Consultation on the White Paper on Multilevel Governance proposed by the Committee of the Regions

December 2009

Citizens’ participation and its role in Multilevel Governance in Europe
Since its establishment in 1999, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies has promoted good governance and citizens’ participation with the support of its members and through the action of its Local Democracy Agencies.\(^1\) It started its activities in South Eastern Europe, in the aftermath of the war in former Yugoslavia, and then expanded its programmes in other areas of Eastern Europe and in particular in Southern Caucasus. Today, with its 160 members (NGOs and local authorities) and its constant activities in Europe, it represents one of the major organization dedicated to promote active citizenship and citizens’ participation through a synergic approach involving local authorities and citizens\(^2\).

The Association of the Local Democracy and the LDAs promoted since 2005 innovative instruments to support citizens’ participation at the local level and enhanced the capacity of citizens to be included in the decision making at the local level. With the support of members and partners, a module on Active Citizenship has been implemented with success throughout Europe. The module includes a first step of awareness and capacity building for local authorities' representatives and civil society (in separated paths) and then a further common capacity building process. The involved actors are then requested to address a problem together and to give evidence of the added value of the combined procedure. The visibility actions are also a fundamental step for the success of the programme. Other instruments of participations are often used as the citizens’ panels or the e-consultation.

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A. General notes on multilevel governance paper

> Support to multilevel governance and partnership approach

ALDA supports strongly the concept of multilevel governance and the partnership approach proposed in the White Paper proposed for consultation. It confirms the increased role of local and regional authorities to strengthen the European Union and to allow its structures to address the challenges of today. A true and dynamic multilevel approach is probably the only possible method to deal with the global difficulties like the economic crisis, immigration and globalized economy, environment and the issue energetic resources.

We share the opinion that this particularly critical period for Europe should be considered an opportunity to redefine the rules and the roles between States, local authorities and citizens, which should be all involved in a common long term problem solving process.

To this respect, Europe could and should be a political and social experiment for innovation, as underlined in all the aspects of the Berlin Declaration of 2007. The

\(^1\) The programme of the LDAs was launched by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in 1993, http://www.coe.int/t/congress/specific-programmes/LDA/default_en.asp

\(^2\) ALDA is one of the members of the Structured Dialogue of the programme Europe for Citizens of the European Commission.
multilevel approach promises to be difficult and dynamics, based on process rather than on very precise targets to achieve. However, it is through the process that policies would be elaborated and understood by the beneficiaries – and therefore fully integrated in their lives. The concept of representative democracy, here completed by participative democracy, is a request of the upcoming years and it will be dynamic.

> **Particular focus on citizens’ participation and role of civil society organisations**

ALDA raises the issue of citizens’ participation in all the level and steps of the governance. Despite several mention in the document, they do not seem represent a systematic approach to the issue here discusses.

i. Citizens should be consulted and involved in drafting policies

ii. Citizens should be involved in the implementation of the policies and in the consequent monitoring of these implementation and reassessment for future changes.

iii. A particular role should be played by the civil society and grass roots organizations

The direct involvement of citizens, in the context of the participative democracy, should be further enhanced with regard to policies and implementation promoted by the local authorities themselves. Citizens’ participation and constant and innovative methods of consultation should represent an integral part of the multilevel governance and included in action plans to be promoted by the Committee of the Regions, by the States and by the local authorities.

Citizens’ participation is nowadays not an option but rather an urgent need. The risk to alienate from citizens the important political and economic decisions taken at the European Union level is high. Despite the problems to deal with “citizens”, there is an absolute request to overcome the difficulties and to find solutions for getting closer to citizens and to make the process understood by them. Furthermore, citizens’ involvement is supposed to improve the quality of the responses to be given to governance since the policies and programmes will be more appropriate to their needs, possibilities and requests.

