

Celebration of the 15th Anniversary of LDA Sisak
International Conference
**The Road of Croatia towards the EU: the role of Croatian Local Democracy
Agencies (LDAs).**
Sisak 04/11/201

Dear Mayor, Dear local authorities, international partners, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Congress, I am very happy to celebrate with all of you - international and local partners -, the 15th anniversary of the Local Democracy Agency in Sisak. It is a particular occasion, at the eve of the accession of Croatia to the European Union, to know about the results achieved so far and look to the future.

I would like to remind the role that the Council of Europe, and the Congress in particular, played in this initiative. The concept of the "*Local democracy Embassy*" was, in 1993, a pilot initiative for restoring peace and coexistence in communities that had faced the interethnic war and devastation after the dissolution of the Yugoslavia. A general political and functioning scheme was described in a Resolution of 1993 recalling the essential aspects of the LDAs, which still remain valid :

- a) to work with a network of European Partners;
- b) the central role of the Delegate (responsible of the field operation and acting in the name of the partnership);
- c) a programme of activities focusing on : interethnic and intercultural dialogue, human rights and empowerment of civil society and local authorities.

In 1998, a new resolution changed the name of Local Democracy Embassies in Local Democracy Agencies. They contributed in different ways in building up democratic local institutions and cohesive communities.

The aims of the *Local Democracy Agencies* were indeed:

- to contribute to the improvement of life conditions ;
- to foster peaceful co-existence and the development of civil society through mutual acquaintance and understanding;
- to strengthen the democratic process where it exists and to put in hand confidence-building measures through intercultural activities, human rights and peace education;
- to combat racism, intolerance and xenophobia by implementing non-violent solutions;
- to commit itself to a pluralistic society and to protect multicultural and multireligious society;
- to encourage the development of unbiased and pluralistic information;
- to encourage micro-economic projects, development and reconstruction aid;
- in general, to promote dialogue and mediation.

All these are the perfect ingredients to foster the civil society, to encourage companies to invest in local economies, to implement local public services, thus developing dynamic and prosperous communities. We all know that these goals are hard to get, and Local

Democracy Agencies addressed them constantly and with determination during many years.

The activities of LDAs become integral part of the programme shared by the Congress thanks to a Standing Committee composed of experts and Congress' members, and, of course, the Secretariat. Among the members of the Congress, I would like to remember the driving force of M. Gianfranco Martini, first President of ALDA and also President of the Steering Committee at the Congress.

The Local Democracy Agencies were also a clear example of the City to City Diplomacy that the Congress supported strongly throughout these years, a concept that is at the fundament of the decentralised co-operation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Croatia the Congress supported the activity of the LDA Osijek (second LDA created in 1993) and the LDA Verteneglio (created in 1996) and always considered them as a driver to promote local democracy and citizens' participation. Sisak was also initiated in 1996 and we are today celebrating its 15th anniversary.

The Congress wants to recognise the important work carried out by Sisak in terms of local democracy, by including the city among the "12 star-cities" of the European Week of Local Democracy 2011 for its engagement in improving local democracy, in experimenting different forms of citizens participation, in supporting the youth involvement in local life, in creating a dynamic civil society.

This status is also an award for Sisak entire population and its long lasting support and engagement in the life of the Local Democracy Agency and to the Association of the LDAs.

The Congress promotes the European Local Democracy Week every year in all the 47 member states because we know how important it is to involve the citizens in local public life and in the current affairs of their community. People involvement is relevant to boost the trust in local institutions, to encourage people to have a word in the decision making processes, and to remind local authorities of their commitment in transparency and efficiency.

Local democracy needs to be continuously fed and maintained. It is why we wish Local Democracy Agencies to continue to play their role with local and international partners to enhance community cohesion, to promote good governance and to empower civil society.

To conclude, I am delighted to wish you all an happy anniversary and for a further and even strengthened engagement for local democracy !

Mrs. Barbara Toce

Member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Vice Mayor of Pedaso (Italy)