



Principality of Liechtenstein and ALDA, a long term cooperation for local Democracy



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Contents

Foreword	5
Introduction	
<i>The Association of Local Democracy Agencies</i>	6
<i>The network of Local Democracy Agencies</i>	8
Chapter 1	
<i>The support of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the LDAs: a success story</i>	11
<i>Trans-border cooperation and interethnic dialogue</i>	14
<i>The regional dimension of ALDA and the network of LDAs</i>	17
Chapter 2	
<i>The development of LDA Mostar</i>	
<i>Mostar, the intercultural crossroad</i>	18
<i>The opening of LDA Mostar</i>	20
<i>LDA Mostar today</i>	25
Chapter 3	
<i>The development of LDA Albania</i>	
<i>Albania, a country on its way towards EU</i>	28
<i>The opening of LDA Albania</i>	30
<i>LDA Albania today</i>	34
Chapter 4	
<i>The development of LDA Georgia</i>	
<i>Georgia, where Europe meets Asia</i>	37
<i>The opening of LDA Georgia</i>	39
<i>LDA Georgia today</i>	42
Chapter 5	
<i>The ongoing process for an LDA in Azerbaijan</i>	
<i>Azerbaijan: a challenging country</i>	45
<i>The possibility of opening an LDA in Azerbaijan</i>	48
Contacts	50

Foreward



Like any other NGO the Association of Local Democracy Agencies is dependent on membership fees, volunteers and also very much on donors for its work. Since the launch in 1993 of the first Local Democracy Agency in Subotica and the creation of ALDA in 1999 the whole network has been fortunate to benefit from all of these necessary “ingredients” for success. That does not mean, however, that there is not constantly an effort to be made to attract all of these “ingredients” or replace the ones who leave by other benevolent ones.

Best is it of course when you come across someone who continues to take an interest and remains willing to support endeavours to promote democracy and respect for human rights throughout Europe. With this publication the ALDA Governing Board and Staff wish to honour the generous support which the Principality of Liechtenstein, represented by its Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe, H.E. Ambassador Ospelt, has provided over quite a number of years. Whether we are talking about the democratisation process in South East Europe or in Southern Caucasus ALDA has been able to count on the continuing financial – and moral – backing of Liechtenstein. Obviously, this has not been the only support but nonetheless a very much appreciated one.

It is our hope that through the human rights projects and the opening of additional Local Democracy Agencies described in this publication we are able to demonstrate just some of the positive results made possible with the support from Liechtenstein. If this could inspire also other potential donors then we would have one more reason to be grateful to the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Thank you!

Per Vinther
ALDA President

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Per Vinther'. The signature is fluid and cursive, matching the printed name above it.

Introduction

The Association of Local Democracy Agencies

When the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) was established in 1999, it brought together a network of Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) in existence since 1993. The LDAs were set up by the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. They were originally conceived to provide concrete assistance to war-ravaged municipalities in South East Europe through partnerships with counterparts in Western Europe. As the war in the Balkans ended, ALDA's focus shifted from crisis management to democratic reform, with an emphasis on promoting tolerant and trust-based relationships within communities.

6 The mandate of ALDA is described in its Statute and it includes the coordination and support to LDAs and the promotion of local governance, human rights and interethnic dialogue, local economic development and civil society empowerment in the local decision making process.

The setting up of the Association was a difficult challenge since it implied new commitments and new resources, which were, already at that time, difficult to collect. The full support of the Council of Europe and of the Congress, as well as of other institutional donors, was fundamental to implementing ALDA's activities.

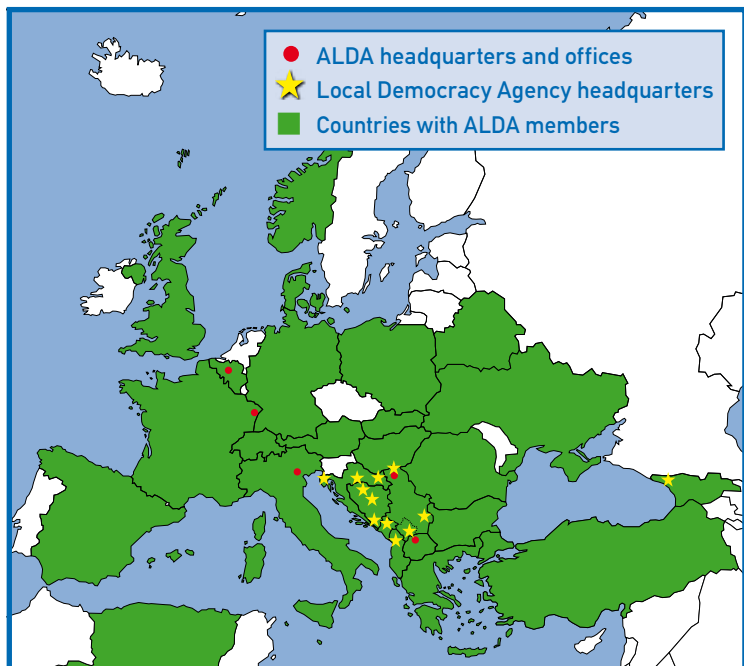
ALDA started developing a unique platform of cooperation, a guarantee of good management for donors, a forum for public debate and decision making for the members and partners of the LDAs. ALDA and the Council of Europe, in particular the Congress, work in full synergy and mutual support. The LDAs and ALDA along with its members proved to be eyes, ears and arms of the Congress on many occasions and in many initiatives. On the other hand, the Congress and its members are a resourceful network of partners offering skills and expertise to the Association.

After more than ten years of activities, ALDA proved to be a reliable partner for institutional donors by implementing projects

with tangible results at the local level able to affect the everyday life of citizens. Among the many donors who have been funding the Association so far, the Principality of Liechtenstein has played a prime role in backing projects for more than eight years with a total amount of 183,000 EUR, building up therefore a solid trustful relationship with ALDA. The long experience in the field of local democracy, active citizenship and the fostering of human rights has made our Association one of the biggest and most important NGOs in its ability to connect local authorities and civil societies. Nowadays it has a network of 160 members coming from 29 countries of the wider Europe.

However, despite its high level of international involvement, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies remains committed to its original mandate focused on supporting democracy at the local level.

