

**“Empowering Citizens and strengthening local governance in neighbouring countries: Lessons learned and opportunities from East to South“
June 7, 2012 Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, Udine, Italy**

Proposed recommendations

The conference “Empowering Citizens and strengthening local governance in neighbouring countries: Lessons learned and opportunities from East to South” discuss the experience of European support to the development of democracy and good governance in its neighbourhood. The Arab spring in 2011 opened the window of opportunity with possibilities for democratic reform that nobody had foreseen. One year later the opportunities are still there, but the big challenges and difficulties in turning these political and social changes into a framework that will lead towards consolidation of deep and sustainable democracy are evident and the importance of facing these challenges in the appropriate way can not be underestimated.

In the Central and Eastern part of Europe a window of opportunity opened already more than 20 years ago. For some countries these 20 years have led to a successful transformation of the political system and the past history seems very far away.

ALDA has been at the forefront of supporting the transition towards democracy working through the Local Democracy Agencies with Local Authorities and Civil Society organisations in the Balkans and Eastern Neighbourhood to push for and support the democratic development of the respective societies and local communities.

The participants at the Conference in Udine, coming from European Union Members States, from Eastern Europe, from South Eastern Europe and from the Med area confirm the following :

- The need to act for democracy and respect of human rights in all the Neighbouring areas and condemn and consider unacceptable the use of violence that some governments are using against civilians.
- The need to stabilize the Neighbouring area in Europe as a fundamental element for peace and prosperity in Europe too.
- The need to share with them the main elements of the European values and identify based on freedom, human rights and democracy.
- European civil society and local authorities are engaged to build a Europe from Below and therefore strengthening the democratic basis of Europe in such a difficult and crucial time. Our efforts and examples of democratic

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principles and the first elements to share with our close neighbours, which are expecting a strong political stand from Europe.

Recognise that :

- Thousands of actions promoted and supported by european civil society organisation and local authorities took place in these last 20 years, supporting peace, democracy and relaunch of development in Eastern Europe and South Eastern Europe, in the process of transition.
- The support to civil society and to local authorities, as non State Actors, proved to be mostly successful to stabilize peace and democracy in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. The countries of Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership benefited from the engagement of civil society organisation and local governments in supporting their own democracy, in particular at the local level and to improve citizens' participation in decision making process at the local level.
- Decentralized cooperation, city diplomacy and the action of Local Democracy Agencies (with their multilateral dimension for decentralised cooperation) represented an added value in the process of stabilization and democratisation of transitional countries, using all the opportunities offered by local actors, when, often national institutions were often inactive.
- Numbers of networks and programmes have been established and proved to be channels of these experiences, both at the civil society and local authorities level¹.

It is proposed :

- To consider such an asset of knowledge and best practices should be used as support to the countries in the Mediterrean areas which are working on the reforms and strengthen their democratic structures
- Policies for stabilization, peace, democracy and development should put among the first priorities the support to local authorities and civil society and their common and joint actions. This is true in European Union and in Neighbouring Countries
- To strongly support the inclusion of civil society organisations as a full partner for democracy and sustainable development. A stronger impact would be reached with the full cooperation between civil society and local authorities. In

¹ ALDA and the LDAs, Civil Society Forum for Eastern Partnership, Working Together for Development, UNDP Art, Platforma, CEECN, ARLEM, Corleap

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particular, this cooperation should be recognised as a fundamental added value in the EU policies and programmes (such as the ENPI and IPA programmes) and also the National policies and programmes both in Eastern Partnership and in the MED area.

- To invite all the European Union institutions and programmes (in view of a future revision of the ENPI policy and the next programming period) to valorise the cooperation between local authorities and civil society at the local level as a stimulus and fundamental element for peace and democracy.
- To invite the European Union and the Member States to consider Decentralised Cooperation, based on the cooperation between local authorities and civil society in Europe and Neighbouring countries, as one of the main policy for promoting democracy, peace and development in the whole area of Eastern Partnership and Med.
- To use all possible means to create a bridge between the struggles for peace, democracy, human rights and fair and sustainable development in the Eastern Partnership and South Eastern areas AND the MED area, coordinated by the EU avoiding a relationship of competition but rather synergy and complementary approaches.
- To invite the Committee of the Regions and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to recognise as a priority to work with civil society group in policy making, monitoring and implementation of the principle of local democracy and respect of human rights, both in the Eastern area and in the Med area
- To further promote the possibility to enlarge Decentralised cooperation methodology (and Local Democracy Agencies) as a successful tool from the East to South