



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

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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.

Summary:

A. NALAS activities and participations

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- Meeting of the [Committee](#) of Liaison Officers in Strasbourg
- [Workshop](#) of international organizations focused on strengthening the capacities of national associations
- First [General](#) Meeting of the National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities of Council of Europe

B. Members associations' activities

- Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia - [AMTS](#)

[Annex 1](#) – NALAS Action plan 2006-2008

A. NALAS ACTIVITIES AND PARTICIPATIONS

1. Meeting between NALAS Executive bureau and the SDC – Swiss Agency for Co-operation and Development representative

On February 21st, in Strasbourg, at the headquarter of the Council of Europe, it took place the meeting of the Executive bureau of NALAS focused on presenting and discussing with SDC representative, Mr. Romain Darbellay, the network action plan for 2006-2008 (presented in *Annex 1*) and its budget. The network was represented by Mrs. Vanya Starovlah, Montenegro, treasures, Mr. Fatos Hodaj and Mr. Ergys Bezhani, representing the Association of Albanian Municipalities, the acting secretariat of NALAS and Mr. Adrian Miroiu, programme manager. Also, Mrs. Dolores Rios and Mr. Jean Paul Chauvet representing the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities from Europe and Mr. Francois Saint-Ouen from FEDRE, attended the meeting.

During the meeting, the action plan and the budget were explained and discussed in detail. Mr. Darbellay stressed that SDC is accepting the action plan considering it as an important step



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before done by the network in its efforts to provide services to its members and to local authorities. Also, he said that SDC is willing to finance the action plan as a whole and not project by project considering that the implementation of all these activities could create for NALAS a even better image than it has now.

The conclusion of the meeting was that the activities of the action plan should start as soon as possible in order to be achieved all the objectives. And the first activity should be to start the executive director selection process, which should be done in a very professional way.

2. Meeting of the Committee of Liaison Officers

On February 22nd, in Strasbourg, it took place the first meeting in 2006 of the NALAS Committee of Liaison Officers. 8 liaison officers, representatives of both associate members, the representative of the Congress and the representative of the network secretariat attended the meeting.

The discussions were focused on the conclusions of the Executive bureau meeting and on launching the selection process for the NALAS executive director position. Mr. Romain Darbellay stressed again the willing of SDC to support the network in implementing the activities during the next 3 years 2006-2008. Regarding the selection process, the participants considered that the position should be promoted very intensively in order to have the best candidates possible from all the European countries. The position would be based in the region (the Balkans) having the possibility to have a staff. The announcement should be done as soon as possible, the networking hoping that at the end of May the position would be occupied.

3. Workshop of international organizations focused on strengthening the capacities of national associations

Several NALAS member associations' representatives attended on 21 and 22 of February in Strasbourg a meeting of international organizations focused on strengthening the capacities of national associations.

The objectives of the meeting were to share understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of national associations of local authorities, focusing on SE Europe, to share tools and approaches that have been / are being / could be used successfully in strengthening the capacities of national associations and to agree a portfolio of best practice tools and approaches that could be offered to national associations interested in strengthening their capacities.

Representatives of VNG (Netherlands), UNDP (Bratislava), GTZ (Germany), Austrian association, LGDK (Denmark), ANCI (National Association of Italian Communes), SDC (Switzerland), FEDRE (Geneva), KS (Norway), OSI (Budapest), SIDA (Sweden), Council of Europe, AAM (Albania), SCTM (Serbia), SOGFBIIH (Bosnia), ALVRS (Republik of Srpska), NAMRB (Bulgaria), ZELS (Macedonia), FALR (Romania), UOM (Montenegro) attended the meeting.

4. First General Meeting of the National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities of Council of Europe

Within 23 and 24 of February, the representatives of associative structures of local and regional authorities from European Council member countries have met with the actual presidency of the



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Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe. The debated themes of the meeting were based on the straightening of the relationships between local authorities structures in European countries and with the Congress.

The Congress President, Mr. Giovanni Di Sasi, stressed that “national associations are both our partners in, and vehicles of, promoting local and regional democracy in Europe, but also valuable supports in helping us to monitor the respect of the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government”. In addition, he pointed out the importance of increasing cooperation between the Congress and the associations, in particular by the creation of networks, which could draw inspiration from the successful inauguration of the NALAS network.

