



## **The Local Democracy Agency in Armenia: a tool for local democracy and citizen participation**

### **What are the needs?**

Decentralisation of power and development of administrative capacities at the local level, together with a capable and vivid civil society, represent a fundamental step in the process of democratisation, stability and development of Armenia. In an effort to support such development ALDA is in the process of establishing a Local Democracy Agency in Armenia. The LDA will have the following objectives:

- a) Facilitate the participation of civil society in the decision-making process at the local level;
- b) Increase the interest, awareness and capacities of citizens to take part in the decision-making process at the local level;
- c) Increase the awareness and skills of the local communities and local authorities to address the needs of citizens.

### **Why an LDA?**

The future Local Democracy Agency will become part of the network of LDAs ([www.alda-europe.eu](http://www.alda-europe.eu)) and its activities will be a practical exercise of policy sharing between citizens and local authorities. The LDA will support capacity building of civil society and local authorities and it will implement its activities at the local level. The LDA will by principle not be based in Yerevan. At this point it hasn't been decided where the LDA will be placed, but locations that are being considered are Gyumri, Vanadzor and Ijevan. The Local Democracy Agency will act as a promoter of democracy and local self-government and will also promote human rights and sustainable development. The Agency will be an operational platform of debate, capacity building and shared cooperation between civil society and local authorities locally.

The LDA will participate in the negotiation with civil society and local authorities and will establish a link between civil society and local authorities and as such it will represent a practical exercise of democracy and citizen participation. Once the LDA has

been established it will be self sustained based on projects and the contribution of its partners. The Local Democracy Agency will operate as a locally registered NGO and will function as a coordinating and stimulating agency for the local society with the support of civil society and local authorities from Europe.

The role of the international partners will be to provide core financial support, participate in activities where they have the skills and capacities, to encourage their own partners to participate in the work of the LDA and to promote the work of the LDA in their own community and encourage wider participation.

### **Other LDAs in the region of Southern Caucasus**

In 2006 an LDA was opened in Kutaisi in Georgia and there are plans to set up an LDA in Azerbaijan in the near future as well. So the LDA in Armenia will also become part of a network of LDAs in Southern Caucasus that can promote cooperation and mutual understanding between the countries in Southern Caucasus.



### **Local partnership**

The project is conceived by the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies in cooperation with the Association of Armenian Municipalities, which expressed their need to have an instrument like the Local Democracy Agency in Armenia to promote local democracy and citizens' participation. The first request from Armenia and its Association of Local Authorities was addressed to ALDA in 2006, when the Agency in Kutaisi

(Georgia) was opened. A strategy paper on enlargement of the network to Armenia was approved by the ALDA Governing Board in 2007. A common strategy was identified several times during the meetings of the Plenary of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The same idea and wish was confirmed by the participants of the Political School of the Council of Europe in Armenia.

### **What will the LDA do?**

The LDA Armenia will be a tool with the following objectives:

1. Supporting participatory processes in decision-making at local level; to help local authorities to operate in an open and inclusive way, to foster local authorities to take account of citizens' needs
2. Improving possibilities, skills and capacities of civil society to engage in dialogue, advocacy and communication activities with local authorities - and at the same time to improve the capacity of civil society to represent its interests.
3. Changing citizens' approaches and improving their skills as far as citizens' involvement in local decision-making process is concerned; to foster citizens' will and ability to address their local needs to the local authorities

The Local Democracy Agency will be a local instrument in the hands of local actors, but supported further and self sustainable with the support of its international partners (civil society and local authorities). It represents a stable and long lasting instrument to promote local democracy and citizen participation.