



Steps towards the Establishment of a Local Democracy Agency in Central and Southern Serbia

With the Support of the Irish Government

The main aims of the project “Steps towards the Establishment of a Local Democracy Agency in Central and Southern Serbia” were to become more familiar with the area where the future LDA will operate and to identify the most urgent wants and needs in the region.

In the wake of Milosevic’s fall from power, the local authorities in the towns of southern Serbia, Nis and Leskovac, symbolically offered the NGOs a permanent seat on the municipal council as something of a reward for the role they played in preserving a minimum of pluralism

in the years when the regime appeared to have taken over in all spheres of authority: politics, finance, education and the media. In the other towns, Kragujevac and Kraljevo, the local authorities also stressed the need for more open and constructive dialogue with civil society. Symbolic gestures, however, are not enough for



the NGOs and they are now asking for permanent dialogue machinery to be set up: eg joint forums for the precise purpose of discussing the various issues affecting the local community.

The future LDA can make a crucial contribution to the development of this dialogue, providing training seminars for local managers, organising wide-ranging debate, arranging for assistance from international experts, or quite simply giving support to experimental projects run by NGOs or the local authorities.

In Nis plans are being discussed for “neighbourhood councils”, which the local authorities will be able

to consult, while in Kragujevac “information points” on the town’s essential services are to be set up to bring citizens and institutions closer together.

Rather than setting up a single operations centre in Nis for the entire region, the future LDA should

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Steps towards the Establishment of a Local Democracy Agency in Central and Southern Serbia

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consider having **two spheres of action, taking as their central point the two dynamic centres of Nis and Kragujevac**. These are, moreover, the two towns where the response to the schemes provided for in the project has been strongest and where politicians and civil society appear maturest.

Possible themes for initial action by the LDA for Central Serbia are: models of local economic development, sustainable development, the labour market, training for trade union representatives, refugee integration or more wide-ranging projects to help them return to their countries of origin (even to Croatia and Bosnia).

It should be said at this point that the network of local democracy agencies and their partners in the Balkans could become an extremely important factor in any project for the return of refugees. It would allow **co-ordinated projects with two or more local democracy agencies providing legal assistance to refugees in the two countries and reception facilities in the towns to which they return**, with "assisted" reintegration into society through employment and suitable housing.

Finally, tackling the problems of young people is of great importance for the entire country. It is essential to conduct special programmes for young people to support **their integration into the local community and their participation in the decisions** concerning them, either by directly supporting the initiatives of existing youth and student organisations (which have shown that they are willing to cooperate with one another and that they are familiar with local political dynamics) or by or-

ganising **training programmes at all levels – in schools and universities, in publishing and the media**. The DRK volunteers, with help from several Italian organisations and the town of Brescia, are already involved in setting up a multi-media centre and a library for young people in Kraljevo and a large number of the DRK's activities will be implemented in co-operation with the local branch of Radio B92, one of the most original independent media in the country.

Programmes to educate **young people and give them a sense of responsibility** (what it means to belong to the community, civil rights, health education, awareness of violence, and school and university exchange programmes) could be carried out in co-operation with the NGOs and local institutions in both schools and universities (Nis and Kragujevac are among the main universities outside Belgrade). Instead of the countless public forums and round tables often ignored by young people, it is necessary, in Yugoslavia as elsewhere, to have direct contact with the younger generation by means of "ad hoc" initiatives, and to speak a language which young people understand and reach out to them in the places where they most often meet.

One of the LDA's most important tasks could therefore be to support ventures by local associations, help them establish stable relations with youth organisations abroad, and thus enable young people to share their experiences with their counterparts in other countries either in the Balkans or in other parts of Europe. This would make a decisive contribution to the resumption of interethnic dialogue among young people.

Project Manager
AADL, *Maurizio Renesto*

Women's rights

(Leskovac, 2 June 2001)

This project was launched by a round table on the situation of women in Serbia. The event, which took place on 2 June in the Leskovac municipal council chamber, was organised in conjunction with the women's section of the Leskovac People's Parliament, the principal local partner, and in collaboration with other organisations in the region working in the same field, in particular the Nis Women's Action Group (*Zenska Niska Akcija*) and the Kraljevo Women's Civil Initiatives Group (*Zenske Gradjanske Inicijative*).