*ALDA network,
LDAs.
headquarters
and offices*



The network of Local Democracy Agencies

The first LDAs were established at the initiative of the Council of Europe benefitting from the determination and political will of a group of enthusiasts who conceptualised and shaped the initial idea. In almost 20 years of activities, the LDAs developed from a pilot project to an efficient and sustainable instrument to promote democracy and civil society in South Eastern Europe and in Southern Caucasus.

Today the network of LDAs is a well-established system in promoting Local Democracy and Civil Society in Europe. Such goals are pursued by a developed chain of 12 Agencies, covering seven countries in South Eastern Europe and in Southern Caucasus.

They are supported by more than 100 partners (local authorities and civil society organizations) in Europe, offering the Agencies financial and political support to fulfil their mandate in accompanying local democracy, civil society empowerment and participation in the decision making process at the local level.

The network of Agencies has been established in line with the major political events marking the overall developments in South-eastern Europe and in the Caucasus:

- political and economic isolation of Serbia during the Milosevic regime made it necessary to think of a flexible means of assistance from 1993 onwards, and the opening of the first Agency in Subotica, which operated in a difficult political climate, enabled the Council of Europe to develop activities aimed at the promotion of civil societies and the improvement of relations within a multiethnic and multicultural local community;
- the establishment of an Agency in Osijek (1994) opened the way for valuable co-operation activities with the United Nation Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES);
- following the signature of the Dayton Agreement (November 1995), the presence of Agencies in Sarajevo (1996) - under the auspices of the City of Barcelona, particularly active in the youth

area - Zavidovici (1997) and Prijedor (2000) made it possible to work for inter-ethnic cooperation, encouraged by a consortium of Italian partners;

- the commitment of the former Mayor of Nis and president of the Union of Free Towns of Serbia, led to the opening of an Agency in Nis after the fall of the Milosevic regime in 2001;
- the creation of an Agency in Montenegro (2001), in close cooperation with the associations of local authorities, gave a great impetus to the country to develop a means for European action and to promote a regional programme in the attempt to foster local democracy, civil society and local development;
- the support of the region of Sisak Moslavina heavily affected after the war in Croatia in 1996, to support the minorities' protection related issues all over the country;



LDAs network

- the support to the local administrative and decentralization reform in Albania with the Agency in 2008;
- accompanying outcomes and first activities of local democratic institutions in Southern Caucasus after the Revolution of the Roses in Georgia;
- the importance of promoting interethnic relations and economic development led to the opening of LDA Kosovo in Peja/Pec in 2010.

Due to convincing evidence of their relevance and the results achieved, the sustainability of the LDAs in the long run has been assured by the partnership network. Since their establishment, the LDAs have primarily been focusing on local governance as well as interethnic dialogue and understanding.

However, due to the evolution of the local context both in South Eastern Europe and in Southern Caucasus, they turned more and more to the process of European integration as an ideal platform for the Stabilisation and Association Process introduced by the European Union.

10

The partnership established within the LDA frame, by means of international decentralised co-operation, has been developed through two main lines of action:

- Territorial based, involving all the actors of the communities concerned on a geographic basis
- Thematic networking, focused on specific, commonly determined issues connecting different local communities.

Since 2000, ALDA has undertaken numerous activities to extend its geographical basis and increase the involvement of local and regional authorities and non-governmental organisations from different European countries. ALDA's contribution in terms of coordination is essential in helping LDAs in the funding search as well as in the logistical and administrative support.

The work carried out over the past years led the Association to establish itself as a fully recognised partner of organisations committed in strengthening political institutions and fostering the democratisation process in southern and eastern Europe, thus becoming a concrete reference for European towns and regions interested in on-the-ground activities.

Chapter 1

The support of the Principality of Liechtenstein to ALDA and to the LDAs: a success story

The Principality of Liechtenstein – through its contributions to the Council of Europe – has played for many years a significant role in supporting ALDA and the LDAs by funding numerous of their projects. This gave a strong impetus to the development of the Association and its entire network of Agencies, ensuring their sustainability in the long run. Moreover, the Principality supported the start-up phases of some crucial LDAs (Mostar, Albania, Georgia, Azerbaijan) and funded their opening projects, helping to overcome the difficult threshold of ensuring initial endowment.

Through such a regular funding the country offered ALDA trust and continuing encouragement for its work. For this vital support, ALDA is therefore extremely grateful to the Principality of Liechtenstein for its interest in the work of the Local Democracy Agencies and their engagement for local governance, participation of citizens and human rights.

Vaduz regular support to ALDA and the LDAs from 2001 to 2010

*Flag of the
Principality of
Liechtenstein*



allowed the funding of numerous projects at the regional as well as community levels. Its total contribution in backing such activities reaches an amount of up to 183.000 Euros.

This financial participation in the support of our initiatives was extremely relevant insomuch as it strongly contributed to the implementation of 'complex' projects, by ensuring a high percentage of co-funding. LDAs' ongoing activities have been taking place in a significant percentage thanks to such a contribution, leading the Agencies towards a self-strengthening process which confirms the sustainability of investing in the LDAs. Indeed all those Agencies that benefited from the funds granted by the Principality have today solid roots and have regularly and strongly been contributing to the social, cultural and economic development of the communities involved.

The projects that met such a vital support had different nature and involved both the Western Balkans and the Southern Caucasus. The main topics can be summarised as follows:

- interethnic dialogue
- youth
- capacity building for civil society organizations and local authorities
- women's rights
- local development

12



Council of Europe Headquarters, Strasbourg, France

A deeper analysis of the financial commitment of the Principality of Liechtenstein in backing ALDA's and LDAs' activities envisages its strong role in supporting main initiatives in the strengthening of the overall network.

From 2001 to 2003 Vaduz has addressed 56.000 euro in financing activities aimed at fostering transborder cooperation and intercultural dialogue. The LDAs though have been the main beneficiaries of such funding: in 2006, 45.000 euro have contributed to the development of LDA Mostar; in 2007 the establishment of LDA Albania and the launch of its initial phase would not have been possible without the financial support of the Principality up to 22.500 euro, the same amount received also in 2009. As well in 2007, 17.000 euro have been directed to support the development of LDA Georgia through the project 'Students for Women's Rights'. The ongoing process of setting up an Agency of Local Democracy also in Azerbaijan has seen the Principality as one of the main actors, by supporting the process itself with 20.000 euro in 2010.

