVD on its work and the 11 Local Democracy Agencies. The film is available in English with subtitles in Croatian, French and Italian. It is the follow-up of the first film produced last summer. The new film adds new material by including all 11 LDAs and the ALDA office in Vicenza. ALDA will use it for presentations during partner meetings, PR activities and contacts with potential donors.

In 2006, ALDA also offers its members and the partners of the LDAs to produce personalised films. For more information on this and the DVD, please contact

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LDA NEWS

Partner Meeting LDA Subotica

A meeting of partners of the Local Democracy Agency Subotica was held in Drammen, Norway from 22 to 25 September 2005, hosted by the Buskerud County Council. The partnership network consisting of the lead partner (Wolverhampton City Council, UK), Buskerud County Council and the host town of Subotica was established in 2003 at the initiative of the Association of LDAs. It has persistently contributed to building up new forms of co-operation between the municipalities included. Over the past two years, much effort has been invested in the design of joint projects and people-to-people exchanges. In addition, numerous contacts and meetings involving the local councillors have been organised on different occasions.

In 2005, particular attention was given to exploring the possibilities of co-operation in priority sectors such as local economic development, capacity building for local authorities, specific education programmes and teaching English in public schools, as well as cultural exchange and youth groups co-operation.

The meeting in Drammen was dedicated to experiences related with the local development planning system and process in Norway, with particular emphasis on mechanisms and institutions of effective co-ordination among regional stakeholders. During the thematic workshop, Mr. Bjarne Stabak, Senior Adviser in the Buskerud County Council, presented the regional

(county) planning process that includes municipalities as primary partners, the regional state (County Governor's office, Regional Employment Service and Department of Social Security), Trade and industry (Regional Business Confederation, Trade Unions and companies). Important regional actors in this process are also the Regional Development Fund (Innovation Norway) and Buskerud University College. Through partnership agreements, specific development projects have been implemented in different sectors. Examples and illustrations of these partnerships were presented in Drammen, the county capital and a flourishing municipality, some 40 km away from Oslo with a population of almost 60.000.

In their presentations, both Councillor Roger Lawrence and Mr. Geza Kucera, the Mayor of Subotica, reiterated the need for intensifying further contacts as to develop joint projects in the fields of good local governance and exchange of good practices. In this way, the LDA Subotica Partners' Meeting achieved its main objectives and may be seen as a step forward in strengthening this trilateral partnership.





ANCI/ALDA Programme

The following articles sum up some of the activities organised within the ANCI/ALDA programme.

Youth Workshop held in Kraljevo

The Local Democracy Agency Central and Southern Serbia organized a Youth Workshop from 21 to 24 October 2005 in Kraljevo in cooperation with the citizens' association "KVART" from Kraljevo and its partner "Tavolo Trentino con la Serbia". The workshop was part of the ANCI/ALDA project "Capacity Building of Local Authorities and Civil Society in Southern and Eastern Europe" supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Target groups were young people from Serbia (Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Nis) and from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Prijedor, Zavidovici).

The "Youth Workshop" was an opportunity for this group of young people to meet, make friends, exchange experiences and work on topics such as identity, stereotypes, non-violent communication and gender issues.



Seminar on EU funds and project drafting held in Nis



The training seminar "European Union: Funds and Drafting Projects" within the ANCI/ALDA Project "Capacity Building of Local Authorities and Civil Society in Southern and Eastern Europe" was organized in Nis on 25 and 26 October 2005 cooperation with the Municipality Medijana, and the City of Nis.

The aim of the two-day seminar was to train local authorities in the writing of EU projects, so that municipalities can profit more from EU funding such as the CARDS programme in the future. Participants were representatives of local authorities of the cities of Nis and Kragujevac, Municipalities Medijana, Palilula, Niska Banja, Pantelejš and Crveni Krst.

Youth exchange between Sisak, Petrinja and Mogliano Veneto

As part of the ANCI/ALDA programme on capacity building, the LDA Sisak in cooperation with its lead partner, the City of Mogliano Veneto, organised a youth exchange for youth organisations from Croatia (Sisak and Petrinja) and Italy (Mogliano Veneto) on 24 and 25 October 2005. 17 young people gathered with the aim to present different youth projects, to exchange experience and to plan possible cooperation in the future.

