

ALDA President’s Speech at the EU Civil Society Forum 2024 for the Western Balkans and Türkiye

Your excellencies Minister Zigmanov, Ambassador Giauffret,
Distinguished guests and colleagues from civil societies in the Western Balkans and Türkiye,

It is a great honour to be able to welcome you in Belgrade at the opening of the Western Balkans and Türkiye EU Civil Society Forum 2024.

It is a pleasure to address this Forum on behalf of ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy. ALDA is the global alliance of local and regional authorities and civil society actors working together with a participative approach for resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities. After being active in the region of the WB for about 25 years, through local democracy agencies, ALDA has launched, at the end of April 2024, a new three-year regional project supported by the Agence française de développement (AFD). The BOOST project will offer various paths for cooperation and support for civil society organisations in the region.

At the same time, I represent the Serbian based Center for Democracy Foundation, which marks 30 years of work in 2024, work dedicated to development of democracy, human rights, sustainable development and to advancement of EU integration and regional cooperation. As representative of the Foundation, I have had the honour to be elected member of the Council for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society, as well as member of the EU Serbia Joint Consultative Committee which enabled me to become a member of the Enlargement Candidate Member Initiative launched by the European Economic and Social Committee.

In the next couple of days, we will be discussing the role the civil society can and shall play in our societies, in the context of the political, economic and social reforms introduced in the process of EU integration at present time. Present time which offers us new window of opportunity for advancing the process of accession to the EU, present time which is defined by new geopolitical reality and challenges and the war in Ukraine, present time in which transformational power of the EU is not as strong as it used to be before, present time in which civil societies are faced with new threats and limitations.

Allow me to mention a set of issues and strategic lines that I find important for the civil society today.

First of all, the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, together with other mechanisms of cooperation and support, provides opportunity for our countries to reduce the gaps between them

Office in Strasbourg

Council of Europe 1,
Av. de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg, France
+33 3 90 21 45 93
+33 3 90 21 55 17
aldastrasbourg@aldaintranet.org
alda@aldaintranet.org

Office in Brussels

26 rue de la Loi,
Mercator Building
4th Floor - Salon For European
Civic Organisations
Brussels 1040, Belgium
+32 (0)2 430 24 08
aldabrussels@aldaintranet.org

Office in Vicenza

Viale Milano 36
36100 Vicenza, Italy
+39 04 44 54 01 46
+39 04 44 23 10 43
aldavicenza@aldaintranet.org

Office in Skopje

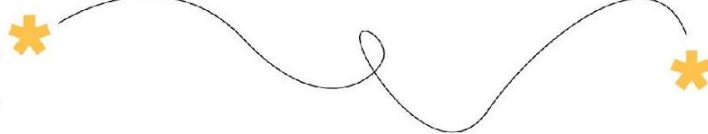
Bld. Partizanski Odredi
43B/1-5
Skopje, 1000
North Macedonia
+389 (0) 2 6091 060
aldabalkans@aldaintranet.org

Office in Chisinau

40, Serghei Lazo street
5 floor, office no.3, Chişinău
Republic of Moldova
aldamoldova@aldaintranet.org

Office in Tunis

Rue Brahim Jaffel,
Imm. Azaiez
2 floor, Apt 4 El Menzah 4,
Tunis 1082, Tunisia
aldatunisia@aldaintranet.org



and the EU. It is of the utmost importance that, following the adoption of the Plan in the EU, the reform agenda in each of our countries are prepared responsibly, coherently, and in a transparent manner. The civil society has an important role to play by demanding transparency from the government, by participating in the design of reforms and by monitoring their implementation.

The importance that the EU accession process gives to fundamental reforms in the domain of democracy and the rule of law is also reiterated by the Growth Plan. This underlines that economic integration into the European single market is only a part of the accession process and that the convergence in the economic sphere shall go parallel with advancement of democracy, with tangible advances in reducing corruption, with visible improvements of independence and impartiality of judiciary. Fair and free elections remain on the top of our list of reforms, as some recent developments showed how easily the democratic standards, obtained two decades ago, may be reverted and endangered. Free media and freedom of expression remain also a demand that civil society shall place high on its agenda.

Public dialogue and structured dialogue with the policy makers is to be promoted and nurtured - it may be difficult in the atmosphere of high political and social polarisation and we can frequently ask ourselves if it brings any results if civil society proposals are not given due attention and respect. However, it is our duty to call for the dialogue, and to do our best to influence public policies, on the ground of our knowledge, expertise and our constituencies priorities. Particular importance lies in the cooperation with local governments through joint projects, through providing local services for citizens, through building resilient communities.

We shall give voice to all those whose voices are not sufficiently heard in our societies, particularly to the vulnerable groups. Fight against poverty and various forms of deprivation, so large in our societies, are addressed and shall be even more addressed by civil society. It is through promoting and presenting social dimension of the EU integration that citizens will feel real benefits of the EU driven reforms – through sustainable investments that provide good jobs, access to good education, reducing gaps between urban and rural areas, health care...

Regional cooperation has been given new impetus, also in the New Growth Plan. Civil society has proved to be a potent vehicle for exchange of good practice, for working together in searching for solutions for open issues as well as for contributing to reconciliation.