Trans-border cooperation and interethnic dialogue

A regional project in South East Europe

Co-funded by the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, Finland and the Canton of Basel-City in the framework of the Stability Pact

From 2001 to 2003, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) implemented an articulated and complex programme for the promotion of interethnic and civic dialogue in South Eastern Europe, thanks to the support of the Principality of Liechtenstein and other institutional donors. The programme involved the co-ordination of ALDA and the work in the field of 8 Local Democracy Agencies. The effect at the regional level has been genuine and long lasting, and the strength of the whole network has been substantially enhanced.

14

The objectives of the programme were:

1. to strengthen the local democracy and decision making process at the local level in South Eastern Europe;
2. to foster the transborder co-operation as an instrument for the local development of the area and the stability;
3. to enhance the intercultural dialogue by working with different representatives of the local authorities and civil society.

The implementing Agencies of the programme were LDAs in:

- Croatia: Sisak, Verteneglio/Brtonigla, Osijek/Vukovar;
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: Tuzla, Zavidovici, Prijedor;
- Serbia: Subotica, Nis-Kraljevo-Kragujevac-Leskovac;
- Montenegro: Niksic;
- "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia": Ohrid.

ALDA acted as coordinator of the activities, developing different synergies with other stakeholders and networks at the regional level, in particular with those supported and included in the Council of Europe area (ENTO, process for the institution of an association of national associations of local authorities in Central and Southern

Europe, etc). All the LDAs involved implemented different actions at the local level addressing important issues for their own local communities.

The project lasted 3 years and included the following activities:

- In Osijek (Croatia) Establishment of a Youth City Council, now a regular feature of the community.
- In Verteneglio (Croatia): Trans-border co-operation - International Congress held in 1995. The first high level event held by LDA Verteneglio and perhaps the first time in the Republic of Croatia in which local authorities dealt with the participation of internationally renowned European politicians.
- In Zavidovici (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Establishment of cultural-political-human exchanges between local communities of Western Europe and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mediation in a post conflict environment (open space meeting; promotion of interethnic dialogue).
- In Prijedor: providing a neutral space of dialogue among the ethnic groups of Prijedor and to promote youth activities in the municipalities and a network of youth associations of different ethnic groups, involving youth associations of Trentino and Trieste.
- In Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Establishment of first contacts among Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Associations of Municipalities in Bosnia and

15

Beneficiary countries of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe



Herzegovina. Signature of a Protocol of Cooperation between the two Associations in Strasbourg (2000).

- In Subotica: Training Programme for young political leaders, public debates to help the promotion of independent intellectuals, free movement of people and ideas and reconciliation in post-war countries of former Yugoslavia.
- In Ohrid (FYROM) Provide and facilitate provision of relevant information concerning the new Laws on Local self- government and get the citizens acquainted with their right for direct participation in the decision-making process.
- In Sisak (Croatia): Establishment and support to local youth NGOs. Establishment of the first help line (SOS phone) for victims of family violence and social exclusion.

This first pilot trans-border cooperation program implemented by ALDA in the Balkans aimed at strengthening the regional network of the LDAs in the region, urged our Association to continue along the same line drafted alongside the LDAs in between 2001 and 2003. Today, ALDA and the network of LDAs have been widely recognised as one of the main stakeholders in promoting the European integration of the whole region.

The regional dimension of ALDA along with its LDAs network has been made evident by the increasing number of projects that the Agencies, mainly in cooperation with the umbrella Association, have been implementing on different topics of central importance for the entire region.

16



Summer School for young political leaders, Macedonia, 2002

The regional dimension of ALDA and the network of LDAs

Today, the role and the activities of regional programs aimed at supporting local democracy and civil society empowerment in Central and Eastern Europe need to be redefined taking into account the rapid evolution of the situation in the field as well as a clear reference to the international framework.

In this sense, since its creation in 1999, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies has efficiently been coordinating the extension of the network of Local Democracy Agencies. ALDA has established strong co-operation with the Stability Pact for South-East Europe and Working Table I, whose Istanbul Final Declaration prioritised local democracy and trans-border co-operation, stressing that "Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) established by the Council of Europe have shown considerable results during the past years in working with local governments and with civil society. LDAs can build upon a wide network of international and local partners and should receive further support".

Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) and the Association of LDAs are instruments at the disposal of local and regional authorities that contribute, as effectively as possible, to the local development in South Eastern Europe.

Since its establishment, ALDA has deployed great efforts in the promotion of a regional dimension within the network of Local Democracy Agencies and has found in the Principality of Liechtenstein one of its main donors and supporters at the European level. This task was of crucial importance in particular in the early 2000s when the LDAs' network was being enlarged and needed a strong support so as to ensure the regional dimension within the network itself.

Thanks to the support of the Principality, and to other international sponsors as well, ALDA had the opportunity to start a long lasting activity even after the end of the project, providing continuity to the pilot activities still up nowadays and promised to last in the following decades.

Chapter 2

The development of LDA Mostar Mostar, the intercultural crossroad.

The municipality of Mostar is the largest and the most important city in the Herzegovina region and the centre of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton of the Federation. With a population of 128.000 inhabitants, it is situated in a beautiful valley bedded between high mountains of Herzegovina. The main attraction of the city is Stari Most, its most famous bridge. The Old Bridge was built in 1565 under the Ottoman Empire by Mimar Hajrudin, a great architect who succeeded in the impossible mission to erect a single span stone bridge over the river. It was the bridge itself which gave the name to the city. Those who were in charge of guarding the bridge were called 'Mostari' indeed.

18

The Old Bridge area within the old city, with its outstanding multicultural architectural features (pre-Ottoman, eastern Ottoman, Mediterranean and Western European) along with the heterogeneity of the surrounding landscape, is a notable example of a multicultural urban settlement. The relevant artistic and architectonic richness is reflected also in the multicultural dimension of the city and Mostar can rightly be considered as an intercultural



*The Old Bridge
of Mostar,
Bosnia and
Herzegovina*

ral crossroad indeed. Settled at the heart of Herzegovina, Mostar is undoubtedly one of the most interesting cities of the region, as far as culture is concerned. A crossroad between the Mediterranean and the Dinarian Alps, it has shown to be both a unique and a plural city, a place where various cultures have learned to coexist with each other after centuries of contacts and dialogue.