Croatian youth met with the representatives of the City of Mogliano Veneto responsible for youth issues and got to know the city administration efforts in the youth policy development. They met with representatives of Punto Giovani (Youth Point) where they learned more about some concrete youth actions implemented so far. The Croatian participants said that this experience was refreshing for them especially "to see the differences but also the similarities in the work of the different organisations".



Partner Meeting of LDA Osijek



liament from Slovakia all attended as well as representatives from Osijek municipality and the NGO Albert E.

The meeting gave the opportunity to take stock of the partnerships and to set new goals and develop new ideas for the future cooperation. The LDA expressed its strong interest in developing agricultural tourism in Slavonia as a way of promoting sustainable rural development in the framework of Croatia's future accession to the EU. Such initiatives would help to improve the economic situation of the communities. All partners expressed their enthusiasm and interest in the future cooperation.

The Local Democracy Agency Osijek held its annual partner meeting in Erdutski Vinogradi, Croatia on 21 October 2005. Representatives from Lausanne, Causes Communes Vaud, the Association of Education in Self-Government in Nitra and the Country Par-

The Vice-Mayor of Osijek, Mr Vladimir Sisljagic, held a meeting with the delegation from Lausanne and Nitra and expressed his wishes for a closer cooperation with Switzerland and Slovakia on issues related to democratisation and European integration.

Court Trial Simulation for Law Students

Law students from the University of Mostar and the "D.ermal Bi-jedi." University took part in a court trial simulation on 1 November 2005 organised by the Local Democracy Agency Mostar (BiH) in cooperation with the NGO "Graditelji Mira". A criminal law case was used for the simulation (car accident with a dead person).

In the second case, procedural law was simulated taking the case of infliction of severe injuries. The project coordinator Predrag Zvijerac stressed the significance of this project for the town of Mostar, since it directly invests in the professional and educational development of young people. The project ended in December 2005.



Norwegian partner visits Subotica

Mr Bjarne Stabaek from Buskerud City Council in Norway paid a visit to Subotica on 17 and 18 November 2005 to give a presentation on local and regional development during a training seminar organised in cooperation with the city of Subotica and the LDA.

Mr Stabæk explained the local political structures as well as the main areas of economic development of his Community to the 20 participants, all members of Subotica's City Council and civil servants. In the second part of his presentation, Mr Stabæk gave details on the planning system and process as well as the interaction between the different actors involved in regional planning. Particular emphasis was given to cross-border co-operation projects and partnerships with other local/regional authorities in Europe. The discussion that followed enabled participants to ask questions on international cooperation and cross border partnerships, in particular on Buskerud's initiatives in the Balkans (bilateral cooperation with the Serbian towns of Obrenovac and Cajetina).

Participants were also interested in learning more about Buskerud County Municipality's local needs assessment and local development planning processes.

Mr. Stabaek also took part in a training seminar with young entrepreneurs organised within the ALDA programme "Promoting Local Economic Development in Western Balkans: Youth Capacity Building" sponsored by the Norwegian Government.



Training for Young Entrepreneurs in Kragujevac

The Local Democracy Agency Central and Southern Serbia organized the training seminar "Training for young entrepreneurs" for two groups of young people from Kragujevac within the programme "Promoting Local Economic Development in the Western Balkans: Youth Capacity Building", sponsored by the Norwegian Government.

The seminar for the first group was held on 11th, 12th and 19th October 2005 and for the second group on 19th, 25th, 26th October and 3rd November 2005.



The training objectives were to help the participants in obtaining necessary knowledge needed for writing a business plan for their own new venture idea. The target

groups were young potential entrepreneurs/young people interested in economic affairs, who had ideas for starting a new business venture. Most of them were students in their final year or unemployed graduate students as well as young people who had desire to change their current job situation. 20 business plans were developed during the trainings.

General Assembly LDA Sisak

The Local Democracy Agency Sisak held its General Assembly in Sisak on 19 November 2005 which gathered representatives of the partners' cities and municipalities from Mogliano Veneto, Preganziol, Casale Monferatto, Province of Venice and Veneto Region as well as potential partners from Kutina, Petrinja and Noale. This year's Assembly was particularly significant due to the official appointment of the new Delegate, Ms. Paula Rauzan, and due to the decision to change the organisation's legal status from an international organisation to a national organisation. The new status will open new funding possibilities and will be a significant step in building local democracy. Mr. Luca De Rovere from Mogliano Veneto was elected as Vice-President and Ms. Irena Barisic Milunic became the new Secretary.



