

**“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**

Draft paper for discussion

The conference “Empowering Citizens and strengthening local governance in neighbouring countries: Lessons learned and opportunities from East to South” will 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. For other countries in the Balkans and in the Eastern Neighbourhood these 20 years have been painful and challenging and it has not always been clear if the transition has resulted in more democracy and positive developments.

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.

Which lessons have been learned in the East? How can we use these lessons to support the democratic development in the South? Which policy instruments were effective in the East? Are the current policy instruments towards the Southern neighbourhood effective and sufficient to provide the right type of support? Which role has Civil Society organisations played in the East? What type of support to them was successful? How can civil society organisations best be supported in the South? Which role has development of local self-government played in the East – which role can it have in the South? Is there a competition between East and South, with more attention for one less for the other?

These questions and many more will be discussed during the conference and during the two panels which will focus on the “opportunities for consolidating the European Policy and Action in Neighbouring Countries” and “Networks of Civil Society active for Local Governance. Lesson learned and ideas for the near future”