More than 150 representatives of associations of local and regional authorities and of other organizations attended the meeting.

B. MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS’ ACTIVITIES

AMTS activities (www.skupnostobcin.si)

- Boris Sovič appointed Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions

Boris Sovič, President of Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia and the Mayor of the City Municipality of Maribor, has been named as a the Vice-President of the European Union's Committee of the Regions (CoR). On the occasion of the Plenary Session of the CoR held on 16-17 February – the first of a new four-year term – it was also confirmed that Mr. Sovič will lead the Slovene delegation to the Committee.

- Double labeling of prices in tolar and euros

On Tuesday, February the 14th, a meeting on actions to the double labeling of prices has been held to the initiative of the president of the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia Boris Sovič. The meeting was participated by the president and secretary general of the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia along with representatives of Slovenian municipalities and Government service of Republic of Slovenia for local and regional policy. The time period for Euro takeover – January 1st 2007 - has been pointed out as it quickly (ali incontinently) nears. Therefore local communities have to accede the double labeling as soon as possible.

- Ski competition in Maribor

On February the 17th The Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia organized ski competition in Maribor. About 150 competitors – employed at municipal administration, mayors, deputies and others – took part in it. Rewards were awarded, food and beverage were offered and even entertainment was no exception.



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Annex 1

ACTION PLAN

2006 – 2008

Introduction

The action plan is based on 2 main issues resulting from the discussions held inside the NALAS Committee of Liaison Officers during its last meetings. It was decided to develop 2 medium-term objectives stated in the Strategic plan:

1. Medium-term objective I: giving NALAS the possibility to become a first rate knowledge center on local issues in South-East Europe, and
2. Medium-term objective II: building advocacy groups, or *task forces*.

These 2 objectives were identified by the network member associations as major needs for the first years of activity of NALAS as a newly registered association.

The other 2 medium-term objectives of the Strategic plan would be implemented through common initiatives of different associations in the framework of NALAS.

During the last meeting of the Committee of Liaison Officers were also identified 2 top priority themes for those task forces to start with in 2006:

1. Local finance and fiscal decentralization;
2. Municipal services dealing with waste & water management.

Other top priorities have emerged among the member Associations and could constitute the themes for two more task forces in 2007 and two more in 2008. Among them, let us mention: improvement of the services offered by the Associations to the Municipalities through better training and communication, local agenda 21, strengthening of the Associations capacities to contribute efficiently to positive changes in national legislations regarding local governance, upgrading the knowledge of relevant EU provisions and standards, etc.

It was also decided to gradually give the NALAS the possibility to become an efficient knowledge center on various issues: a so-called “topic-oriented knowledge center”. It will work in harmony with the task forces and will benefit from their activities. The idea is to gather and disseminate documents and information on the member associations and local authorities in SEE in general, and to focus also on topic-oriented material drawn from the NALAS task forces’ productions. This link between the task forces and the knowledge center explains why the latter should also begin in 2006, along with the first 2 task forces.

The last part of this action plan is focused on the creation of adequate structures for an efficient implementation of the Action Plan 2006-2008.



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1. Creation and development of six Task Forces

The role of the task forces is to work on specific issues. As previously mentioned, NALAS are planning two new task forces per year over the period 2006-2008, i.e. a total of six.

2006:

- Local finance and fiscal decentralization.
- Municipal services dealing with waste & water management.

TF 1: Local Finances

- Local budget - planning & management, taxes
- Access to EU funds
- Financing municipal infrastructure
- Fiscal decentralisation
- Property devolution
- Fiscal legislation & decentralization

TF 2: Municipal Public Services, Environment

- Mun. Services - Waste, Water, Energy Efficiency
- Public services, Waste and Water
- Sustainable environment Development (Local Agenda 21)
- EU directives and standards (environment)
- Financing municipal infrastructure

The results of the activities of these two task forces will be carefully evaluated before launching two more task forces in 2007. We will do the same at the end of 2007 in the perspective of the launching of two other task forces in 2008. This is very important because each task force should be in a position to benefit from the lessons learned by the others in order to create cumulative dynamics.