The intercultural and spiritual unity of Mostar was reflected in its harmonious architecture, a refined whole which combines together different architectural styles, making the city one of the main attractions of central Herzegovina. When it comes to the future, we might best use the words of Mayor Ljubo Bešlić:

"...It is to be expected, and I am personally, as a Mayor and as a man an optimist, that the City of Mostar as such, will be a guideline for Bosnia and Herzegovina in its path towards European integration, where we do belong, and a leader in creating total prosperity. The mix of cultures and traditions and the unbreakable spirit that here has a hold will be an additional strength for a challenge that stands before us in achieving that goal."

The opening of LDA Mostar

The tough political and economic situation then characterising the city urged the establishment and development of a Local Democracy Agency in Mostar.

Ethnical divisions, high unemployment rates and a lack of high educated professionals were the main challenges to tackle. Since its creation, LDA Mostar became a strong actor in the promotion of activities such as interethnic dialogue and the creation of employment opportunities which had a strong impact on the improvement of the political and economic context in the Mostar civil society.

The contribution and the support of the Principality of Liechtenstein was a key factor in steering the articulated process towards the establishment of LDA Mostar, officially and successfully completed on 22nd November 2004.

20

Three important meetings took place before the official inauguration in order to evaluate whether or not the project might have taken on a life. They gathered all the potential partners: international and local organisations, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies and the Municipality of Mostar who, at the end of the debating process, agreed upon the opening of an LDA in the municipality.

After the Dayton Agreement in 1995, the city still clearly remar-



*The opening of
LDA Mostar,
22nd November
2004*

ked an ethnic-based division line within the society, aggravated by a high rate of unemployment and affected, like many other cities in the country, by the so-called 'brain-drain'. Many international organisations invested in the physical reconstruction of the city but only a few of them addressed financial support in backing human resources.

Bearing this in mind, since its establishment, the new Agency addressed its priorities and activities to the restoration of normal relations amongst citizens, moving towards the overtaking of ethnic fractures and, at the same time, to the improvement of skills and competencies of Mostarian people. In this perspective, LDA's commitment was channelled into providing the inhabitants with tangible opportunities in terms of employment, interethnic dialogue and many other specific topics insofar as they would not have felt forced to flee the country in search of more favourable economic and political conditions.

In a more deep analysis, LDA Mostar adopted a plural intervention centred on four different action guidelines as tools in tackling the challenges mentioned above:

21

1. Action "Dialogue through practice – Court Trial Simulation":

The project consisted in a non-formal training course aimed at improving interethnic dialogue between the University of Mostar and Džemal Bijedić University and supplement the lacks of practical work in the formal learning in these 2 institutions. The course addresses priority areas in the development of the practical and research work in students approach to learning. It also provided a setting where theoretical knowledge acquired through formal education can be further developed and applied in practice. The course was implemented in 2 segments, had places for 15 participants and ran for one academic semester (6 months).

Strategies used to accomplish interethnic dialogue were based on a model, which required communication between 2 ethnic groups in order for them to realize their common needs. Their needs in this case were lack of practical work in the formal learning environment and were a point where both groups met. The highly motivated participants, who were selected by the Project team were part of a growing resource of educated young lawyers and

support persons with skills and knowledge that could be shared with their peers and assist them in their future professions.

The aims of the seminar were to introduce the participants with the course methodology as well as build group cohesion and initiate dialogue. Participants took part in an actual recreation of a legal case, in all of its phases, from the act of committing felony, setting up the prosecution, preparing the defence and the actual trial where a sentence was brought.

The course was designed and implemented in such a way that it provided participants with a deep knowledge on how to prepare a sentence or defend a client from the beginning to the conclusion of the case. At their conclusion, certificates, signed by the Deans of both Faculties of Law, were delivered to the 15 participants.

2. Action “training course for tourist guides”

CKM Ltd. in cooperation with the LDA prepared the Tourist Guide Seminar during summer 2005. In July of 2005, an official notice for the seminar application was published in two local newspapers (Dnevni list & Dnevni avaz).

One hundred and twenty candidates applied, out of which 30 were selected for the training course. Between July 27 and 29, consecutive interviews with potential candidates were held in LDA premises, for English, Italian, German, French and Spanish languages.

22



*Meeting
in Mostar,
Bosnia and
Herzegovina,
July 2005*



The Seminar began on August 23, 2005 according to the already established Program, divided in three parts:

- Introductory presentations and discussions regarding general information about tourism, laws and regulations in BiH, tourist demand, tourist destinations and resources, organization of tourist supply institutions etc.
- Presentation of the main tourist destinations in HN Kanton, illustrated by the publications and other means of presentation.
- Practical training of behaviour and communication of the guide with tourists, and with people and institutions related to particular tourist attractions.

To end the course, a tour was organized through the city of Mostar in cooperation with a local tourist agency, in which was demonstrated to the candidates how should tourist guides do their job properly, how to behave, what to highlight and what can they expect.

At the end of the Seminar, CKM issued a certificate that confirmed a successful completion of the course.

3. Action "Forming the Union of all secondary school Student Councils in Mostar"

At that time, in Mostar there were 26 secondary schools, and only 10% of them had efficient Student Council. Other 90% of Student Councils existed only on paper just in order to obey the Legal requirements. Our objective was to make an initiative body which would have a role to promote the idea of union and to lobby all other secondary schools to be included in the Union.

This union was an excellent way to connect young people in the area of Mostar, to exchange experiences, common projects and influence the improvement of teaching process.

The Union is now a legal, non-governmental, non-party and non-profitable body, and the main objective of that body is to connect the students of all secondary schools and influencing on the improvement of the teaching process.

4. Action “Setting up the LDA – Final Step”

Since LDA Mostar has been opened in the second half of 2004, during its first year the Agency had to face several start up costs. Even if furniture and other office staff, received in heritage from the previous office of the Council of Europe, has given a significant help to the LDA Mostar’s starting up, the coverage of some expenses was not still fund-raised. The deployment of part of the grant financed by the Liechtenstein for covering the equipment and office material expenses ensured the proper functioning of the Agency, allowing the implementation of the project already in existence and the future work of the Agency itself.

The contribution of the Principality of Liechtenstein meant a lot for the existence of the Agency, both in terms of activities implemented for the local community and in terms of sustainability of the Agency. Nowadays, the LDA Mostar is one of the most active Agencies in the whole network.