The subjects on the agenda included:

- a comparison of the protection of women's rights in international human rights charters and the local situation and its specific regional features;
- violence against women in the home and in society and the impact of the recent political and economic crisis on the situation of women;
- the problem of the labour market and, in particular, the need to guarantee equal opportunities for women and men;
- women's participation in political, local and national life, which was given special attention during the discussions, and the need to ensure that women are more widely represented in public institutions and all decision-making positions.

"People without rights"

(Nis, 9 June 2001)

The "people without rights" are the refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (40 000 in central and southern Serbia) and the IDPs, "internally displaced persons", as the specialists have termed the Kosovo refugees since the 1999 war. 440 000 people, who, as Serbian citizens "temporarily" living outside Kosovo, formerly an autonomous province of Serbia, have never

been granted refugee status. A solution to their problems has still to be devised, far less implemented.

"People without rights" also include the various ethnic minorities - the Bulgarians, Roma, Albanians, Hungarians, Slovaks, Sandzak Moslems, etc - who live in a still multi-ethnic Yugoslavia but whose basic rights are all too often ignored.

The project therefore gives special attention to minorities and refugees. First of all, there is a legal **training seminar for NGO** staff working in the refugee Collective Centres. The aim of this seminar, which was organised in collaboration with the Belgrade and Kragujevac Helsinki Committee for Human Rights was to enable staff a. to provide refugees with basic information on the possibilities, under Yugoslav, Croatian and Bosnian law, of returning to their countries of origin and b. to help refugees with the difficult choice of staying refugees or socially integrating into the asylum country.

As from mid-June the seminar participants returned to their usual work in the Collective Centres, distributing specially prepared information material (this material and a short description of the seminar by participants will be sent out, together with the remainder of the project documents, in Serb).

Care was taken to bring in the remotest Collective Centres, those far from the main towns and cities and often forgotten by major international and local humanitarian organisations. A series of **3 programmes** on the same theme, broadcast on the main regional radio station (Radio Nis-RTS), was a further endeavour to make contact and "communicate" with those refugees it had been impossible to contact physically (it should be noted that the exact number of refugees present on the territory is unknown) and to make the public more aware of the problem (see appended document NIS 2).

Finally, a **round table** on the issue of minorities and refugees was held at the Nis City Hall, in collaboration with the Nis Open Club and with the valuable assistance of the president of the YU-rom Centre (which brings together the country's main Roma organisations), Osman Balic, who advises the Federal Ministry for Ethnic Minorities and is a vice-president of the Nis municipality.

“Citizenship and local democracy”, the relationship between citizens and institutions

(Leskovac, 16 June 2001)

The third part of the project concerned citizens' civil rights in their direct relations with local institutions, a subject obviously closely linked to the more general subject of the decentralisation of power in Serbia.

Civil society has shown great interest in this question and several local NGOs (the Nis Civil Forum, the Kragujevac Regional Centre and the Novi Sad Centre for Regionalism) have spontaneously decided to group together to put forward decentralisation proposals, seeing the reforms as affording genuine prospects of active participation in the life of the community.

In this connection, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies, in collaboration with a local NGO, OGI (Committee for Civil Initiatives), has taken several steps not only to investigate scope for intervention in this area but also to learn more about how ordinary people perceive the institutions that represent them and public reaction to direct participation in local decision-making.

An opinion poll was conducted in early June and covered the four towns to be involved in the future LDA – Nis, Keskovac, Kragujevac and Kraljevo - to assess people's awareness of their rights in relation to local institutions and their perception of their local area.

The poll was conducted to rigorous standards and drew on the experience and sociological expertise of OGI. The results will provide valuable knowledge of the area for the LDA's future activities and will be published in August, in Serb and English.

An awareness-raising campaign was also organised on the same subjects as the opinion poll, also with the assistance of OGI, which is now one of the most “professional” NGOs in the region and adopts a narrower but very sound approach to participation in decision-making processes and civil rights.