2007 and 2008:

Not decided yet. But the choice will be made among the remaining top-priorities expressed by the Associations members of NALAS:

TF : Energy Efficiency

- Municipal Services

TF: Urban Planning

- Municipal strategic planning
- Municipal strategic planning

TF: Social Issues

- Minority issues



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TF: Economic Development

- Local economic development
- Local economic development and tourism
- Municipal Property management

TF: Culture Youth and Sports

- Municipal role in education

TF: Member Services

- Communication with members
- Training municipal. Administration and elected representatives

TF: Strengthening the Association

- Capacity building for association
- Establishing Assoc.-Committees
- Advocacy in legislation / Lobbying
- Communication with media
- EU Association issues
- Financial sustainability of Association
- Fundraising for members
- Guidelines for members
- Member services
- Communication with members
- Committees' work
- Policy statements
- Policy papers

Each task force will be placed under the responsibility of a NALAS association, which estimates very positively its experience in the field and its relations with other organizations regarding this particular issue. For 2006, the National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria has already declared itself ready to play this role for the task force on local finance and fiscal decentralization. The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia will perform the same duty for the other task force, on waste-water management and energy efficiency.

Each Association will delegate a person in each task force, which will meet more or less every two months (5 to 6 times per year). One or several independent experts will be also hired. What will be the main activities of the task forces? They can be summarized as follows:

- Identify key issues in the field and concentrate on them. It should clearly make the distinction between topics tackled by task forces – needs of municipalities, and needs of associations: capacity building of municipalities is one subgroup, capacity building of associations the other.
- Comparative analysis on the chosen issues (national legislations, implementation in municipalities, best practices in the field, problems and obstacles still to be overcome).
- Overview of the EU “legislation” and standards in the field.
- Networking with the relevant stakeholders.



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- Publications and issue of a “policy paper”, to be adopted by the NALAS General Assembly.
- One final Conference in the end of the year the activities and the policy paper.
- On the basis of the policy paper, concrete projects proposals to be developed.

In a more detailed way it gives the following:

- a) Create the Terms of Reference for the task forces, considering the tasks described in items b) to j). The ToR should be elaborated by the Committee of Liaison Officers and approved by the Executive Bureau. On the basis of the analysis of the network, capacity will be defined if there is a need for hiring external consultants.
- b) Meanwhile, the member associations will be asked to nominate a person to be a member of the team (until the end of March). The activities are carried out not on the basis of a personal commitment, but on institutional commitment by each member association. Every Association should nominate its titular and substitute representatives in order to provide for the regular participation in every meeting. [Do these persons will have to sign a Memorandum? It is still in discussion]
- c) A first meeting of the task force would be organize for prioritizing the main issues in the field of activity to whom their activity will be addressed, what topics to be tackled, what meetings, other activities could also be proposed by members. During the first part of this meeting the liaison officers should be present in order to explain what the network is, which should be the effects of the task-force activity, on what issues the task force should focus more, etc. Also during this meeting, the participants should receive and discuss the European legislation in the respective themes with an accent on the new integrated countries' situation (changes, effects on local authorities, good ideas to be implemented, bad situations to be avoided, etc). A number of formats would be elaborated in order to gather information from different countries.
- d) Until the second meeting of the task force, the group leader with support of its members will have to gather all the necessary data for the comparative analysis.
- e) The second meeting would be dedicated to present the gathered data and to design the framework for the comparative analysis of these information (legal framework, level of decentralization, implementation of laws at local level, problems and obstacles, measures already taken and to be taken and case studies). Another period of time will be necessary to the group after these meeting to elaborate the comparative analysis.
- f) Within the third meeting the participants will select the most important parts of the comparative analysis (which should be also common for all the associations but this is not compulsory) and to start to design the format of different policy papers addressed to these issues. Also during this meeting they will start to create, based on the experience of Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania, the guidelines on the impact of the *acquis communautaire* on local authorities in the respective field of activity.
- g) The fourth meeting will be focused on finalizing the policy papers and to delimitate what should remain as recommendations to national government and associations and what should become subjects for concrete projects developed by the network or by some members of NALAS. The members of the task force would be involved as source persons into the elaboration process of the project proposals. They will receive full support from NALAS executive bodies. Also, the guidelines mentioned at point f) will be finalized.
- h) A Conference will be organized at the end of each year for presenting the policy papers and their possible effects to all stakeholders. The conference will be an occasion for the task forces to present their results.
- i) During all the period, the group leader and the executive structures of NALAS will give the members of the task forces the possibility to stay in contact with all the stakeholders involved in the respective field at national, regional and European level.
- j) The final reports and the other final products of the task forces will be presented and approved by the NALAS General Assembly. Also, all these papers will be translated into all member languages, uploaded on the network site and gathered into a publication that should be disseminated in the region.



