

ALDA STATEMENT ON FUTURE EU ENLARGEMENT

Strasbourg, 25th November 2014

ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy – and the Local Democracy Agencies in the Western Balkans express their concern over the official five-year break from the European Union enlargement, announced recently by the European Commission and call for a persistent commitment to strengthened dialogue and cooperation with the candidate countries and potential candidate countries preparing to join the European Union, community of shared values and standards.

By the same token we call for a much stronger commitment of the governments in the Western Balkans to the democratic reform process by supporting good governance and citizen participation as well as to alignment with the political and economic European Union membership criteria.

There are many good reasons in support to keeping the momentum of strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the integration process in the Western Balkan countries, particularly in relation to the current severe financial and economic crisis. These reasons can be condensed in three words clearly indicated in the newly elected Commission President's statement: Experience, Solidarity, and Future. We consider these guiding principles fundamental for the EU enlargement strategy thus providing the space for integrating the lessons learnt from the regional experience of the Western Balkans into the future of Europe. Therefore, creating a common vision, based on experience, solidarity and the future, requires responses allowing for enlargement perspective beyond the present "fatigue" or even more beyond alternative alliances outside the EU.

We recognize the importance of the 2014-2020 Instrument of Pre-Accession launched, and its deep anchorage with the reform process in the candidate countries and potential candidate countries, which expressed a strong political commitment to the full membership perspective.

Important steps have been made within the Europe for Citizens Programme, enabling the space for co-operation and dialogue on EU integration related issues

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among those who will actually carry out the reform process – citizens in local communities, local and regional authorities and civil society.

In support to those very actors who will carry out the reform process on the way to EU integration, ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy, the Local Democracy Agencies in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina (representing a network of more than 150 European and local members and partners):

- ✚ Call for stronger commitment from the European Council, European Commission and European Parliament to support the Enlargement process with clear agenda and visible steps, with political engagement. We are firmly convinced that there is no alternative to the EU integration perspective of the Western Balkan countries.
- ✚ Fully support the development of the EU and EC actions, in full cooperation with the governments, local institutions and civil society organizations of South Eastern Europe for strengthening the European values of respect for human rights and democratic principles.
- ✚ Salute the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding with Serbia and with Montenegro on 27th October 2014, for participation in Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020, and call for all other countries in the Western Balkans to sign the document providing the framework for furthering the co-operation and engaging citizens, CSOs and local communities in dialogue on EU integration related issues.

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