

Association of Local Democracy Agencies
General Assembly
(Bydgoszcz, Poland, 9 July 2011)

Speech by President Keith Whitmore
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
Council of Europe

President Vinther,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to have this opportunity to address the General Assembly of ALDA at a moment when your association is enjoying a solid drive forward, expanding both its activities and its scope of operations.

After the successes of the first ten years of existence, the association has become an important player in local democracy-building and a genuine driving force behind cross-border co-operation at both local and regional level – not only in South-East Europe but also increasingly in South Caucasus and the rest of the Eastern Partnership countries. And let's not forget the important role played by ALDA in promoting the accession of South-East European countries to the European Union, and preparing the ground at local level for their future integration.

I would like to welcome in particular your involvement in the Eastern Partnership process and your current expansion into South Caucasus, with a new agency to be opened soon in Armenia. We look forward to this addition to ALDA's network and strongly hope that the new local democracy agency will become as much of a pillar for local democracy action in the whole territory of Armenia, and operate for all Armenian local elected representatives and for further dialogue with citizens in Armenia.

We hope that together with the LDA in Kutaisi, Georgia, they will serve as a platform for building co-operation between both local and regional communities across South Caucasus and contribute to the framework for co-operation and development in the Black Sea region as a whole. This certainly fits well with the Congress' own action to promote the regional approach in South Caucasus as well as local and regional co-operation within the Black Sea Euro-region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These recent activities of ALDA clearly show that local democracy agencies have gone beyond confidence-building measures and project implementation to play a wider role in the

process of mobilising citizen action, engaging both local authorities and civil society and providing a framework for citizen participation. This role of LDAs was highlighted in manifold ways during yesterday's conference on volunteering for democracy, and I wish to thank your association once again for coming up with the initiative to organise this event.

Indeed, local democracy agencies have become major vehicles for participatory democracy at local level, and their experience can be used and applied elsewhere, for instance for local democracy-building in the southern Mediterranean in the context of the Arab Spring. The Congress is certainly keeping this in mind when formulating its contribution to the Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy, currently under elaboration, and for its future involvement in this policy's implementation.

Finally, I would like to reiterate what I stressed at the conference yesterday: that the Congress remains fully committed to its partnership with ALDA and will pursue and increase its co-operation with your association in the areas of common interest. You have our continued support in your endeavours, and I wish ALDA much success in your current and future activities.

Thank you.