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The main indicators for success of the task forces will be :

- A change in Associations' and local authorities' policies in the fields covered by the task forces.
- These task forces are more and more consulted, or referred to, by the main donors (incl. EU).
- Changing in some elements of donors' policy clearly related to the work of the task forces.
- The number of quotations of their work in all publications specialized on governance in SEE.
- The number of references to their work by the relevant NGOs in the field.
- The number of project proposals developed by task forces.

The first meeting of the task force on municipal services dealing with waste & water management, energy efficiency is planned for April 2006 in Serbia (as the SCTM is the leader of this task force).

The first meeting of the task force on local finance and fiscal decentralization should take place in Bulgaria in June 2006, in the same time with a Conference organized by NAMRB for the economic directors from Bulgarian municipalities.

2. Development of the network as a Knowledge Center

It is a major objective for NALAS to stimulate the exchange of information and experiences among its members, to disseminate and promote the results of its own activities. In the NALAS Strategic Plan 2004-2007, the medium-term objective I even expresses NALAS ambition to become gradually one of the most reliable sources of information and expertise on local self-government issues in South-East Europe.

[There is a remark here aiming at putting more stress on the benefits of this activities for the Associations]

Even though the Knowledge Center will substantially be active through Internet, it will be physically located in the new NALAS office (see below: chapter on NALAS Structures). Its work could be summarized as collection-translation-dissemination of relevant information and European best practices and make them accessible to every municipality.

During 2006 - 2008, the knowledge center should be focused on gathering and producing the following types of information:

- Necessary information for the activities of the task forces;
- Documents produced by the task forces;
- Already existing documents about the local self-government in South-East Europe (legislation, national working plans, national strategies);
- EU integration related documents (identify the most important ones for different member associations in order to be translated);



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- Database of experts from SEE in various fields that NALAS is active in (members of the task forces would present a basis);
- Any kind of database able to be produced by NALAS members (regarding local authorities in Balkans, regional experts in local administration related issues, etc.).

The Knowledge Center will be designed to perform three basic functions: Advocacy, Member Services, Public information reaching out media and civil society.

- Advocacy:

Systematic collection of information on legal developments in SEE;

Analysis of those legislations in terms of impacts on local government;

Collection of laws and by laws on various topics, i.e.: implementability, impact on municipal budget, on human resources (capacity building needs), on stepwise implementation and enforcement, on monitoring of performance (benchmarking).

Preparation of positions and defending of the interests of the local authorities from SEE in front of European and international institutions.

- Member services

To allow the Associations to develop gradually a demand driven service concept;

On the basis of the preparation of a model, creation of a training package for new councilors (in cooperation for instance with ENTO and UNITAR) and organization by NALAS of regional “training of trainers” to be certified to train others to deliver package;

The promotion of each Association to become a “regional focal point” for at least one category of services;

All Associations provide each regional focal point with adequate and up-to-date information;

The NALAS knowledge center is the coordinator of all those activities, especially regarding the various regional focal points.

- Public Information

By upgrading, regular maintaining and an extensive use of the NALAS Web Site;

By making the maximum possible documents available in all the local languages (it implies special efforts on translation);

By coordinating and upgrading communication activities of the Associations;

By benchmarking for local authority communications and introducing subsequent communication strategies in local authorities;

By coordinating best practice programmes to be developed by the Associations.



