



Network of Associations of Local Authorities from South-East Europe - NALAS

The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe is wishing You all a very good New Year, full of successes and happiness and is thanking you for staying close to NALAS in 2005.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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NALAS is announcing through this info-bulletin the intention to bring into your attention as many as possible general information about its activities, but also about what the member associations are doing at the level of the respective countries. The information from this info-bulletin is submitted by the associations' representatives and by different collaborators. To subscribe or to unsubscribe to this info-bulletin, please send e-mail with your request to nalas.see@gmail.com.

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A. NALAS ACTIVITIES AND PARTICIPATIONS

- The Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe, Sinaia, Romania, December 8-9, 2005

The Forum was called "Improving leadership, citizen participation and service provision in cities and regions of SEE" and was organized by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Prahova County Council from Romania, with the support of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Dexia and FEDRE in the framework of the Romanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

More than 150 local and regional elected representatives and civil servants from southeast Europe attended the event. The interest in Romania was very high, an important number of representatives of Romanian local and central administration being present in Sinaia.



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Between other subjects, the Forum discussions were focused on very important topics in the region like the development of the associations of local authorities and the future of the Network of National Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS), the development of participation of citizens at local and regional level in the framework of the 2005 campaign "Year of citizenship through education", the role of local authorities in the process of co-existence of different minorities and finally, the most recent initiatives of co-operation between local and regional authorities of South-East Europe.

During this two day meeting many of the participants discussed also about NALAS and they expressed their ideas and comments concerning this Association. Mr Giovanni di Stasi, President of the Congress confirmed that CoE had supported NALAS in the past and would have continued to support it in the future. The general idea, from the other participants, was that NALAS had done a good work until now and that different bodies that operate on local level had supported and would support NALAS even in the future.

During the first day of the meeting the Executive Bureau held some presentations.

The President of NALAS, Mr. Tarzan Milosevic, had prepared a speech about NALAS in general. Because he could not be present himself for healthy reasons, his message was transmitted by NALAS' treasure, Mrs. Vanja Starovlah. His speech described in general how NALAS was established and the complexity of this Association. NALAS was presented as a body that helped the strengthening of the capacities of the member associations, and created direct relations between the Central and Local Governments. During the speech were stressed the specifics that SEE region has related to political, economical, cross-bordering issues etc.

Mrs. Ginka Tchavdarova had prepared a presentation about the priorities and future activities of NALAS for 2006-2008. The presentation had to do with a description of the region being seen from the economical development, infrastructure, cultural heritage, advantages, disadvantages etc. point of view.

Mr. Fatos Hodaj presented the last presentation about the added value of NALAS and for the EU Integration. The presentation stressed more on the cooperation that SEE countries should have with each other. NALAS was an Association that had shown that cooperation and good results could be achieved if there was a good will from all the actors involved.

The presentations had been welcomed and appreciated by the participants. They underlined that from now one NALAS should focus in achieving concrete result for improving the quality of life of their citizens.

During the meeting, the representatives of Greek and Croatian Associations stated that they would try to transmit a clear message to their Associations that these two countries should be part of NALAS.

The Final Declaration, which is concluding the 2-days debates, is attached to this informative bulletin (*Annex I*).

- The meeting of the NALAS Executive bureau, Sinaia, December 7, 2005

Before the start of the Forum of Cities of Regions, it took place a meeting of the NALAS Executive bureau with the participation of Mrs. Ginka Tchavdarova, executive director, Mrs. Vanja Starovlah, treasurer, Mr. Fatos Hodaj, member, Mrs. Dolores Rios, member, Mr. Ergys Bezhani, secretariat representative and Mr. Adrian Miroiu, programme manager.



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During the meeting, a number of very important issues for the next future were discussed. The main focus was the first draft of the action plan, which received suggestions in order to be finalized until the end of January when it should be submitted to different donors interested in working with NALAS. Also during the meeting there were discussed the NALAS presentations for the Forum, being stressed again the importance of an as active as possible involvement of all people who are working in a way or another with the network, in order to obtain a faster development.

B. MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS' ACTIVITIES

1. SCTM activities (www.skgo.org)

- The XXXV General Assembly

the General Assembly took place on 5 December 2005 in Belgrade Save Centre having as main topic „Towards better local self-government through partnership between central and local governments”. Together with mayors and other representatives from all Serbian towns and municipalities, high officials from the Central Government level, foreign and international organisations and actors in the fields of importance for local governments in Serbia attended the event. During the meeting, Mr. Zeljko Ozegovic, Mayor of Novi Beograd, was elected as President of the association.