The final round table was held in Leskovac and was attended by several local experts, including:

“Working out democracy”, the labour market and workers' rights

(Kragujevac, 23 June 2001)

The fourth of the project events, a round table on the labour market, workers' rights and the economic outlook for the local community, took place at Kragujevac Town Hall on 23 June.

In addition to the representatives of 3 of the 4 municipalities to be involved in the future LDA and local partner organisations, the following attended the round table:

- the three main national trade unions (the Association of Free Independent Trade Unions, Independence - the Union of Free Trade Unions - and the Union of Serbian Trade Unions) and several regional trade unions from Kragujevac and Nis;
- the member of parliament representing the Coalition for Sumadija (Sumadija is the region of which Kragujevac is the hub);
- Maja Trajkovic from the Standing Conference of Yugoslav Municipalities;
- the main local economic agencies (the chamber of trade and industry, the Kragujevac School of Economics, etc)

The international participants (potential partners for the LDA) included:

- Margareth Stronge, the co-ordinator of the Dublin Institute of Public Administration;
- Amir Dizdarevic (BiH) of the Zavidovići Company Development Centre;
- Giorgio Anghilleri, of the Lecco CGIL trade union;
- Salvatore Rao, municipal councillor, Ivrea, responsible for social and labour policy;
- Enrico Levati, from the Ivrea committee for solidarity with the people of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia;
- Esther Cockram, from the Irish Trade Union Congress;
- representatives of the Balkan Assist Association, Sofia.

Two topics on the agenda were the role that trade unions and local authorities can play in the current process of economic transition and the need for special micro-credit and financing projects to help retrain the workforce (firms in the region are currently over-staffed) and to help create new jobs. Debate, on what obviously is a crucial problem, was very heated at times

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“Performing democracy”, the rights of young people

(Kraljevo, 29 June 2001)

Young people in Serbia, often overqualified for the jobs available, were one of the sections of society most directly affected by Serbia's political isolation over the past few years and the one most threatened by the current economic crisis. Unable to find jobs that give genuine financial independence, young Serbs tend to be much older than young people in other European countries - at least 30 - when they finally leave home.

During the months of May and June 2001, the AADL organised a series of activities for the young people of the four towns. First of all, a film forum in Kraljevo, organised in partnership with local volunteers from the DRK (Cultural Development Society). The main aim of the series of local and international movies by alternative filmmakers (see appended document NIS 4, in Serb) was to show young people in the region that they have fundamental rights (the right to education, freedom of expression, etc). The films were of an artistic and cultural type which cannot normally be shown in rural areas owing to the lack of cinemas in small towns and the very limited programmes available. Each film was followed by debate.

The last of the five round tables took place on Friday 29 June, once again in Kraljevo and with the assistance of not only the DRK but also NGOs in other towns concerned with similar questions, eg NISA (the Nis Students Association), the Kragujevac Forum and the

Leskovac People's Parliament.

The issues on the agenda, directly or indirectly concerning young peoples' rights and their most frequent problems, were:

- opportunities for young people to take an active part in the life and decisions of the local community;

- student organisations and the question of student representation in educational establishments (the school reform is one of the other main issues currently being debated in Yugoslavia);

- racism, violence and intolerance towards ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, etc: the role of the educational system and the media in overcoming the culture of conflict;

- conscientious objection: the right to make a

“different” choice (officially recognised in Yugoslavia but not *de facto*);

- juvenile crime and protection of children from violence in the home and in society.



“Working out democracy”

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but always frank and constructive. The trade unions raised the problem of the unions' new status since the transition from the single trade union system that existed in socialist Yugoslavia under the Milosevic regime to the current pluralist system, which requires them to overcome past bitterness and differences in order to seek a common basis for collaboration.

"Working Together" local government – NGO Cooperation

Training of Trainers – Budapest 18-22 June 2001

Under the Stability Pact Project "Municipal Training Capacity Development Program" there was organized "Local Government – Nongovernmental Organizations Cooperation" Training of Trainers. The TOT is realized by the Regional Program "Working Together" and the network of the Partners for Democratic Change in Budapest - Hungary, from 18-22 June 2001. In the frame of this program there will be a series of trainings that will provide participants from SEE with training skills in special governance development areas. The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies is part of the development of this programme thanks to a regular participation of the LDA's staff in the TOT.