In this process, there is a major role to be played by the civil society organisations, in particular grass roots organisations, that could directly contact, channel and organise the thoughts and deeds of citizens. Indeed, ALDA confirms the need of a direct involvement of citizens (and not only virtual through e-consultations), which could be realized through the engagement and support of civil society organisations and networks.

A particular bridge between the multilevel governance proposed here by the White Paper and the programme _Europe for Citizens_\(^3\) of the European Commission should be established.

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\(^3\) [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.htm)
- Request for an action plan and monitoring

As correctly requested throughout the White Paper, the global challenges of these years requests from all of us to be more concrete with even more measurable outcomes. ALDA confirms the importance of setting action plans even for multilevel governance and to assess the monitoring procedures for the obtained outcome. This must be adapted also to citizens’ participation methodology.

- Role of multilevel approach in the enlargement process of the EU and the ENPI programmes

ALDA being involved in many Pre Accession countries as well and in ENPI areas confirms the needs to maintain in all the policies addressed towards these areas, the important multilevel approach with a specific role to be played by the local authorities, the civil society organisation and with citizens.

B. Specific notes on multilevel governance paper

> Introductory part

It will be necessary here to add the role of citizens’ participation for good governance. Only local and regional authorities are here presented as actors of the multilevel governance.

(p.10) Encouraging participation in the European process

Undertake to establish possible contacts with the programme Europe for Citizens of the European Commission, or specific mention to it.

(p.12) “Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives”

This might be of particular importance to establish a good ground in the Pre Accession Countries or ENPI.

(p.14) In mentioning the City Diplomacy and from below a specific mention to the Local Democracy Agencies and their role in peace building and good governance in post war areas could be done. See also document of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities mentioning the LDAs in this specific role.

https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CPL(14)12REP&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=origin al&Site=Congress&BackColorInternet=e0cee1&BackColorIntranet=e0cee1&BackColorL

4 LDAs are present in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and Georgia. The 2009 position paper of ALDA confirms the interest to enlarge in Southern Caucasus and to implement activities in Eastern Europe and pilot initiative in MED areas.
A specific focus and specific resources should be allocated to the networks supporting multilevel governance.

(p. 18) **improving European civic education** through the know-how of local and regional authorities.
A specific mention to the activities of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies working in Citizens participation with innovative methods in these last years could be done here.

(Citizens’ panel, e-consultation, campaigns and volunteers for democracy)

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Position Paper
Association of Local Democracy Agencies
2009-2011

The Role of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies in Local Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe
Introduction and achievements

With its Position Paper approved by the General Assembly held in Budapest in June 2006, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) established guidelines for the Association up to 2009:

a) To support the enlargement of the European Union in South Eastern Europe based on the active participation of civil society and local authorities, with the support of the Local Democracy Agencies (LDA):

b) To increase the role of the LDAs in local economic development in the region;

c) To develop and further elaborate the methodology of multilateral decentralised cooperation of the LDAs;

d) To develop and strengthen ALDA activities in the field of European Active Citizenship and Civic Participation;

e) To open the LDA programme to other regions of Eastern Europe;

f) To be of assistance to local authorities in building a Europe from below;

A lot happened in Europe and in South Eastern Europe, and consequently for ALDA as well, in these last three years and the present Position Paper is needed to assess and identify guidelines for the future activities, in a new perspective.

The objectives identified in the previous Position Paper were achieved as far as the commitments of ALDA and the LDAs are concerned. A substantial report of activities is now ready for the 10th anniversary celebration of ALDA.

In South Eastern Europe, the enlargement of the European Union does not depend only on local actions and achievements. The process has suffered from some stops and goes in these last years. However, even if the political enlargement is not yet achieved, most of the countries of the region have signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU. Croatia has reached an advanced level of accession negotiations and the process of joining will hopefully be finalized soon. Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and soon Albania are eligible for the EU funded programme “Europe for Citizens”. Another EU funded programme, the IPA programme (Instruments for Pre Accession) is now in place in the whole region and will support, from inside, the integration of the region into the European
Union. However, despite these initiatives and their results, support to local authorities and civil society is still needed in order to reach the objectives, as will be described in the present Position Paper.

