



### **A newsletter for a network of European ideas and best practices**

For over ten years ALDA has been working in the field of local democracy and exchange of best practices, to help active citizenship, human rights respect, equal opportunities and European values.

Our network is made up of about 200 members, all involved in our projects.

This monthly newsletter aims to focus on this great reality and to have a positive and multiplying effect.

Your comments and suggestions will be welcomed and highly appreciated.

Per Vinther  
ALDA President

Antonella Valmorbida  
ALDA Director



### **ALDA General Assembly and International Conference in Skopje, 28th-29th May 2010**

Skopje was the city chosen to host ALDA General Assembly this year together with the International Conference focusing on “How Civil Society and local governments are fighting the global crisis. – A joint active citizenship: a launch pad for a new future?”. A choice that finds its reason both in the considerable work that ALDA has been doing in this country in order to support the development of local democracy and in the utmost attention given by ALDA to the Macedonian Government’s aspiration towards membership of the European Union.

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This framework given, thanks also to the generous assistance provided by Skopje Municipality, ALDA General Assembly which was held last May was the occasion to give our members information about our Programme 2010 and our policy of future actions. Besides, presentation and approval of the Accounts 2009 were arranged, together with the Treasurer’s and the Auditor’s reports.

“Thanks to extensive support from the EU, active citizenship remains – Per Vinther, ALDA President, stated opening the General Assembly – one of the cornerstones of ALDA activities with our members and also further afield. Our finances remain in a very healthy state and ALDA is in a good shape to rise to the challenge of the coming years – the President remarked – notwithstanding many of our members among local authorities have felt the effects of the crisis and have had to reduce their involvement in our projects or with individual Local Democracy Agencies. This, however, should not lead to complacency. ALDA staff and Board of members – he concluded – are constantly searching for new partners and members as everywhere people and priorities changed.” A peculiar attention to be addressed to an increase in the services and projects implementation, as referred to ALDA partners and members, was a further point which emerged as strategically relevant in ALDA 2010 plan of activities.

The General Assembly was also the occasion to work on a further step in the re-launch of the LDA Kosovo and to announce the opening of an LDA Armenia.

Thanks to the several contributions given, the International Conference which took place the following day was proposed as an opportunity to seize the critical moment as the chance to think about ALDA and the LDAs goals and methodologies. The aim is to position ourselves as instruments of active citizenship in order to help solve this phase and to keep pace with the development of the situation at a global level.



### **ALDA is working on the Local Democracy Agency in Armenia**

The towns of Gyumri and Ijevan, in the North of Armenia, could be the local host of the new local Democracy Agency that ALDA is preparing. This progress on the identification of the local host was confirmed during a meeting of the Steering Committee for the future Assises of the Decentralized cooperation between France and Armenia, taking place in Yerevan on last 20<sup>th</sup> June, chaired by The Deputy Mayor of Grand Lyon, M. Hubert Julien La Ferrière.

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The Director of ALDA, Mrs. Antonella Valmorbida, and M. Peter Sondergaard had the opportunity to meet many Armenian stakeholders, local authorities, NGOs and international organizations.

A full engagement of local authorities and citizens was confirmed as essential for a local LDA approach.

The French Municipalities, in particular Valence and the Region Rhones Alpes, showed their interest on a possible cooperation.

The Assises of the Decentralized cooperation, taking place on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> October 2010 in Yerevan, Armenia, will be the forthcoming step where ALDA will explain the objectives to be reached in the region as for as local democracy is concerned.

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### **Armenia looks at Europe**

To give a full insight and understanding of the political systems in France, completed also by European perspective. This is the objective of a study visit to the French National Assembly and other important stakeholders of a delegation of high officials and Member of the Armenian Parliament that took place in Paris from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2010.

The visit was organized by ALDA, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies that is promoting an initiative to support governance in Armenia, falling under the activity of the Academy for Educational Development of Yerevan.

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The President of ALDA, M. Per Vinther, met the Armenian delegation at the beginning of the visit, emphasizing the interest of the Association for the work undertaken in the Caucasus and the intention to put its experience and its network available to local democracy.

A special visit at the National Assembly was organized by the Friendship group of Armenia and its Chair, M. François Rochebloine, MP of the French National Assembly.

A complete picture of the different technicalities and political issues was given to them thanks to the presentation of professors and a meeting with key stakeholders like Cidem and Ligue de l'Enseignement.

