



Paper Strategy of ALDA in Eastern Partnership

(update May 2014)

ALDA's work in the Eastern Partnership

Regional strategy EaP and Southern Caucasus

The work of ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies in Eastern Partnership is based on the same methodologies and values, which animate the whole network such as multistakeholder approach to local development, citizens' participation at the local level and support to decentralization and local democracy.

ALDA is actively engaged in all six Eastern Partnership countries. Currently ALDA is working actively in **Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia**. There are LDAs in Georgia and Armenia and plans to open an LDA in Azerbaijan. In 2013, it started a process to set up and LDA in Ukraine, in Dniepropetrovsk. ALDA will start to research the possibilities for opening and LDA in Moldova.

ALDA has been working in **Belarus** since 2006 and has implemented a number of projects together with its main partner the Lev Sapieha Foundation to develop capacities and awareness of citizens participation at the local level. It developed and active partnership with the Consortium EuroBelarus. The specific action on local governance and citizens engagement at the local level has been particularly interesting and productive considering the difficult environment faced in the country.

In addition to ALDA's own activities in Eastern Partnership countries, ALDA is also actively involved in the **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**, where ALDA is currently coordinator of the **Subgroup on Local Government and Public Administration Reform**. In this capacity, it sits as permanent observer at the **Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP)**.

ALDA and the LDAs are also following carefully the activities of the **Council of Europe as for their activities to support local democracy and citizens participation**. Some activities are joint ones, as the promotion and dissemination of the Monitoring reports

on the implementation of the European Charter on Local Self Government (recently, ALDA and its network gave inputs and follow us the dissemination of the Monitoring report on Azerbaijan).

Within the programmes Non State Actors and the concept of local governance and citizens participation at the local level, ALDA is implementing the programme **Working Together For Development**, where association of local authorities and association of civil society are working together to development policies and actions for cooperation and development. ALDA participated in the vast consultation discussing Local Authorities in Development, for the next programming period of the European Union, highlighting great potentialities and difficulties.

The opening of the LDA in Georgia 2006 led to a permanent presence and stronger ties with the region in general. ALDA works with the South Caucasus region as a whole, but at the same time emphasizes strong direct cooperation with each of the three countries. Experience from ALDA's work in the Balkans has shown the importance of insisting on a regional and multi-national approach bringing different groups and people together. ALDA is therefore adopting a "light" regional approach by bringing representatives from all three Caucasus countries together at international conferences to exchange experience with other European actors, such as for instance the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe. The primary goal of these meetings is to exchange experience and information with European actors, but at the same time also to have an exchange of experience between the countries in the region. ALDA has organised yearly regional conferences in 2009 and 2010 with participants from all three countries and plans turn these conferences into an ongoing process of yearly conferences that ensures cooperation with European partners and exchange of information between the countries in the region.

The work of ALDA and its Local Democracy Agencies represent an important part of the action of the Local Democracy Agencies in the Neighborhood of the European Union focusing on local governance and citizens participation. A particular focus has been raised on fiscal decentralization and territorial cooperation, which allows multistakeholder approach.

Expected results and long term perspective

ALDA's strong involvement in South Caucasus and in Eastern Partnership will intensify the cooperation between the countries in Eastern Partnership Countries and Europe. These countries still need to develop their system of local government and citizen participation at the local level and some of them lack political will to conduct reforms. In such circumstances it is important to keep the topic on the political agenda and ensure that concrete activities show the positive results of increased authority to local authorities and increased cooperation between local authorities and citizens.

Achieving substantial reform and real change in this field is a long term process that will require a lot of patience. ALDA therefore considers the establishment of LDAs in Azerbaijan and Armenia and intensified work on local self-government and exchange of experience with other European countries essential to guarantee that the focus on the topic of local self- government reform and citizen participation is maintained.

Local Democracy Agencies in Southern Caucasus

In 2003 ALDA's Governing board, supported by the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, decided to open the programme of LDAs to regions outside the Balkans. This led to the opening of a Local Democracy Agency in **Kutaisi, Georgia**, in 2006 and in 2011 a Local Democracy Agency was opened in **Gyumri, Armenia**. During the past years ALDA has expanded its work on the development of local ALDA works towards the opening of an LDA in **Azerbaijan** to ensure the presence of LDAs in all three countries in South Caucasus.

In line with the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the **Corleap** (Committee of the Regions) as well as the **Civil Society Forum for Eastern Partnership**, the expansion of the LDA network to all countries in South Caucasus is an important strategic objective, because it will create the necessary infrastructure to work on the development of local self-government and most importantly show concrete examples of cooperation between local authorities, civil society and citizens.

ALDA has been also promoter, with the Congress, of a regional approach linking local and regional authorities and their representative associations.

ALDA has established relationships with the **Associations of Municipalities** in both Georgia and Armenia and is currently also trying to build a stronger contacts with the Associations of Municipalities in Azerbaijan. For the long-term development of local self-government, the associations are important partners and the future successful development of local self-government will also depend on how efficient and competent the associations are in promoting these goals. In addition to working with the associations ALDA has also build good relations with a number of **local NGOs and international organisations** working to promote local self-government and citizen participation in South Caucasus.