Since 2003, the programme of the LDAs in South Eastern Europe focused also on local economic development – with several programmes to support youth entrepreneurship, micro economic start up activities, self sustainable economy. The LDAs created – as a follow up of these regional programmes proposed by the ALDA, their own activities to support economic development.

The multilateral decentralised cooperation, which is the basis of the Local Democracy Agencies is now a well established methodology recognised in several European Fora. The process is comprising several projects to support in a long term perspective local democracy in areas where it needs to be strengthened further. A specific focus has developed in the field of local governance and good practices and methodologies of consultation and participation of civil society in the decision making process at the local level.

Over the last three years, ALDA has become one of the major actors in promoting European Active Citizenship focusing on the local dynamics between civil society and local authorities. Several projects have been implemented in Europe and in neighbouring countries. We have further developed methodologies and innovative instruments of consultation, trying to bridge the gap between the European Institutions and decision making process and the civil society. ALDA and its members have contributed to a better understanding of the objectives and instruments offered by the European Union and the Council of Europe to promote local democracy and civic participation. However, it has also proved to be a useful instrument of consultation of citizens, raising the issues and the needs to be addressed to European Local authorities.

The enlargement of the LDA network progressed with the opening of the first LDA in Georgia, now active and progressively more involved in the field of local democracy and civic participation. The development of a network in Southern Caucasus will be advanced with further actions in Azerbaijan and in Armenia. Moreover, in 2008, the opening of the LDA Albania finally completed the picture of our presence in South Eastern Europe. A number of pilot projects took place in Belarus and Russia and now contacts have been established for civil society and active citizenship participation in other countries and areas of Europe and even beyond.
The system established by the LDAs has worked and is still working. It is sustainable, manageable, light and efficient. It is based on the strength of a large number of experienced and committed people. The need of participation, involvement of citizens and cooperation with local authorities is in constant demand all over the world and the responses given by the European actors seem to lead the process in terms of capacities and models. ALDA and the LDAs tackle one of the most crucial challenges addressed at today’s system of politics: how to make democracy efficient and respectful of human rights and diversity in a changing and complex world.

The Association has to face different challenges but has now the tools and experience to address them with full awareness and understanding of the tasks. Today, ALDA has proven itself capable of making a difference and changing people’s life for the better.

**Objectives:**

The terms of the Position Paper have been identified during different brainstorming sessions of ALDA during its activities, with the staff and with the members. However, decisive was the Governing Board in Zaragoza, which reflected on the lines of action for the next few years, the objective being to consolidate the results achieved so far and to progress further in the direction of promotion of local democracy and governance and participation of civil society.

In the coming years the Association will address the development of local governance and civic participation as a major instrument for peace and development in Europe and in its neighbouring countries. The intention is with the present Position Paper to place ALDA at the forefront of this challenging task.

**Areas of activity**

To achieve these objectives emphasis will be put on the following areas of activity:

A/ Support to the Local Democracy Agencies

B/ Conceptualisation of methodologies

C/ Development of activities in civic participation

D/ Pilot projects in local governance and civic participation
E/ Consolidate membership orientation and support to members

Cutting across these priority areas of activity ALDA will develop its strategy of communication, insufficient so far, among the elements of the network and towards the outside in order to gain further political and financial support and improve visibility in general.

A/ Support to the Local Democracy Agencies

The network of the Local Democracy Agencies shall be further consolidated. It will imply constant research and support to the partnership network. Each of the LDAs must respect the fundamental criteria for their existence such as partnership, programme and activities related to the main mission of promoting local democracy and citizens’ participation and sustainability. There is a need to pay particular and constant attention to the assessment and the evaluation of the results achieved.