One of our tasks is to continue promoting EU integration and enlarging citizens support for the process and for EU membership as final objective. Their support will be increased if they understand better the benefits the reforms will bring them. So it is through communication that we shall bring the whole process of EU integration closer to citizens through awareness campaigns, education, enhancing their perspectives.

Office in Strasbourg

Council of Europe 1,
Av. de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg, France
+33 3 90 21 45 93
+33 3 90 21 55 17
aldastrasbourg@aldaintranet.org
alda@aldaintranet.org

Office in Brussels

26 rue de la Loi,
Mercator Building
4th Floor - Salon For European
Civic Organisations
Brussels 1040, Belgium
+32 (0)2 430 24 08
aldabrussels@aldaintranet.org

Office in Vicenza

Viale Milano 36
36100 Vicenza, Italy
+39 04 44 54 01 46
+39 04 44 23 10 43
aldavicenza@aldaintranet.org

Office in Skopje

Bld. Partizanski Odredi
43B/1-5
Skopje, 1000
North Macedonia
+389 (0) 2 6091 060
aldabalkans@aldaintranet.org

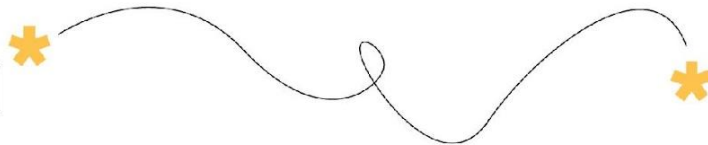
Office in Chisinau

40, Serghei Lazo street
5 Floor, office no.3, Chişinău
Republic of Moldova
aldamoldova@aldaintranet.org

Office in Tunis

Rue Brahim Jaffel,
Imm. Azaiez
2 floor, Apt 4 El Menzah 4,
Tunis 1082, Tunisia
aldatunisia@aldaintranet.org





WE shall find the ways to create links between citizens in the Western Balkans and citizens in the EU member states – it is possible if we enlarge our cooperation with EU based organisations. ALDA for examples works continuously in forging such links, through partnerships, through improving understanding of the Western Balkan realities among its EU interlocutors.

Here I would like to reiterate how important is the pilot initiative of the European Economic and Social Committee – called the Enlargement Candidate Member initiative. It is through this initiative that the representatives of the civil society, together with the representatives of social partners, are enabled to participate in the work of the European Economic and Social Committee. In such a way, we become closer to EU institutions and our voice will be better heard.

And finally, nothing of this will be possible if we do not provide for sustainability of the civil society sector. Creating and enabling environment for the civil society is a task of the duty bearers, but it also depends on us and our strength to impose policies and solutions to the identified problems. Financing from public funds needs to be improved and enlarged, through transparent procedures. With the donors, we shall engage in advocating for funding mechanisms that will ensure sustainability of small, medium and large organizations, on both local, national and regional level, enabling small to become medium and medium organizations to become large ones.

Here again I refer to the BOOST project of ALDA which will, in the next three years with the AFD support of 3,75 mil Euro contribute:

- Strengthen the role and the capacities of civil society in the Western Balkans countries
- Set up a network of relevant stakeholders (civil society, local authorities, universities and others) committed to the stable and democratic, economic, cultural and social development of the region.
- Promote and strengthen a shared narrative among civil society and decisionmakers that reinforces European values of peace, democracy, and inclusion of young people (men and women, boys and girls) at regional level.

Similarly, Center for Democracy Foundation continues, through RYDE project supported by the EU, its regional presence in providing youth dialogue for Europe through education, internship, policy labs, capacity building for youth organisations, and the Regional School Politeia, so dear to me as one of my first projects for young people that started in 1998 and which became a real brand in the past two decades.

I wish to all of you a successful Forum, fruitful discussions and conclusions that will shape our future work, as well as I wish to all of our guests a pleasant stay in Belgrade.

Office in Strasbourg

Council of Europe 1,
Av. de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg, France
+33 3 90 21 45 93
+33 3 90 21 55 17
aldastrasbourg@aldaintranet.org
alda@aldaintranet.org

Office in Brussels

26 rue de la Loi,
Mercator Building
4th Floor - Salon For European
Civic Organisations
Brussels 1040, Belgium
+32 (0)2 430 24 08
aldabrussels@aldaintranet.org

Office in Vicenza

Viale Milano 36
36100 Vicenza, Italy
+39 04 44 54 01 46
+39 04 44 23 10 43
aldavicenza@aldaintranet.org

Office in Skopje

Bld. Partizanski Odredi
43B/1-5
Skopje, 1000
North Macedonia
+389 (0) 2 6091 060
aldabalkans@aldaintranet.org

Office in Chisinau

40, Serghei Lazo street
5 Floor, office no.3, Chişinău
Republic of Moldova
aldamoldova@aldaintranet.org

Office in Tunis

Rue Brahim Jaffel,
Imm. Azaiez
2 floor, Apt 4 El Menzah 4,
Tunis 1082, Tunisia
aldatunisia@aldaintranet.org