Study Visit Zavidovici/Cremona

From 20th to 25th of November 2005, a delegation from the Municipality of Zavidovici (Bosnia-Herzegovina) participated in a study visit to the Municipality of Cremona (Northern Italy - one of the partners of the LDA Zavidovici) and to Cresme S.p.A. of Rome.

The visit was organized in the framework of the ANCI/IB programme "Italian Municipalities for Balkan Municipalities" promoted by ANCI, the Italian Association of Municipalities and the support of Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme foresees the definition of projects of decentralized cooperation between Italian and Balkan municipalities. The objective is the transfer of know-how, the exchange of experience and best practices in order to modernize local public services. The municipalities of Zavidovici and Cremona, in collaboration with Cresme S.p.A., are realizing a feasibility study in the field of territorial planning which will allow the Balkan municipalities to elaborate their own plan following criteria of local sustainable development.

During its visit in Cremona, the delegation was accompanied by Mr. Daniele Soregaroli (chief of the Department of Urbanism) and his technical staff. The Bosnian delegation was also welcomed by the Mayor, the local government and by the Municipal Council during one of its Assembly meetings.

In this occasion, the Vice-Mayor of Zavidovici, Ms Dzeraldina Milicevic, thanked her Italian colleagues for their hospitality and expressed the wish that the partnership between the two municipalities would not remain at an institutional level, but that it could also involve different sectors of the civil society. Miss Milicevic also underlined that it is important not to forget the relevance of those civil and democratic values. What Zavidovici can give in this moment to Cremona is therefore a kind of witness, a message: "we are reminders for you. We are reminders of the fact that those values can be lost and that it is difficult to rebuild a democratic society".

City of Petrinja New Partner of LDA Sisak

As a follow-up of the fruitful cooperation, the City of Petrinja became officially a partner of the Local Democracy Agency Sisak on 18th of January 2006. The Partnership agreement was signed by LDA Sisak delegate, Ms. Paula Rauzan, and the Mayor of Petrinja, Mr. Miroslav Gregurincic. Petrinja is the third city from Croatia that joined LDA Sisak partners' network and thus became a member of the wide international network of local authorities and non-governmental organisations. Mr. Kreso Kovacek, Vice-Mayor of Petrinja, pointed out that they expect a lot from this partnership, especially in connection with EU enlargement.



Serbian Council of Europe representative visited Subotica

Mr Stefano Valenti, Special Representative and Head of the Belgrade Office of the Council of Europe paid a visit to Local Democracy Agency Subotica on 10 and 11 November 2005. The purpose of his mission was to receive more information on the work of all the LDAs in Serbia and to get acquainted with both the contents of ongoing projects and the people involved in their implementation. Present in the meeting were Ms Stanka Parac, LDA Delegate, Mr Svetislav Milankovic and Mr Ladislav Suknovic, Local Project Co-ordinators and Ms Noemie Forlano, intern ALDA.

During this visit, Mr Valenti stressed the importance of the work of LDAs at the local level as a specific link between Serbia and Montenegro and the Council of Europe in the light of the country's full membership to the CoE and the commitments and obligations accepted accordingly.

During his stay in Subotica, Mr Valenti had a meeting with Mr Geza Kucera, Mayor of Subotica and Mr Jozsa Laszlo, President of the Hungarian National Council in Serbia and Montenegro. They informed him about the efforts invested by the local authorities in addressing the issues related with recent interethnic incidents and the need for the further strengthening of the local institutions.

Mr. Valenti confirmed that the Council of Europe is ready to support the progress made by the authorities in Serbia in implementing a genuine decentralisation of government. Local authorities and increased citizens' participation at the local level are the pillars for a greater

democratic stability in the region. The visit also gave the LDA Subotica the opportunity to introduce Mr Valenti to a new initiative in the local civil sector, in which the LDA is an active participant: the creation of the network of NGOs (SU Civitas). Its main objective is to support citizens' participation in local government and help establish future partnerships between civil and public sectors. Included are more than 20 organisations dealing with human and minority rights, local democracy, women's rights, neighbourhood community centres and youth groups.

Furthermore, Mr Valenti met the organizers and executive managers of the two most important cultural programmes organized traditionally in Subotica for the past 15 years: The International Film Festival and International Children's Theatres' Festival.