The methodology of the LDAs would continue to operate in South Eastern Europe to address the issues pending on decentralisation, citizens’ participation, functioning of local authorities and strengthening of civil society. In South Eastern Europe the LDAs offer a natural platform for the implementation of the IPA programmes and the continuing support for the integration of the countries of the region into the European Union.

It is among the priorities to develop and consolidate a network in Southern Caucasus and maybe further elaborate a precise model of multilateral decentralised cooperation in that region, which would be different yet incorporate essential and proven elements of the model followed in South Eastern Europe.

The further enlargement of the network of the Local Democracy Agencies must correspond to a capacity to carry out quality actions and to follow the different programmes and processes proposed. The possibility of “exporting” the LDA concept to other areas where decentralised cooperation is already an instrument of international cooperation (such as the Magrebian countries and the Middle East) is currently under evaluation and could be implemented gradually, based upon clear conditions.

The Local Democracy Agencies would support the programme and development of the programme “Europe for Citizens” in the region by addressing the support and strengthening of civil society and the twinning opportunities.
In the context of the programme of the Council of Europe, in coordination with the different programmes dedicated to Active Citizenship, the LDAs could implement the strategies proposed and coordinated with the Council of Europe regarding local democracy and civil society groups.

The present network of LDAs.
B/ Conceptualisation of methodologies for the LDAs

The LDAs have developed a certain experience and would need now to find an assessment procedure and way to improve not only qualitatively their activities but also how they could reach wider target groups. They would help the entire Association to identify best practices in citizens’ participation and to implement new and innovative ways of consultation of citizens.

A specific effort will be deployed towards identifying the best way to improve LDA and ALDA activities in terms of efficiency and sustainability.

C/ Development of activities in civic participation

ALDA will be strongly involved in the future in implementing activities on Active Citizenship and citizens’ participation in particular in the cooperation between civil society and local authorities, by

- Collecting and taking stock of the best practices in this field and establishing models and replicable concepts;

- Identifying with partners and members the most efficient and innovative way of consultation through different methodologies such as
  - the module on active citizenship
  - European Active Citizenship dedicated to the rights and duties of every citizen in Europe (with a specific focus on immigration issue)
  - the citizens’ panels
  - the promotion of voluntarism and participation.
• Providing a constant interface between the LDAs and the members and the European institutions working in this field in order to create a better dialogue between citizens and the European Union decision making process.
D/ Pilot projects in local governance and civic participation

With its background and experience, ALDA could propose to offer support and assistance to pilot projects in the area of citizens’ participation and local democracy, involving local authorities. Pilot projects in areas of Europe, which are not a first priority of ALDA, would also stimulate the interest and new ideas among partners and members. It would also feed the methodological aspect and pave the way for new contacts. It could regard and focus on Eastern European countries, the Middle East and the Magreb countries.

In this case, ALDA could support technical assistance and share methods and consultancy approaches.

E/ Consolidate membership orientation and support to members

More than ever, ALDA could be considered a membership oriented organisation. The strong involvement of the members, the decision making with their participation, the forum proposed, is a special asset of the Association. Therefore, the activities will be further directed at informing and including the members in our activities. The membership network should be further developed and diversified keeping in mind the fundamental importance of a balance between local authorities and civil society groups from all over Europe. The membership drive should be further intensified in countries of Europe under-represented now, in order to have them included to the largest possible extent in ALDA activities and decision making.

In this task, ALDA would further develop:

- thematic working groups offering the opportunity to study in detail the concepts, tasks and leadership
- country meetings with members
- regular communication with the members
- services and technical assistance.

Conclusion
This brief Position Paper is meant to be a strategic tool for the development of ALDA, the LDAs and their activities in the next three years. It will remain work in progress allowing necessary revision in the light of results and external developments.

Against this background the overall objective of the Association shall be to firmly support the principle that citizens' participation stay at the basis of political culture of Europe. In these difficult times, affected by the global crisis and by a new definition of the values of the European project, ALDA remains convinced of the need to work on the European identity also through the involvement of citizens in the decision making process.