- Project implemented in co-operation with the Associations of Municipalities from Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina: „Strengthening local democracy and developing local communities”

The project collects best practices from the countries of southeastern Europe, in areas of integration of ethnic minorities and citizen participation at local level, and presents them to broad range of municipal officials for further implementation and improvements.

2) AAM activities (www.aam-al.org)

- The “Exhibition of Municipalities, 2005”

Albanian Association of Municipalities organized on 16-17 December, the “Exhibition of Municipalities, 2005” in the premises of Historical National Museum, in Tirana. 18 Albanian municipalities participated at this event and several national or international NGO-s that operate in the local government field. The municipalities had prepared different materials, leaflets, posters, manuals, presentations by videos, photos, etc, which presented their best outputs.

On the other side, AAM organized several activities on the 16th of December such as: forums of specialists, open days, etc which made this activity very important and productive. All mayors, Head of Communes, Head of City Councils, representatives of the Presidency, Government, Members of Parliament and Diplomatic Missions in Albania participated in this activity.



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3) FALR activities (www.falr.ro)

- The project “SMART – Strategy development for Moldavian and Romanian Twinning”

The Romanian Federation of Local Authorities is implementing together with IDIS – Viitorul foundation from Moldova this project managed by VNG International. As activities of this project there had been organized already a number of events focused on increasing the knowledge and abilities of the participants in different topics (like project management, communication, citizens participation or strategic planning) necessary to develop common activities between local and regional authorities situated at the border between Romania and Moldova. The project will last until November 2006.



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Annex 1

“Final declaration of the 6th Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe SINAIA (Romania), 8-9 December 2005

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adopted on 9 December 2005

The participants at the 6th Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe meeting in Sinaia on 8 and 9 December 2005 at the invitation of Prahova County Council, under the Romanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and at the initiative of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, with the support of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe and Dexia,

1. Extend their thanks to Prahova County Council for its warm welcome;
2. Recognize that local and regional authorities in South-East Europe are to a high degree dependent on their geo-political framework and context and therefore:
 - a. congratulate Bulgaria and Romania on their imminent accession to the European Union;
 - b. welcome Croatia’s status as candidate for accession and the European Union’s recent favorable opinion on progress made in democratic reform by “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” which includes a recommendation that it be granted candidate status;
 - c. welcome the second round of talks on the Stabilization and Association Agreement of the European Union with Serbia and Montenegro scheduled for December 2005, and the start of talks with Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina;
 - d. express the hope that relations between the European Union and Moldova will be improved in the near future;
3.
 - a. Reaffirm the fundamental role played by local and regional authorities in South-East Europe in the promotion of democracy and stability, and therefore of economic development in the region;
 - b. welcome the positive developments in legislation relating to local and regional authorities that have taken place in South-East Europe in accordance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and in particular expect that:
 - i. the constitutional reforms planned in Bosnia and Herzegovina shall reinforce the unity of the country, while developing local democracy;
 - ii. the process of decentralization underway in “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” will contribute to stability in this country;
 - iii. the talks resulting from the United Nations’ decision to start discussions on Kosovo’s future status – which they welcome – will lead to a peaceful solution, acceptable to all parties concerned and fully respecting human rights;
4. Welcome, as a positive example for other countries in democratic transition, the conclusion by the Government of Romania of a set of laws on public administration reform – the result of an active partnership between the associations of local public authorities and the Ministry of Administration and the Interior and following consultation with the main opposition party. Thus, the adequate legal framework for increasing the decision-making power at local level has been established;
5. With regard to associations of local and regional authorities of South-East Europe:



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a. call for their strengthening, and recommend that these associations, in consultation with their members:

- i. develop their role and capacities in strengthening local authorities' leadership, service provision, community participation and public ethics;
- ii. ensure that local authorities and citizens are aware of the responsibilities of transparency and accountability incumbent upon public officials through wide distribution and knowledge of relevant international instruments such as the European Code of Conduct for Local and Regional Elected Representatives ;
- iii. promote on-going self-improvement and good governance throughout local government;
- iv. research, plan, implement and evaluate capacity-building programmes, collect and disseminate best practice (high-quality models and service methods exist in a number of countries and can be shared at international level, thus enabling national and local authorities to learn from each other);
- v. make the best possible use of the Council of Europe's planned Center of Expertise on Local Government Reform, its expertise and its Capacity-Building Toolkit(s) in developing their own capacity-building programmes;
- vi. and, in particular in this respect, make full use of the expertise of the European Network of Training Organizations (ENTO) and support the project of a joint seminar between the Congress and ENTO in Osijek (Croatia) in 2006;

b. with regard to the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS):