City Council of Portogruaro dedicated to the LDA Verteneglio/Brtonigla

The City Council of Portogruaro (Province of Venice, Italy) dedicated its last meeting in the year 2005 to present the activities of the Local Democracy Agency of Verteneglio/Brtonigla (Croatia) and their involvement in ALDA. The event was held on the 20th of December at the presence of the Council, the Delegate of the LDA, M. Tullio Ferneti and the Director of ALDA, Ms. Antonella Valmorbida.

Portogruaro is a funding member of the LDA Verteneglio and continues to support the Agency with an active partnership. During the meeting, the Mayor, Antonio Bertoncetto, confirmed their full participation in the activities for active citizenship and peace in Europe.

Training Course for Tourist Guides in Mostar

As part of the project "Setting up the Local Democracy Agency in Mostar", sponsored by the Permanent Representation of Liechtenstein to the Council of Europe, the LDA Mostar organized a three-months training course for tourist guides. The course was realized with the collaboration of the Centre of Commercial Management and the main travel agencies of the region.

The programme concentrated on the possible guide activities in West Hercegovina and the Neretva Kanton, known for its important tourist destinations of historical, cultural, sacral and ecological nature. Bearing in mind the high tourist potential of the region and the lack of qualified guides in the area of Mostar, the LDA Mostar, intended to provide returnees and young people with new employment opportunities through the training. Moreover, the LDA Mostar, submitted some recommendations to the Federal Ministry of Tourism and Trade of BiH, in order to contribute to the development of regulations in the tourism sector. They particular wanted to help setting up the standards and the rules for the establishment of a competent committee in charge of issuing certificates for tourist guides.



More than ten years after the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, tourists are returning to the city of Mostar.

ALDA Partners

The City of Nantes and ALDA support the Georgian National Association of Local Authorities

The Association of LDAs is working on the possibility to extend its network of LDAs to Georgia and has therefore established links with the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG). On the other hand, the City of Nantes had expressed its will to support NALAG since the early stages of its development. Together, they provide financial assistance to the development of NALAG's presence in Georgian regions.

The National Association was created in December 2004 on a regional basis. This is necessary because of difficulties of communication distance central officials from the members (local authorities) on the ground. Therefore, the Executive Board of NALAG decided to establish two regional offices in the biggest regions of Georgia, namely in Kakheti and Samegrelo.

The project funded by ALDA and Nantes aims to:

- ensure a good communication between the central office in Tbilisi and member municipalities;
- disseminate information among the member municipalities;
- facilitate the provision of services to member municipalities;

conduct a roundtable on the forthcoming changes in local government legislation.

The project also receives backing from the Council of Europe, the municipalities of Lagodekhi (in Kakheti) and Senaki (in Samegrelo), which will cover office rent and salary for one staff, and the Urban Institute, which will provide furniture and fax machines



Tbilisi City Centre

New ALDA Members and LDA partners

- The City of Vicenza, Italy (new member of ALDA)
- International Centre for European Training, Budapest, Hungary (new member of ALDA)
- City of Petrinja, Croatia (new partner LDA Sisak)
- Province of Venice, Italy (new partner LDA Mostar)
- Municipality of Vejsen, Norway (new partner LDA Central and Southern Serbia)

ALDA Agenda February—July 2006

7–8 February Internal Training for new LDA Delegates, Vicenza, Italy

13 and 14 February ALDA present at the OECD Fair on Local Governance in Vienna, Austria

13 and 14 February Transborder Cooperation Seminar, Norwegian Programme

15 February Mahldenet Meeting in Sarajevo, BiH

16 - 17 February 3rd Steering Committee ANCI/ALDA Programme and Meeting with Delegates for a follow-up

21 February Meeting of potential partners of the LDA in Georgia, Strasbourg, France

22 and 23 February IB Seminar Zagreb, Croatia

23 and 24 February Meeting of the national associations of local authorities, Strasbourg, France

6 and 7 March Transborder Cooperation Seminar, Norwegian Programme, Nis, Serbia

6 and 7 March Training on EU Affairs, Albania

21 and 22 March Transborder Cooperation Seminar, Norwegian Programme, Subotica, Serbia

24 March Meeting of the lead partners of the LDAs, Mogliano Veneto, Italy

5 and 6 May ALDA stand at Civitas Fair, Padova, Italy

13 May ALDA stand at Courier des Balkans Fair, Arcueil, France

30 May—1 June Annual Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (ALDA present with a stand), Strasbourg, France

31 May Information Day „Georgia: Two years after the Rose Revolution“

9 June ALDA General Assembly in Budapest, Hungary

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ALDA newsletter also available online

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