"This event absolutely fits into our strategy to get more involved in governance issues in Armenia", says Mrs. Antonella Valmorbida ~~begin\_of\_the\_skype\_highlighting~~ ~~end\_of\_the\_skype\_highlighting~~ -Director of ALDA, who attended a fact finding mission two weeks ago in Yerevan- We are also receiving benefit from the good experience of our French partners in Paris". The Council of Europe participated with the lecture of M. François Friederich, during their staying too.

For ALDA, the project is also an opportunity to cooperate with AED and with USAID, which is one of the key stakeholders in the region of Southern Caucasus in terms of support to local governance. ALDA was selected as the main stakeholder in terms of governance and quality organization that could organize such a tour. ALDA is preparing the start-up of a new Local Democracy Agency in Armenia (that will add to 12 already existing in the Balkans area, Georgia and Albania).

The Armenian delegation in Paris:

**Hovhannes Margaryan**, Committee Chair, Standing Committee on Territorial Management and Local Self-Government of RA NA;

**Rafik Petrosyan**, Deputy Committee Chair, Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs of the RA NA;

**Andranik Mnatsakanyan**, Expert, Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs of the RA NA;

**Arpine Hovhannisyan**, Adviser to the RA National Assembly Speaker;

**Sirvard Gevorgyan**, Adviser to the Head of Legal Department, RA NA;

**Armen Galstyan**, Expert, Standing Committee on Territorial Management and Local Self-Government of RA NA;

**Anna Hovhannessyan**, Local Expert for USAID Assistance to the RA National Assembly project.

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### **From Mixed to Shared: the Haifa Alternative**

The International Conference “From Mixed to Shared: the Haifa Alternative” was held in Haifa, Israel, from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> June 2010, organized in partnership by the Shatil New Israel Fund Initiative for Social Change, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the Technion and the Association of Local Democracy Agencies. It represented an unbiased platform for discussing challenges and successful models related to construction of ‘Shared Cities’ in areas where historical, ethnical, political and religious divisions seem to endanger the peaceful and mutually respectful co-existence of people.

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ALDA has been working in South East Europe since early Nineties, especially through the network of Local Democracy Agencies and has gained a relevant experience in promoting the good governance of “shared cities”. In this respect, it is relevant to highlight the experience of Mostar, where a LDA has been established since 2006, recognised as one of the most known divided cities of the recent history, and the successful experience of Subotica (Serbia), an example of good governance of an intercultural city.

The participation of several representative of ALDA members (Barcelona, Bydgoszcz, Subotica and Brindisi) sharing their utmost expertise and experience in this field, has contributed to broaden the debate on the addressed topics.

For more information, you can visit the official website of the conference: <http://www.shatil.org.il/english/haifa-conference/>.



### **“Reconciling for the future: European perspective for the Western Balkans”**

“Western Balkans countries must reinforce regional co-operation programmes in different areas, bilateral relations and cross-border co-operation in view of their EU integration. These are the major preconditions to strengthen the post-conflict reconciliation process in the area” Per Vinther, ALDA President, stated opening the Regional Conference in Zagreb, final part of the project “Reconciling for the future: European perspective for the Western Balkans”.

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The conference was held in Zagreb on the 29<sup>th</sup> June organized by ALDA, lead partner of the project, supported by the European Commission under the Instrument for Stability - Peace building Partnership support programme.

After the opening notes by Mr. Per Vinther, President of ALDA and Ms. Katarina Kruhonja, honorary president of the Centre for peace and non-violence, Osijek, the key note speaker on behalf of the President of Croatia – Dr. Ivo Josipovic was Ms. Zrinka Vrabec Mojzes, the President’s advisor for social affairs.

She greeted the participants on behalf of the President Josipovic who expressed his appreciation for the initiatives accelerating the steps towards reconciliation as one of the prerequisite for regional stability, to which Croatia is contributing in its full capacity. Both the reconciling with the recent past and remembrance with regard to all the victims of the war conflicts, both in Croatia and in other countries are now receiving the highest attention of the President’s missions to different parts of the country.

The Regional Conference was the final part of the project and followed the three country- based panel discussions held in NIS, Serbia (December 2009), in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (March 2010) and in Osijek (April 2010).