*Neighbours
Day in Mostar,
Bosnia and
Herzegovina,
May 2010*

LDA Mostar today



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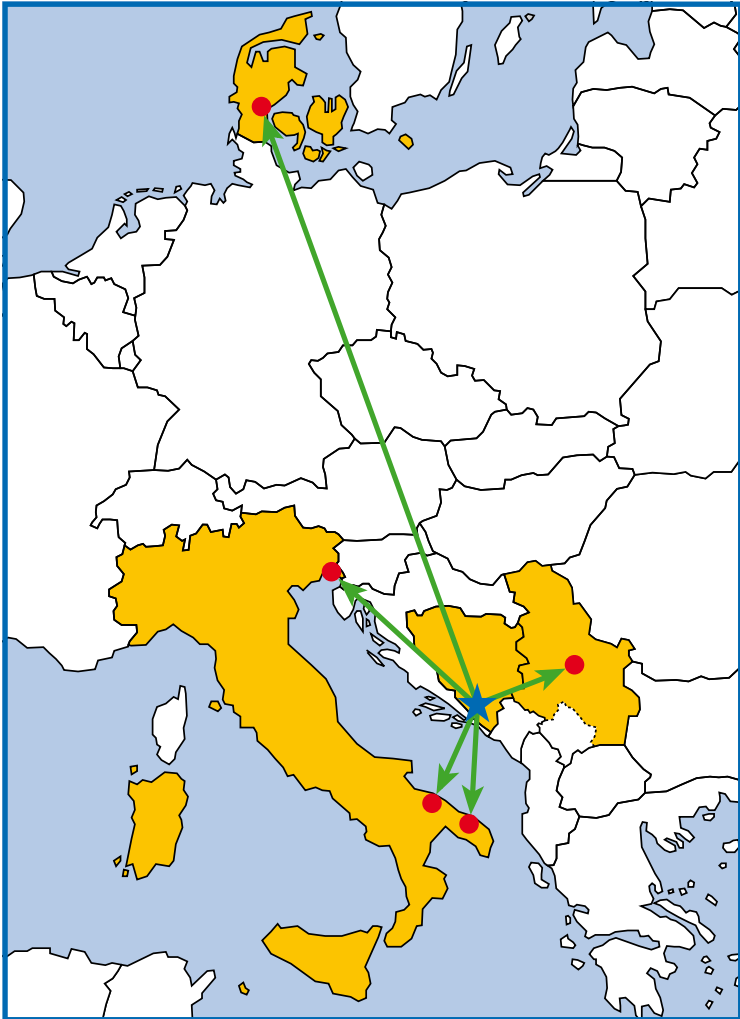
Partners: Bosnia and Herzegovina: Municipality of Mostar; Denmark: Municipality of Vejle; Italy: NGO "IPSIA" Milano, Province of Brindisi, Province of Venice, Municipality of Monfalcone; Norway: Municipality of Sund; Serbia: Municipality of Kragujevac

Since 2004, the Local Democracy Agency of Mostar has been working to support local democratization by strengthening good governance and capacity building of local authorities and civil society, as well as by encouraging participation of citizens in public life. Today, the aim of the Agency is to be a resource centre for institutions of the City Administration, Cantonal authorities, and civil society as well as a bridge between them, towards a better harmonization of BiH democratic standards with those of the European Union.

The path towards full democracy and local development in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still difficult and painful, and the process of European integration rather underestimated and far from being a concrete option for the benefit of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The state seems to hang in a state of oblivion, where spectra of ethnic tension violations of minority rights, corruption, heavy and complex bureaucracy, economic depression, high unemployment rate and civil frustration are overwhelming obstacles in the process of State stabilization. In short, there is an evident lack of contemporary and unique political desire for real involvement in the Bosnia and Herzegovina process of institutional strengthening and socio-economic development, with the aim of finalizing the transition period and to overcome political and economic isolation by joining the European Union. Despite the unre-

solved situation still cause of political and social tensions in the country, the international community began to shift their attention and support to other emergencies in the world.

Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens were then abandoned to their fate. Nevertheless, many citizens, citizens organizations and public employees are willing and ready to resist this dark scenario and have been getting involved in important projects and



*LDA Mostar
foreign
partners
pinpointing*

activities that can lead to a better future for individuals and their society as a whole. Local Democracy Agency Mostar collaborated with these extraordinary people in and around the municipality. Thanks to an active European network of partners, the LDA kept working on supporting local authorities and citizens in fostering democracy and civil rights in the area.

More recently, the Agency has had a chance to work together with local, regional and European partners and to be active in the field of citizens participation and civil society involvement in the public life, ensuring an active cooperation and exchange between the Bosnian and other European communities. The last years were marked by many important achievements: building bridges between Mostar and the European communities the LDA cooperates with, establishing and improving many professional and personal relationships at the local and international level to ensure the sustainable development and empowerment of citizens.

The successful work of the LDA is proven by one major fact: the voice of citizens. ALDA is sure that in the future Local Democracy Agency Mostar will continue to be loyal and devoted to Mostar and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular to its citizens.

*Mo.StarT-V,
a project of
training for
young
video-reporters,
August 2009/
March 2011*



Chapter 3

The development of LDA Albania Albania, a country on its way towards EU

Albania, once one of the most isolated country in Europe, is now part of this organic process of great global transformations and also a country with firm aspirations for membership in the European Union. A balance of achievements and challenges that the country is currently facing reflects the long way ahead in trying to match the right pace of reforms and standards of democracy, rule of law and the welfare of its citizens.

28

However, two decades after the transition from communism, democracy in Albania remains fragile. As the country makes further formal steps towards Europe, important democratic deficits remain in the areas of rule of law, judicial independence, elections, media independence, and combating corruption.

Albania is a country which nowadays shows two faces. On the one hand, the country is modernizing reasonably fast. The conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2006 shows that Albania is willing to move towards "Brussels" and



*The Albanian
flag*

*"No war
between us!",
"Youth: the
right direction"
project in 2009*



that the country is making progress in achieving this goal. On the other hand, the country shows some severe internal problems that could slow down the process of modernization. Corruption is, for instance, still a big problem and is damaging the country's economic potential in a serious way. The fact that the local elections in 2007 could not meet the international democratic standards, is a clear sign of how democratization and transparency should still be on the top of the political agenda during the coming years.

29

The election of the new Albanian president in August 2007 underlines this idea. In sum: Albania is a country in transition, that should grab the attention of both Balkan countries and the European Union. It is in this frame that is acknowledged the importance of establishing a Local Democracy Agency as relevant actor in promoting the Albanian path towards the EU.