- i. reiterate their backing for the newly-official network following its first General Assembly in Skopje, on 6 September 2005, and encourage it to reinforce the role of its member associations in relation to central government, improve their ability to provide services to their members and help to develop local self-government and financial and fiscal decentralization in South-East Europe;
- ii. invite NALAS members, following their active participation at the Conference on "Effective Democratic Governance at Local and Regional Level" (Zagreb, 25-26 October 2004), to work in close partnership with central government in the preparation of their respective National Work Programmes with a view to the follow-up conference in 2006;
- iii. invite the network to consolidate their position by finding steadier sources of finance thereby ensuring their long-term sustainability;
- iv. invite the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to continue to support the network and to allocate funding, means permitting, at this crucial time in its development;
- v. invite donors active in the region to grant financial support to the priority projects defined by the Network;
- vi. recognize the importance of co-operation with relevant international associations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and its Black Sea Commission;
- vi. invite other local government associations in South-East Europe and, in particular, the Central Union of Greek Cities and Municipalities (KEDKE) and the Union of the



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- Association of Towns and Association of Municipalities of Croatia to seek membership of NALAS;
- vii. invite local government associations in other parts of Europe – notably the Caucasus – to be inspired by the NALAS model of co-operation and seek to join forces in an attempt to give local authorities in their region a voice;
 - viii. Call on NALAS and the Congress to organize a conference on the situation of national minorities in Mostar in 2006;
6. Reaffirm the importance of the role of municipal banks in the strengthening of local and regional authorities' capacity to finance local investments, and recommend that they:
- a. operate on the basis of a long-lasting commitment with local governments;
 - b. assist in local institutional and legal development and help build a sound credit framework;
 - c. facilitate authorities' access to long-term credit by raising resources on private financial markets;
 - d. provide local authorities with a wide range of services (long-term loans, project financing, liquidity guarantees, credit enhancement, budget planning and enhancement of management skills;
7. Emphasize the importance of giving young people, from an early age, the opportunity to influence and shape decisions, thus facilitating their social inclusion, the development of their socio-political awareness, and improving citizen participation at local and regional level in South-East Europe and recommend that:
- a. the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of young people be taken into account by any policy or measure designed to promote youth participation, thus implementing the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People;
 - b. the lessons learned, at all levels, from the European Year of Citizenship through Education, be shared and fully implemented;
 - c. education for democratic citizenship and human rights be promoted by parliamentarians and local and regional elected representatives as one of the main tools for forming active and participative citizens and contributing to the sustainability of the Council of Europe's project for democratic citizenship and human rights;
 - d. the parliaments of countries of South-East Europe sign and ratify the European Convention on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-Term Voluntary Service for Young People (ETS No. 175);
8. Affirm the importance, for true stability and democracy in the region, of developing sustainable minority communities in South-East Europe, and to this end believe that local and regional authorities should actively promote human rights and measures to counter discrimination against minorities and any population groups that may suffer from it, by:
- a. promoting the development of sustainable multicultural communities through the integration of minorities;
 - b. not only taking account of minorities' diverse needs and customs, cultures and lifestyles, but also using them as a springboard for co-operation;
 - c. encouraging initiatives enabling participation of minority communities in the political arena;



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9. Recognize the sustained activities undertaken in the abovementioned fields by the Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) both individually and as part of the network formed by the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA);
10. Encourage interregional co-operation in Europe, from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, and are convinced that the cities and towns of South-East Europe should work together with the whole of Europe to develop co-operation for the sake of stability and democracy;
11. Encourage associations and entities such as the Euroregions whose objective is the development of co-operation between municipalities and regions of South-East Europe to continue their work, and ask the Congress to further develop links with them and, in particular, to:
 - a. give its full support to the Adriatic Euroregion;
 - b. encourage the Romanian Chair of the Committee of Ministers to ensure that the Romanian accession to the European Union will serve as a bridge between the European Union and the countries of South-Eastern Europe and the Black Sea area, in order to promote a Europe without dividing lines as was requested by Heads of State and Government at the second Council of Europe Summit in 1997;
 - c. support, in this respect, the creation of the Black Sea Euroregion, which received the backing of the Romanian authorities, and contribute to the organization of the first meeting which will take place in Constanta, Romania, in March 2006;
 - d. support the proposed creation of a Center for interterritorial and transfrontier co-operation between regions in Europe – whether they are situated or not in the European Union. This centre, which has already received the support of the Russian Federation, will be a means of enhancing co-operation between regions in all priority fields of the Council of Europe and will also deal with regional economic development issues;
 - e. encourage the creation of a specific INTERREG programme in the Balkan and Black Sea area in synergy with the European Union regional policy and the new Neighborhood policy.
12. Are grateful for the invitation to organize the 7th Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe in Albania in 2006/2007. ,,