Some of the main actors of social and political debate about the EU integration perspective attended every events. During the discussion, both the EU integration process of the Western Balkans countries and the need to reinforce the democratic potential of the grassroot civil society initiatives engaged in the post-conflict reconciliation and even more in restoring the confidence building measures were reiterated.

The representatives of civil society regional networks, local NGO-s, local self-government, minority groups, experts and media took part in the project action in order to help encourage the involvement of a wider range of actors at different levels in the post-conflict reconciliation.

The entire action of the project is designed to help to address the post-conflict reconciliation process between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia with particular emphasis on assessing the achieved level and quality of inter-state relations in view of the progress made toward EU integration.

The activities planned also aim to address a number of challenges to increase the relations between Croat, Serb and Bosnian Muslim communities at different tiers of government within respective countries, at bilateral/cross-border and multilateral level.

Through a comprehensive set of activities, the project intended both to build the capacity of non-state actors operating at local/regional level in facilitating post-conflict reconciliation, and to support their networking and coordination.



#### **INTACT project: study visit in Sisak, Croatia on 8th – 9th June**

A large delegation of INTACT project partners participated at the study visit in Sisak last June. This is the first international event of this project which is aimed to strengthen the links among 20 municipalities and associations from 7 countries particularly involved in the citizens' participation issue and the promotion of EU values in the process of EU integration. A successful event.

On 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> June 2010 a large delegation of INTACT project partners participated at the study visit in Sisak. This is the first international event planned in this project, which is aimed to strengthen the links among 20 municipalities and associations from 7 countries that are particularly involved in the citizens' participation issue and the promotion of EU values in the process of EU integration.

Purposes of the project are to exchange good practices, to promote innovation and know-how by multiplying relations among towns across Europe in the context of the Local Democracy Agencies' network.

Some elected representatives and high-level administration civil servants were among the participants of the delegation. During the visit not only the partners attended the first meeting of the Steering Committee, where the different steps of the project were discussed, and a conference on decentralised cooperation and twinning. They also visited the municipalities of Dvor and Hrvatska Kostajnica, a factory in Divusa, a beekeepers cooperative and a family agricultural farm: a mutual chance to meet in a different context and have more direct exchanges. The successful outcome of the event thus promises a positive result the future activities of INTACT project.

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#### **MoDE: Bulgarian NGO "National Forum API" presented its experiences in Strasbourg**



MoDE project has moved forward in Strasbourg: on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> June, ALDA hosted two young women from National Forum API, based in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, particularly active in the promotion of European citizenship, Human and children's rights and cultural exchanges. Both of them presented their organizations and methods to each other, in order to have a best practice exchange and to learn mutual ways of managing projects in a quite common field of competences. Both Bulgarian representatives also had the occasion to discover the Council of Europe and Strasbourg's civil society.

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#### **Algerian immigration in Europe: opportunities and recognition of skills in France and Italy**

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> ALDA participated in organising the Seminar "Algerian immigration in Europe: opportunities and recognition of skills in France and Italy". The event, held in Lecce (Italy), was promoted by Lecce Municipality and ALDA in the framework of the project "Capitalize migrants capacities" granted by the EC-UN Joint Migration & Development Initiative (JM&DI).

On 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2010 ALDA participated at the Seminar "Algerian immigration in Europe: opportunities and recognition of skills in France and Italy". The Seminar was held in Lecce (Italy) and was promoted by Lecce Municipality in the framework of the project "Capitalize migrants capacities" granted by the EC-UN Joint Migration & Development Initiative

(JM&DI). It involved local authorities and civil society organizations.

The project aims to increase the development impact of migration by addressing the problem of brain drain and de-skilling of prospective migrants and returnees in order to transform it in brain gain.

Mr Giuseppe Naccarelli, Head of International relations of Municipality of Lecce, opened the Seminar followed by the Councillor Mr Alfarano, delegated to International affairs, underlying the opportunities that this kind of initiative gives to the civil society.

They were followed by Mr Jlenia Destito, responsible for International affairs and migration research department at IPRES institute, who introduced the topic of the migration policies at European level explaining the involvement of IPRES institute in analysis and research on migration issues, especially at the Mediterranean and local level.

Participants opened a debate on the dialogue with the local authorities and the integration at local level. Mr Augugliaro, representing Sicily Region, described the policies applied by his region and the vademecum for foreigners, a publication edited in different languages to support migrants in finding a job, starting a business activity and understanding Italian economic legislation.

