

Speech of Tetiana Lomakina at the ALDA side event, on the eve of the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2026 (URC 2026)

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

First of all, I would like to sincerely thank Antonella Valmorbida for her many years of important work in supporting local democracy agencies in Ukraine.

For many years, you have supported Ukrainian communities, strengthened local self-government, and helped build dialogue between authorities and citizens. Today, you continue to stand with Ukraine during one of the most difficult periods in our history.

For many Ukrainian communities, local democracy agencies have become more than partners. They have become spaces of trust, solidarity, and joint problem-solving.

Today, we remember Mariupol — a city that has been under occupation for many days and nights.

A city that has become a symbol of strength, courage, and the price Ukrainians pay for freedom.

We remember the people who stayed there. We remember those who were forced to leave their homes. We speak about families separated by war.

And we believe that the day will come when Mariupol will be free.

When the city will return home — to Ukraine.

When people from Mariupol, who now live in different communities in Ukraine and in different countries in Europe, will be able to return to their land, hug their relatives, friends, and neighbours who could not leave, and together start a new chapter in the history of their city.

Today, we speak about people from Mariupol who have found shelter in host communities.

And first of all, we speak about gratitude.

Gratitude to communities in Ukraine.

Gratitude to communities in Europe.

Gratitude to all people who opened their cities, their institutions, and their hearts to those who were forced to leave their homes.

We clearly understand that the biggest needs remain housing, jobs, access to education, and support for older people, people with disabilities, families with children, and everyone who has experienced the trauma of war.

And this is where local democracy tools become especially important.

Because the recovery of Ukraine did not start after the war ends.

It is already happening now. Every day.

In every community that hosts internally displaced people.

In every decision about housing, education, transport, accessibility, or social support.

That is why the development of local democracy is not a secondary task. It is one of the

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key conditions for successful recovery.
We often speak about inclusive recovery.
And this is very important.

But today, Ukraine needs something more.
We need inclusive leadership.
A new style of leadership based not only on authority, but on trust.
Not only on making decisions, but on creating decisions together.
Not only on formal consultations, but on real involvement of people in decisions that affect their lives.
Inclusive leadership means the ability to hear different voices.
The voice of a veteran.
The voice of a person with a disability.
The voice of a young person.
The voice of an internally displaced person.
The voice of an older person.
The voice of those who have often not been heard in decision-making.
And this is not only about the right of civil society to be heard.
It is also about the need for mayors, local council members, and community leaders to make decisions that have support from most residents, build trust, and do not create new conflicts.
In the difficult time of post-war recovery, the quality of decisions will directly depend on how many different experiences were heard during their preparation.
That is why we see a very important role for local democracy agencies.
They can be a space for dialogue between authorities and communities.
A platform for finding common solutions.
A partner in developing modern local governance.
A source of European experience and practices of inclusive leadership.
Together with the European Association for Local Democracy, local democracy agencies can help Ukrainian cities and villages build a new culture of governance — a culture of participation, trust, and responsibility.
A culture that is needed not only to rebuild what was destroyed.
But also to build a stronger, fairer, and more united Ukraine.
A Ukraine where people will return.
A Ukraine where everyone has the opportunity to be heard.
A Ukraine where recovery begins with human dignity.
Thank you all for your cooperation!

Tetiana Lomakina, Presidential Commissioner for Barrier-Free Environment, PhD

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