The opening of LDA Albania

In the long-lasting process leading to the setting up of LDA Albania, conceived as central stakeholder in tackling the unresolved challenges highlighted above, the Principality of Liechtenstein played once more a consistent role. Thanks to its support, the process successfully ended up in the creation of the Albanian Agency in 2008 in Skodra. Valduz contribution was put in place, in more concrete terms, through two different programs.

The first one, funded in 2007, provided ALDA with the practical means necessary to create a solid basis for the new Agency, focusing on the creation of a strong partnership as the frame within which to determine the priorities of LDA Albania. Its main topics enhanced capacity building activities for local authorities, civil society empowerment, citizens' participation and best exchange measures with a special focus on youth.

30

Liechtenstein's support represented a key contribution in materialising the objectives set by the Governing Board in 2005 with regards to Albania. The necessity of a Local Democracy Agency on the ground as a highly potential benefit for the local authorities and communities in Albania has been stressed by both civil society organisations and public institutions.

ALDA was actively engaged in looking for partners during the 2008-2009 term to support in the long run the sustainability of the Agency. The creation of a partnership network for an LDA is undoubtedly one of the hardest steps. Potential partners are those who share common objectives with the Association and understand the concept of decentralised cooperation in its multilateral perspective in order to share within the network ideas and resources. Potential members were therefore identified among both the numerous ALDA's contacts and those introduced by the Municipality of Skodra.

After three years of intense and step by step preparatory work, the Agency came officially to life on 10th December 2008. The inauguration of the LDA was followed by a seminar over local authorities and their cooperation with civil society, attended by about 40

participants from all over the country, providing them with skills and instruments for a better cooperation. It saw the attendance of both local authorities from all over Albania and the municipality's partners and it benefited from a wide media coverage.

The opening of an LDA in Albania certainly represented a priority for ALDA since 2006. The first preparatory mission took place in Shkodra in 2005 with the significant support of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. In it, the Mayor of the city stressed the strong interest and willingness to make his Municipality the hosting centre of the LDA. The strategic geographical position of the city, close to the border with Kosovo and Montenegro, was a key element in the promotion and development of a wide cross-border approach, enabling an easier cooperation with the LDAs of the two neighboring countries.

Taking into serious account such an initiative, ALDA adopted a deep analysis over whether the proposal could have had a concrete implication. Its achievement required the creation of a strong partners' network able to support the initial and ongoing projects.

Once more the Principality of Liechtenstein highlighted his key role in the promotion of local democracy and civil society, by being one of the main actors in backing such a hard but currently successful challenge.

The second relevant programme that met the consistent contribution of Vaduz took place in between February 2009 and 2010. It

International seminar on "Decentralization", Shkodra, Albania November 2009



primarily focused on supporting the initial steps of the Agency providing it with the necessary resources required to carry out a set of activities in order to give a solid basis over which the Agency could manage its future projects and strengthen the cooperation with its partners. In this general frame, an action plan of start-up activities was afterwards successfully implemented, in full accordance with the guidelines agreed by partners in the meeting held in Skodra on 10th December 2008.

The main goal of the start-up phase was to foster a profitable and fruitful exchange among its partners as a key tool for creating a long-lasting and strong basis of profitable cooperation. Such an exchange led to prosperous results in terms of reinforcement of the network, creating the path to joint-projects involving the partners and the LDA.

In this framework of activities a special focus was placed on the importance of local authorities and civil society organisations to work together. The cooperation between these two key elements of the community is an essential part of the activities and the actions that LDA Albania has meant to play on the ground.

32

Despite the several challenges faced, the following main results were proudly achieved:

- support and reinforcement of the decentralization process;
- stronger capacity building for civil society organizations and local authorities;



*Opening of
LDA Albania,
October 2008*

*"Seenet II",
a seminar
in Gïrokaster
Albania,
March 2009*



- promotion and strengthening of cooperation between civil society and local authorities;
- more productive exchange among stakeholders of the economic sector.

33

Thanks to these results LDA Albania has become a respectful actor in the region, able to develop solid relations based on trust and loyalty with both local authorities and civil society organisations.

Bearing in mind the important role the Agency has reached in only a few years in promoting local democracy in the region, the grateful contribution of the Principality of Liechtenstein has shown to be a productive investment in the European Integration process that Albania has recently moved into. This support has given the Agency the tools to work along with local and international partners and represents a solid bridge in the cooperation between local authorities and civil society organisations.

LDA Albania today



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The LDA Albania has been supported by the Principality of Liechtenstein.

34

In only three years after its creation, LDA Albania has become a well established actor in promoting the democratic process in Albania, by keeping local authorities and civil society organizations working together for local development, community empowerment and European integration. Despite the internal problems the Agency faced after its establishment, its significant role in



*Microcredit
Steering
Committee
Meeting,
Tirana,
Albania,
July 2010*

*LDA Albania
foreign
partners
pinpointing*



promoting active citizenship and local governance is today widely recognized. Still, its international structure, through its European partnership and the large ALDA network, has been providing the Municipality of Skodra and the whole country in more general terms with a European dimension which for too long represented the main missing element among local authorities and civil society organizations in Albania.

35

Today, LDA Albania is working in close cooperation with different local and international stakeholders to support and reinforce the process of decentralization, provide capacity building for civil society organizations and local authorities, promote and strengthen cooperation between civil society and local authorities, favour the exchange among stakeholders of the economic sector, act as a youth empowerment activator, and promote active citizenship.

LDA Albania is involved in several projects implemented by ALDA, in particular within the programme of Europe for Citizens, continuing its initial mandate of contributing to the process of EU rapprochement of the country. During the last year, the Agency has also been very active in the field of Youth, implementing a transnational project aimed at fostering the international cooperation and

mobilization in this sector. Furthermore, on the occasion of the European Year of Volunteering, LDA Albania promoted the “culture” of volunteering at the local level, making a step forward in promoting a culture of peace and solidarity.

Through the strong support of its lead partner, LDA Albania has built strong relations with the Municipality of Brindisi, and with the Apulia region in general. This allowed the natural continuation of the strong historical cooperation between the two regions on the opposite shores of the Adriatic Sea.

The Agency has nowadays gained the necessary financial autonomy to carry out actions effectively affecting the local communities in the long run in a sustainable perspective. It is evident that these meaningful results would not have had such a consistency without the multi-annual support received by the Principality of Liechtenstein in the establishment and start-up phase of the Agency.