The second part of the seminar was dedicated to the recognition of skills in Italy and France, giving participants the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of both the Italian recognition of skill process and the procedures applied in

France. The seminar highlighted the need to improve services for migrants living on the territory and to provide those who are going to migrate abroad with further information.

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### **Civil Bridge-Building - The Hungarian EU-Presidency in 2011 and the Western Balkans**

Initiated by a Hungarian civil society organization, the European House, and hosted by the European Fund for the Balkans and ALDA, an international conference took place in Novi Sad, Serbia on 18-19 June. The urgent need for the creation of a European Union listening to citizens and carrying out a continuous dialogue with them were among the final recommendations adopted by the 62 representatives from Hungarian civil society organizations and from the Western Balkans countries.

Initiated by a Hungarian civil society organization, the European House, and hosted by the European Fund for the Balkans and ALDA, an international conference took place in Novi Sad, Serbia, on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2010 with the participation of 62 representatives of

Hungarian civil society organizations and from the Western Balkans countries.

The final recommendations adopted by participants at the end of a rich and fruitful discussion summed up in the creation of a European Union listening to citizens and continuously opening a dialogue with them: a significant challenge which implies coordinated efforts from all stakeholders.

It was decided to support the contribution of civil society organizations as a necessary means of strengthening the European perspective of the Western Balkans countries. Hungarian CSOs can contribute to this process by transferring their experience and presenting their best practices, strengthening bilateral and regional contacts, initiating and organizing various programmes. A process that can be significantly promoted by the forthcoming Hungarian EU Presidency in 2011.

The 18-month programme of the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian „trio” EU presidency covering the issue of EU enlargement is an important feature and it should also be one of the priorities of the Hungarian Presidency.

The final document of the conference suggested that, in line with the „trio” and Hungarian presidency priorities, Budapest should host an event of European character in May 2011, for which the participant organizations are ready to contribute.

With regard to the elaboration by the European Commission of an EU Danube Strategy, which should also include contributions and proposals of civil society organizations, the setting-up of a Danube Civil Forum should be an important element of the planned EU Danube Action Programme. The adoption of the Danube Strategy during the Hungarian EU Presidency in 2011 will be supported.

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### **ReACT (Reinforcing Actions of capacity building for civil society ). Final conference of the project**

The final conference of the Reinforcing Actions of capacity building for civil society (ReACT) project was held in Minsk on the 19th of June, organized in partnership by NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» and ALDA.

The conference discussed best practices of Civil Initiatives for Capacity Building and Strengthening of Civil Society

The final conference of the Reinforcing Actions of capacity building for civil society (ReACT) project was held in Minsk on the 19th of June, organized in partnership by NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» and ALDA.

The conference discussed best practices of Civil Initiatives for Capacity Building and

Strengthening of Civil Society.

At the conference the 11 civic initiatives that received funding as part of the ReACT project presented the results of their initiatives. The initiatives covered a broad range of different activities from ecological initiatives to initiatives on health information and protection of student rights and social protection in the sphere of public services.

All initiatives managed to create impressive results during a short period of time with limited funding. The initiatives and the community groups working on the initiatives have shown great commitment to develop their society and the local communities they are part of. More detailed information about the initiatives with links to websites of some the initiatives and the products of their activities can be found in this report.

Read the [summary report](http://www.alda-europe.eu) on [www.alda-europe.eu](http://www.alda-europe.eu).

The conference also had a presentation on the NGO legislation in Belarus in the context of European standards presented by a Belarusian expert. Ms. Ivita Peipina from the State Regional Development Agency in Latvia that spoke about best practices of cooperation between civil society and municipalities in Latvia. Furthermore new forms of citizen participation in Denmark were discussed as well as a discussion of whether citizens in European countries should be considered as active, passive or just on Standby. Finally there was a discussion at the conference on the ways and directions of civil initiatives in Belarus and how civil initiatives can be continued in the future.

Representatives from local authorities, Belarusian NGOs, universities, experts and representatives from international organizations participated in the conference.

The conference was part of the Reinforcing Actions of capacity building for civil society (ReACT) project. The general aim of the ReACT project was to stimulate citizens and civil society organizations in Belarus to work actively for poverty reduction in cooperation with local authorities. The final remaining activity of the ReACT project will be a publication of the results of the project and the supported initiatives.