Participants to this training were persons from each of Southeast Europe countries/region (Slovenia, Croatia, BiH, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania) working for different training institutions, among them to the TOT participated Sladjan Ilic from LDA Zavidovici. The training was conducted the senior trainer team from Partners Slovakia led by Mr. Dusan Ondrusek. The training was focused on: facilitation and community cross-sectoral collaboration, coalition building, consensus – based decision making and problem solving, case studies from successful LG-NGO cooperation in transitioning countries.

After attending to TOTs, SEE trainers will develop Action Plans for applying the acquired knowledge and skills by designing and conducting training programs in their countries involving local officials and NGOs. For these training, the training agencies could receive technical and financial support.

The participation in such trainings is great opportunity for LDAs for improving our capacities and connecting with other organizations active in the field of local democracy strengthening.

The program is funded by the USAID and Dutch Government through Partners for Democratic Change and Stability Pact.

Sladjan Ilic,
Project manager - LDA Zavidovici

An initiative for the young people and the old people of Ljubija

Saturday 14th July 2001 at 10:30 in Radnicki dom Ljubija there will be the official opening of the new Youth Centre of Ljubija and of the renewed premises of the *Klub za Penzionera i invalida of Ljubija* at the presence of the local authorities and of a delegation of the Italian town of Rovereto, the town of Peace, that is supporting the project through the Local Democracy Agency of Prijedor. Also Cristina Valer, on behalf of the Association Program Prijedor, the partner leader of the LDA of Prijedor and Daniele Baldo, Mayor of the town of Aldeno, in the Province of Trento, will be present.

The delegation of Rovereto will be composed by Roberto Maffei, the Mayor, by Marco Vender, delegate for the international cooperation, Erica Mondini, delegate for the education to peace, Paolo Cova, member of the municipal assembly and Luca Vicentini as president of the Centre for Peace of Rovereto.

The town of Rovereto is strongly working for the promotion of the value of Peace. Each evening in Rovereto the Bell of Peace, done with the fuse bronze of cannons of all the nations of the first world war, is remembering the deaths of all the war of the past and of the present. The town of Rovereto is hosting the International University of the peoples and of the institution for Peace, the Permanent Observer on the Balcan (www.osservatoribalcanti.org), as instrument to support the action and as virtual place for stimulating a critic discussion for the re-building of the potentialities and of the capacities in the Balcan area, and the Centre for Peace.

The activities in Ljubija have been done in cooperation with the local associations *Klub za Penzionera i invalida* and the just established Youth Centre Svjetionik of Ljubija and with the support of the local group of CARITAS, of the Omladinski Center Svjetionik of Prijedor and of the Association Zdravo da Ste of Prijedor. Special thanks to Mr Boro Prastalo President of MZ of Ljubija, for the cooperation and to Swiss Caritas and UNICEF that will support part of the activities of the Centre during the next year.

Annalisa Tomasi
Delegate – LDA Prijedor

Supported by the town of Rovereto, the town of PEACE, in the Province of Trento - Italy

Members of AADL: Who are we?

Balkan Assist – Association for Partnership and Citizens Activity Support

Member of the Association of the Local Democracy Agency and future partner of the LDA in Central and Southern Serbia

Balkan Assist is a Bulgarian non-government organization established on June 2, 2000.

The members of the association are a team of highly qualified professionals making their contribution to the prosperity of Bulgaria and the Balkans and their integration into the European community. They all have many years of experience working in Bulgaria and abroad and are recognized for their contribution to the social and economic development at local and regional level. Some of the members have played an active role in the implementation of the Program for Development of the Municipalities in Central Stara planina of the Swiss government since the year 1993.

The association is a reliable partner to national and international organizations for the implementation of programs and projects supporting local and regional initiatives. **Balkan Assist** is a prominent member of international networks of organizations working for the sustainable development of society.