A fundamental support of the work of ALDA in Eastern Partnership countries has been given by the programme **Working Together for Development**, supported by DEVCO, where NGOs networks and local authorities associations have been strongly associated.

ALDA's Work in Georgia

ALDA's work in Georgia is led by the Local Democracy Agency in Kutaisi. Since the LDA started its operations in 2006 it has implemented a number of projects both independently and as part of bigger ALDA projects. Such as for example the project on Local self-government in people's service, which provided training on how to improve public relations and ensure transparency to about 250 participants from both the governmental and non-governmental sector. LDA Georgia has also conducted various projects to support women's rights, youth and projects to support and integrate internally displaced persons based in Kutaisi. During 2010 LDA Georgia has among a number of projects been implementing a project funded by region Friuli Venezia Giulia in Italy to support the restart of the businesses sector, the economic independence of vulnerable groups and to establish links between local businesses and Region Friuli Venezia Giulia.

The official partners of LDA Georgia are City of Strasbourg (France) leading partner, Municipality of Monfalcone (Italy), Kutaisi city (host city of the LDA) ,Tbilisi city, Kutaisi-Newport International Association (KNIA) ,National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), Kutaisi branch of Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

ALDA's work in Armenia

In October 2011, Local Democracy Agency Armenia was opened in Gyumri. This was the culmination of a long process of building support and finding partners for the Local Democracy Agency. The opening of the LDA is a result of ALDA's priority to strengthen its role in South Caucasus and Armenia. The LDA in Armenia is working to strengthen local democracy and citizen participation as well as strengthen the relationship between Europe and Armenia. In addition to the work to promote the LDA, ALDA has also organised study tours and exchanges for governmental and NGO representatives from Armenia to Latvia and France.

The official partners of the LDA Armenia are the city of Gyumri, the NGO Asparez and Shirak from Gyumri and the Urban Foundation Armenia. As for European support, the leader is the Region Rhone Alpes (France) and the Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy).

Further expanding the LDA network to Armenia created the necessary infrastructure on the ground to work on the development of local self-government and most importantly show a good example of cooperation between local authorities, civil society and citizens. The LDAs attracts attention from European municipalities to the region and will ensure an ongoing focus on the issue of cooperation between local authorities and citizens. It is essential for the credibility and sustainability of the LDAs that they operate autonomously and ALDA will ensure to create a structure and fundament for the LDAs

that allow the LDAs to operate autonomously.

In addition to the work on the LDA, ALDA has also been implementing specific projects with Armenian partners. In 2010 ALDA organised two study tours for Armenian officials. One study tour to Paris took place in July 2010 for a parliamentary delegation from Armenia that studied the French legislative system. In August 2010 a study tour to Latvia was organised for a group of governmental and non governmental representatives from Armenia who were introduced to the Latvian political system and the role of civil society in policy making. The LDAs has been involved in activities of awareness and capacity building for citizens and local governance.

ALDA's work in Azerbaijan

The process of opening an LDA is a long term goal of ALDA. Contacts have been established and the discussion regarding opening an LDA has been initiated but is still at an initial stage. Ganja has been identified as a possible city to host the LDA, but no official discussions have taken place yet. In the short term ALDA will focus on specific activities related to develop the capacity of municipalities, local self-government and citizen participation at the local level in Azerbaijan.

These activities will focus on providing international experience and best practices in cooperation between municipalities and citizens to Azerbaijani municipalities. The activities will also try to address the population's lack of information about the institution of local self- government and public participation in the process of local self-government.

A tight relationship has been established with some NGOs engaged in local government and local development such the Consortium BINA and Economic Research Centre. A project on Youth exchanges was implemented in 2013 and it gave impetus to further development

The focus will be given to work with BINA consortium on the spot.

ALDA'S WORK IN BELARUS

ALDA has been active in Belarus since 2004 and has implemented several projects together with its main partner in Belarus the Lev Sapieha Foundation. Currently ALDA is implementing the TANDEM project as a follow up to the ACSOBE and REACT projects. ALDA's work in Belarus focuses on strengthening civil society organisations and local community groups and their cooperation with local authorities. ALDA's projects in Belarus often involve subgranting, which allows civic initiative groups to implement projects to develop their cooperation with local authorities and act for development of their local community. The local governance and community approach is giving good results and proved to be a solution to operate in a difficult context as Belarus.

ALDA'S WORK IN UKRAINE

ALDA has become more active in Ukraine during the past years and is trying together with Ukrainian members of ALDA to develop projects on citizen participation and development of local democracy. As part of ALDA's strategy for Eastern Partnership, ALDA has also decided to initiate preparations for establishing a Local Democracy Agency in Ukraine. Since end of 2012, with the participation of Lower Silesia Region (Poland), ALDA launched the initiative to have the first LDA in Ukraine, based in Dniepropetrovsk. Different regions and local authorities in Europe are interested to take part in it. Partners meetings have been organized and we head for an opening in 2014.

ALDA'S WORK IN MOLDOVA

As parts of ALDA's strategy for Eastern Partnership, ALDA has also decided to become more active in Moldova and to initiate preparations for establishing a Local Democracy Agency in Moldova. This decision will be followed by assessments and analysis of the possibilities and search for potential partners for an LDA in Moldova. ALDA has a member in Moldova and is generally trying to develop and expand its activities and cooperation with partners in Moldova.