*Europe for Citizens Programme
“Town twinning: a vehicle for European integration”, training in Shkodra, Albania*

Chapter 4

The development of LDA Georgia Georgia, where Europe meets Asia

Situated at the strategically important crossroads where Europe meets Asia, over the centuries, Georgia was the object of rivalry between Persia, Turkey and Russia, before becoming an independent state in 1991. After its independence, Georgia has again become the arena of conflicting interests, this time between the US and a reviving Russia. Tense relations with Russia have been further exacerbated by Moscow's support for the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Since independence in May 1991, Georgia has confronted civil strife, territorial conflicts and severe economic crisis. Poverty is pervasive throughout the country, especially in remote regions and high mountainous areas. The government is unable to provide an adequate social safety net (e.g., food, health care, education) to ensure the livelihood security needs of large segments of the population, especially vulnerable groups, including pensioners, orphans, handicapped and institutionalized persons.

37

After the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia again became the center of attention in 2008 as a war erupted between Georgia and

*The Georgian
flag*



Russia over the break-away region of South Ossetia. The war was brief and devastating; resulting in many deaths, internally displaced persons, and a de facto redraw of the regional map after Russia (as the only one) recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia - the other break-away region of Georgia - as independent states.

Today, Georgia is still facing many problems concerning democracy, minorities, protection of human rights, economic and civil development. Even though the country has been extremely active for many years in building relations with international institutions to improve its democratic situation, it is well aware that such values are still deficient in the country.

The opening of LDA Georgia

As a consequence of the critical report adopted by the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on local governance and democracy in Georgia, ALDA decided to look into the possibility of copying in Georgia what it has successfully been doing in the Balkans since the beginning of the 90s. In 2004, ALDA undertook two fact-missions to Georgia from which it was concluded that Association's experience and working methods might indeed also be beneficially applied to this country.

Supported by the Principality of Liechtenstein, through the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and by other international donors as well, the 12th Local Democracy Agency was set up in Kutaisi, Georgia on 8th September 2006. The opening of the Agency was a very special day both for ALDA and Kutaisi, and its citizens as well. Indeed a new chapter was so opened in the history of the Association by extending its geographical area of activities to the Southern Caucasus. The establishment of LDA Georgia was an important confirmation that ALDA's activities in the Balkans have reached significant results and such an experience could be exported covering other geographical areas such as the Caucasus.

The Principality of Liechtenstein accompanied our Association also in this important step towards an 'unexplored' region, opening a new scenario for ALDA's future work and that of LDAs network.

39

LDA Georgia partners



Since the Agency started its operations in 2006, it has implemented a number of projects both independently and in partnership with ALDA. Particularly important was the one foreseen in the “start-up” phase of the Agency funded by the Principality of Liechtenstein. The project “Support to the Local Democracy Agency in Georgia : Women’s rights workshop and support to the partner meeting” was included in the activities implemented by ALDA to strengthen and give further support to the newly established Local Democracy Agency in Georgia. Indeed, since the Agency opened in 2006 and it was the only one in Southern Caucasus, it seemed to be still quite weak and lacking a network support. For this reason, one of ALDA’s strategic goals was not only to support with activities and networking LDA Georgia but also to foster the establishment of other LDAs in the region so as to create a net of support and synergies.

Vaduz contribution proved again to be a key factor in the setting up process of the Agency and in the strengthening of its partnership support. Women’s rights acknowledgement has been a main topic in LDA Georgia’s activities, such as training seminars and awareness campaigns over trafficking of human beings in cooperation with the Council of Europe Secretary General Representative in Tblisi as well as the crucial programme addressed to young lawyers in the Kutaisi and Imereti region to increase acknowledgement on women’s rights through court trial simulation. This part of activities was implemented in cooperation with the Young Lawyers Association of Kutaisi, which is also a partner of the Agency.



LDA Georgia partners' meeting in Strasbourg, France, 2007

The implementation of the pilot project aimed at strengthening the work and the partnership of LDA Georgia gave the Agency the necessary autonomy to continue its activities in the long run and in a sustainable way.

The year 2007 was extremely important for the consolidation of the Agency. Here, LDA Georgia was officially registered and started to implement different local actions in a really efficient way. The key priority for the Agency was its self-determination and enhancement of its organizational capacities on the local level. The LDA in cooperation with its partners and ALDA could contribute to the process of rapprochement to the European structures.

In 2008-2009, the Agency's key priority focused on furthering support to local self-governments, on promoting joint efforts for local democracy development and on drafting/proposing projects on youth and women's rights. These were relevant perceived issues in the overall environment of the city as much as in that of the entire country, and main topics stressed in the mandate of the Agency.

During its first operating years as a completely autonomous Agency, LDA Georgia proved its efficiency by implementing different self-funded projects as well as several activities within big European initiatives carried out by ALDA.

LDA Georgia today



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Today, LDA Georgia plays a dual role in the overall strategy of ALDA in promoting lasting democracy and citizens participation, and in the enlargement process affecting the network of Local Democracy Agencies in Southern Caucasus.

42

Thanks to the solid support LDA Georgia received during its



*LDA Georgia
foreign
partners
pinpointing*

first years of activities, it is now recognized as much at the local level as at the national, regional and international ones, as a key actor in promoting democracy and citizens participation in the country.

During its latest year of activity, LDA Georgia has implemented several projects in many different fields. It demonstrated a good financial autonomy as it was able to fund-raise itself for a significant number of projects, remaining at the same time strictly tied to the LDAs' network through the participation in many ALDA's projects.

In order to give a general idea of the active role of the Agency, the following list summarizes the many projects implemented in the last years:

As partner in ALDA's projects.

1. Youth in Action – Partnership Building Activity “EVS: the way to European Understanding”
2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe - “Support to Local and regional democracy in the South Caucasus”
3. LDA Georgia Annual Partners Meeting

Self-funded projects

1. JMDI - “Georgian Diaspora for Developments in Kutaisi”, led by Georgian Diaspora in Netherlands
2. Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia - “Platform for the development cooperation with Georgia”, led by the Municipality of Monfalcone
3. City of Strasbourg - “HURRY UP! Human Rights Revisited by Youth in Europe!”
4. Polska Pomoch - “Inclusive local government – how local authorities create inclusive public policy towards marginalized groups”, led by City of Bydgoszcz
5. Polska Pomoch - “The cooperation of local NGOs, in building a sustainable platform for cooperation in meeting the needs of citizens”, led by City of Poznan
6. Youth in Action – Partnership Building Activity “Meda, Balkan, Caucasus, Europe : Let's include us”, led by French NGO AMSED

As a further important element to take into account, the work of LDA Georgia has been helping ALDA in continuing its activity in the entire region. The establishment of the Agency in 2006 led to a permanent presence and stronger ties with the region in general terms. This, along with the strong support received by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, was a key element in establishing well-built relationships with the Associations of Municipalities in Georgia and Armenia, and similar efforts have currently been addressing towards Azerbaijan.