The objectives of the organization are:

- ⇒ To support the democratic changes in Bulgarian society, working for decentralization and strong local government
- ⇒ To stimulate active citizens' participation in social life
- ⇒ To support the processes of local and regional development and self-government

WHO ARE THE PARTNERS OF BALKAN ASSIST:

- Local and regional authorities, groups or associations of municipalities
- National and international institutions, ministries, parliamentary committees, embassies
- Bulgarian and international cooperation agencies, foundations, local, regional and national associations, consulting agencies, business associations;
- Citizen Groups and NGOs, youth groups, participants in public debates and forums;
- The media;
- Schools, universities and training institutions;
- The private business community
- **Balkan Assist** is a member of the ALDA since December 2000.

MAIN PROJECTS FOR THE YEAR 2001:

⇒ Organization and conduct of citizens forums in 6 municipalities in the Region of Central Star Planina

This project is financed by the Swiss government and aims at involving the citizens to actively participate in the development of their towns. This is a cycle of open public discussion on the priorities of local development, ending up with recommendations to the City authorities and preparation of projects for solving local problems. **Balkan Assist** play a key role in the organization and conduct of the forum discussions as well as in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the projects coming out of them. Up to the present moment after 10 forum sessions in each of the 6 municipalities, 49 project proposals have come out from the participants, 31 of them were approved for financing by the Swiss government.

⇒ Establishment and go-between support to the partnership between municipalities, hospitals and schools from Bulgaria and from Switzerland.

The team of **Balkan Assist** has contributed to the establishment and is still the go-between of these partnership. They include 6 municipalities, 3 professional schools, 1 music school and 5 hospitals from Bulgaria with their partner in Switzerland. The financial assistance is from the Swiss government.

⇒ Tourist Animation Project

This project aims at making students mobile, competitive and flexible at the European labour market. 30 students from tourism secondary school went to Italy for a 6-weeks placement in the area of touristic services. The project is financed by the Leonardo da Vinci program of the European Union.

⇒ Civil forum in Nis, Yugoslavia

Based on our experience in 6 Bulgarian municipalities, **Balkan Assist** developed a project for organizing similar open public discussions in a Yugoslavia which is a country very close to us in terms of recent political, economic and social development. We would like to apply the best practices in Bulgaria, adapted to the specific situation in Yugoslavia. The project is financed by the Open Society Foundation.

CENTURIO PROGRAMM: Co-operation among the Assembly of the Assembly of the European Regions and the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies

At the end of March 2001, the AADL informed all the Agencies about the opportunity offered by the Assembly of the European Regions : the programme CENTURIO. Thanks to this programme, civil servants of European Regions from Eastern Europe have the chance to get an internship of two months in a hosting Western European Region. This exchange is very useful for the capacity-building of the civil servant from Southern and Eastern Europe and for creating long term and constructive co-operation among different regional authorities.

Each LDA informed the regional and local authorities where they are working and get them the necessary and practical information for the application.

Mrs Karmen Krajina, Head of Department for International Relations of the city of Osijek received the answer from the Assembly of European Regions that her application was given a positive answer. The government of Steiermark county in Austria invited Mrs Krajina to practice in her office in Bruxelles from 19.11. till 15.12.2001.

We asked Mrs Krajina about her expectations from her stay there, and she answered that she will go there highly motivated to learn as much as possible. She is particularly

interested in seeing ongoing or upcoming projects foreseen for cities and regions. She is also interested in techniques and structures of project writing since it seems her that it is the skills which is the less developed Osijek. She would like to see which institutions and organisations exist in Bruxelles and with which of them the city of Osijek or the whole region could co-operate. In any case, Mrs Krajina thinks that the information and knowledge she will get from the internship could be used not only by the city municipality but also by many other organisations, institutions and individuals in the city.

The LDA is glad that the realisation of this trip was partly helped by the Association of LDAs and by the office in Osijek.

For many years now we have been co-operating with the Department for International relations of the city of Osijek, and especially in the last two years for a programme of transborder cooperation. The members of this Department are regularly present at seminars and round tables organised by the LDA Osijek.

Miljenko Turniski
Delegate LDA Osijek-Croatia

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Mr Tullio FERNETIC is the delegate of Brtonigla-Verteneglio LDA – e-mail: aldve-brtonigla@pu.hinet.hr

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