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Practically speaking, among the activities necessary to be undertaken for setting up in good conditions this knowledge center, it can be mentioned:

- a. A better systematization of the site, re-arranging the links on the home page so that they should be more visible.
- b. Re-designing of the section dedicated to the knowledge center in a way which should allow an easy search for a document, tools for doing these search, ways of uploading a document by a large number of persons (based on a username and a password).
- c. During the first meeting of the Committee of Liaison officers in 2006, a special section will be dedicated to the process of identifying exactly what kind of documents would be useful to the member associations or to their members (local authorities), based on proposals made by member associations. This way, a matrix of necessary kinds of documents should be created making easier the collecting process. [Remark: we have still to clarify what kind of documents should be collected]
- d. Using the matrix, in a process of gathering the documents related to the first 5 most important issues (the number and the procedure should be discussed here) will start in 2006, the next 5 issues in 2007 and so on.
- e. Also during this meeting mentioned at point c), a common questionnaire should be created for gathering information about most important documents necessary to be translated in a regional language. In order to do this a draft questionnaire has to be prepared also before the meeting!
- f. The questionnaire should be fulfilled by a number similar to the number of each association's steering committee and should be implemented by each association. The most important (the number should be established) should be gathered (if they are public), translated into the requested language and uploaded on the site in the original and translated languages.
- g. Collaborate on permanent basis with the task forces members in order to receive requests for necessary documents. Also, after each meeting, the task force's leader and hosting association will be asked to provide to the knowledge center the results of the respective meeting.
- h. The executive bodies of the network will collect the CVs of the members of the task forces, of all the consultants involved in the network activities in time, of any consultants used by member associations at local level. These all would be gathered in a data base of experts involved in activities in Balkans.
- i. In 2006 it will be implemented a process of identifying what kinds of databases could be interested for others and could be produced by NALAS. If there will be identified such kind of databases, the process of gathering the data should be started immediately, because they can become a source of self-sustainability for the network.

The main indicators for success of the Knowledge Center will be;

- Increase in number and diversity of the "regional focal points";
- Increase in hits on NALAS Web Site;
- Increase in the dissemination of "packages for new Councilors";
- Development of concrete collaboration between the Associations clearly related to the output of the Knowledge Center.
- Linkages established with different partners, evidence of how many times NALAS is contacted and/or consulted by various international and regional stakeholders



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3. Improving NALAS structures

In the end of 2005, NALAS is at its beginning as a formal organization and money is very scarce.

In order to implement efficiently all the activities contained in the Action Plan, NALAS needs people to follow the plan and to try to determine that all the involved actors are playing their parts.

Therefore, it is necessary to have a permanent staff full time devoted to NALAS, i.e. an Executive Director, a Secretary or Office Manager, a part-time accountant.

The implementation of the foreseen activities requires part or full time engagement of different professionals. There is also a possibility to envisage a transitional period, during which the acting Executive Director, Mrs. Ginka Tchavdarova (Director of the Bulgarian Association) and the current Secretary, Mr. Fatos Hodaj (Director of the Albanian Association), will go on with their tasks, but with a part-time remuneration (which has not been the case so far). The current Programme Manager, Adrian Miroiu, financed by OSI-LGI will go on until the end of his mandate (end of March 2006). [a remark made here stressing the necessity of having a full-time structure for the Network itself, and advocating Brussels because it is a “neutral” location, rather than to set up this structure in one country of SEE]

Besides, the NALAS Association has to finance some statutory meetings, namely at least one General Assembly per year, and some meetings of the Committee of Liaison officers and of the Executive Bureau.

Every three months, an activity report will be issued and presented to the donors supporting NALAS on the basis of this Action Plan, with a statement of what has been achieved and of the work still to be done. Some additional proposals will be eventually made.

4. Towards more self-sustainability

NALAS is presently at the very beginning of their activities and almost completely dependant on external funds to launch and implement them. This is the predominant scenario for 2006.

But this does not mean that in 2007 and 2008, such a situation will remain the same. The idea is that the costs of NALAS new structures and activities, reflected in the budget in attachment, will be gradually more and more covered by internal resources, mainly generated by the activities themselves. This is the case for membership fees (currently 500 € per year) which should be higher in the years to come in close relation to the quality and quantity of the services offered to the member Associations. Task Forces and Knowledge Center will also generate paying services to municipalities and investors in the regions for instance, and develop an activity of consultancy.

Simultaneously, permanent staff and structures will contribute decisively to increase NALAS fund raising capacity, which is low at present, even though some preliminary contacts have been established at a high level with the EU Commission (EU Commissioner Danuta Hübner).

So, from a financial perspective, a crucial indicator for success will certainly be the amount of income generated by NALAS activities. This will obviously be a serious incentive for NALAS to really deliver top-quality services and information throughout the region.