ALDA's role in the region has further been strengthened by capitalising the profitable relations with a good number of local NGOs and international organisations focused on the promotion of local self-government and citizen participation in South Caucasus.

The strategic role of LDA Georgia, both in promoting local governance and citizens participation and in providing ALDA with a solid logistical basis in the region, undoubtedly represents an added value for the entire Agencies' network. The Principality of Liechtenstein well understood the long term outcomes of such an initiative and invested relevant funds in leading Georgia to benefit from one of the main instruments in the promotion of local democracy in the country such as the creation of the LDA.

44



*International
conference in
Kutaisi
Georgia,
30th November-
1st December
2010*

Chapter 5

The ongoing process for a LDA in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan, a challenging country

Since independence, obtained in 1991, Azerbaijan has been troubled by domestic power struggles, in which dissident army and police forces operated on their own. Although democratic on the surface, at its core Azerbaijan still seems an authoritarian regime. President Ilham Aliyev "inherited" his office from his renowned father, Haydar, and he is seen as a smooth operator careful not to call down the wrath of former masters in Moscow. Elections, held at the national and the local level are by no means democratic. The opposition have very few seats in parliament and do not hold power in a single municipality of the country. However, there will be a period after the last elections until 2013 with no major elections scheduled, which could lead to some openness for cautious reforms.

45

The conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh is a major issue – and, while the conflict seems frozen from the distance, it still feels very real and on-going in Azerbaijan and the Azeris feel they are still at war. This complicates any cooperation with Arme-

The flag of Azerbaijan



nia and also underlines the constraints there are to building regional cooperation in South Caucasus.

Azerbaijan became a member of the Council of Europe in 2001. Moreover, Azerbaijan entered Association Agreement negotiations and a new phase of cooperation with the EU on 17 July 2010. It has been part of the European Neighbourhood Program since November 2006 and has received €88 million since 2007 to help advance reform.

The Azerbaijani government has a very poor human rights record. Indeed, the human rights situation in the country remains poor with backsliding in some areas, especially media freedom, religious freedom, and political participation. Restrictions on freedom of assembly, expression, and religion continue, as do arbitrary arrest and detention, and the imprisonment of persons for politically motivated reasons.

Local self-government practically does not exist in Azerbaijan. After a municipal reform in 2009 there are now 1718 municipalities in Azerbaijan. However, these municipalities have very limited authority and almost no money to work with.

The "Executive Committees" that are directly appointed by the president of Azerbaijan have the real power at the local level and the municipalities depend completely on these Executive Committees. The Executive Committees have much broader responsibilities than the municipalities and some of their responsibilities over-

46



ALDA is searching for potential partners and organisations to support the opening of an LDA in Azerbaijan

lap those of the latter, whose mandate is highly unclear creating therefore great confusion.

The city councils are directly elected, but without any real authority these elections have limited meaning. The budget of the municipalities is around 4 Euro per citizen per year putting strong constraints on the possibilities for the municipalities to do anything.

The municipalities' actual responsibility is limited to maintaining municipal roads, providing social support to low income groups who are not included in the state's social programs, maintaining cemeteries and organising mourning ceremonies. Most municipalities still do not have administrative buildings.

Azerbaijan ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government on 15 April 2002 and it entered into force on 1 August 2002. The last municipal election was held on December 23, 2009. The Congress adopted a very critical report and criticized among other things Azerbaijan for the lack of a truly pluralist political landscape.

The possibility of opening a LDA in Azerbaijan

In 2010 the Principality of Liechtenstein funded ALDA to implement the project "Enlarging the Network of Local Democracy Agencies in Southern Caucasus: a LDA in Azerbaijan" in the attempt to strengthen and extend the network of Local Democracy Agencies in Southern Caucasus, continuing its policy of support of ALDA's activities in the region, launched with the establishment of LDA Georgia.

The several initiatives implemented within the project gave ALDA the possibility to write down a first-hand assessment concerning the situation in Azerbaijan, where the Association already had partners and relevant contacts, thanks to broad consultations with local and regional authorities, representatives of political parties and civil society.

48

The results of the first assessment led to the conclusion that the establishment of an LDA in the country is a main long term goal that ALDA does intend to pursue in order to face the many internal problems weakening Azerbaijan's quality of democracy. Despite the numerous constraints, many contacts have already been established and the discussion over the creation of an Agency has taking shape even though still at its initial stage.



Consultation within the project "Enlarging the Network of Local Democracy Agencies in Southern Caucasus: a LDA in Azerbaijan"

In a short term perspective, ALDA plans to focus on specific activities concerning the development of the abilities of municipalities, local self-government and citizen participation at the local level in Azerbaijan. These activities will be channelled into providing international experience and best practices in a main field as the one concerning the cooperation between municipalities and their citizens. Such activities will also try to address the population's lack of information on the institution of local self-government and public participation. A relevant initiative promoted by ALDA took place in 2009 in the form of trainings over Active Citizenship addressed to NGOs mainly in the Guba region.

Although the many obstacles on its way, ALDA has been benefiting once more from the strong support provided by the Principality of Liechtenstein. Several activities have been planned in order to create a solid basis over which a new Agency could be found in Azerbaijan. The prudent approach ALDA has been following in pursuing such a goal however is primarily explained by the difficult political situation which still characterises the country.

Vaduz contribution to ALDA's activities in the region will prove again to be a wise investment whose main outcome will most likely be an intensification of the cooperation between the South Caucasus region and Europe.

All the countries of the region still need to develop their systems of local governance and citizens participation at the local level and some of them suffer the lack of political will to conduct reforms. In such circumstances it is important to keep the topic up on the political agenda and concretely support the planned activities in order to obtain positive results in terms of increased self-determination and cooperation between local authorities and civil society.

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in participation
with ALDA's LDAs



LDA Central and
Southern Serbia



LDA Osijek



LDA Sisak



LDA Sisak



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