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CG/ASS/ADL (8) 82

**Paper for the Working Table I, Stability Pact
12/13 of June 2002, Istanbul**

**The added value of the city to city co-operation to the democratisation and stabilisation
process in SEE**

The support of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies

Cooperation between cities, regions and NGOs, from Europe, in South Eastern Europe is one of the most innovative and relevant phenomenon of the international cooperation process taking place over of the last several years. It is characterised by a large number of actors and the use of available resources (both human and financial). It proved to be rich and crucial for the on going stabilisation and democratisation actions in the region.

Partnerships between local authorities, enriched by the contact with NGOs, assure a long lasting effect, as they directly involve the commitment of the citizens, create human contacts and mutual exchanges of experiences and developed new skills and capacities. This methodology can be considered as a practical and effective tool for a comprehensive development of South Eastern Europe but also, without doubts, as enrichment for the EU member States themselves.

The development and the success of partnerships among towns and regions are based, in most of the cases, also on the support of networks and other institutions (especially for small and medium sized local authorities). The networks could offer a fundamental help to the activity of co-operation of these local authorities. The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) is an effective instrument of the city to city co-operation working for the development and the stability in SEE.

➤ **Developing partnerships : the role of the Association of the LDAs**

The Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) and the Association of LDAs are an instrument at the disposal of local and regional authorities that wish to contribute as effectively as possible to support the democratisation and development process in the Balkan region and Eastern Europe. The purpose of the LDAs is to promote local democracy, reconstruction of civil society and intercultural dialogue.

The ALDA has the task :

- To create the contact for the partnership supporting then the Agencies ;
- To provide inside information from the field though the presence of the Agencies ;
- To provide competencies in fundraising ;
- To support the project management ;

- To give a follow-up to the initiatives ;
- To keep alive the awareness on the need of stabilisation and democratisation in SEE ;
- To identify resources (financial and human)
- To represent the needs of the network in different forum of discussions on the matter and working in the region

The LDAs works closely linked with the activities of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The programme implements a specific methodology of international co-operation, which wants to confirm the necessity of building peace, development and stability in Europe, from the bottom. It is an ambitious and innovative experience, which creates the co-operation between different actors at different level :

- a European institution (such as the Council of Europe)
- local authorities
- NGOs

The programmes generates an organised and long lasting presence of local authorities from Western Europe involved in the programme. The principles, which are at the basis of the actions are a) the promotion of a shared and participated local development b) the role of the local authorities and the good governance in this process c) the participation of the civil society.

This on-going and participative process of the different stakeholders, and not just the results of our activities, but it is one of the main characteristics of the programme.

The network of the LDAs represents

10 offices (year 2002)

Croatia (Osijek, Sisak, Verteneglio/Brtonigla)

Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tuzla, Zavidovici, Prijedor)

Serbia and Montenegro (Subotica- Serbia, Central and Southern Serbia – Nis, Niksic, Montenegro)

“the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (Ohrid)

This year the 11th office might be opened in Gjilane, Kosovo

4 countries of SEE in the regional programme

60 partner towns and regions in 13 European countries

40 partner NGOs

10 years at work in the Balkans

The activities promoted by the Agencies

- Training for local elected representatives and officials
- Schools of Civil society (with the support of the Council of Europe's Confidence-Building Measures Programme)
- Pre-election public information activities
- Training for young journalists in local democracy and intercommunity dialogue
- Transfrontier co-operation activities
- Activities to develop civil society and participation by young people
- Programmes to integrate minorities into the community
- Exchanges and debates with the European city partners
- Transfer of know how and exchanges of best practices

The partnership from European towns and regions :

Every LDA project is based on an agreement setting out the practical contribution of the main partner local and regional authorities. These authorities provide technical and financial support and expertise for projects run by the LDA.

Through the network thus established, the other partner authorities have the opportunity to participate, as their resources and expertise permit, in a convincing and effective policy of external relations. Their involvement reflects a commitment by residents of the partner authorities. Depending on the needs voiced by the host authority, local and regional authorities and NGOs may take part in an LDA's programme of activities in a variety of ways.

One of the partners is designated the "**project leader**" and takes particular responsibility for managing the network, co-ordinating projects, raising funds and overseeing the administration and financing of the project.

A **host city** will be the Agency headquarter which constitute the basis for the activities. The main target groups are citizens, NGOs, elected representatives, local government officers and civil servants.

Through the network thus established, the partner authorities have the opportunity to participate, as their resources and expertise permit, in a convincing and effective policy of external relations. Their involvement reflects a commitment by residents of the partner authorities. Depending on the needs expressed by the host authority, local and regional authorities and NGOs may take part in an LDA's programme of activities in a variety of ways:

- by funding specific projects (in the field of education, health, media, environment, youth or microeconomic projects, for example);
- by sending elected representatives or experts to lead seminars;
- by hosting study visits in partner towns, regions or associations;
- by establishing links between representatives from the socio-economic or voluntary sectors and key players in the host authority.

Network of the LDAs



➤ **Opportunities of the city to city co-operation**

- The co-operation of cities and regions in South Eastern Europe is still, today, a great opportunity for implementing innovative programmes of institution building and local development with the support of the civil society.
- The entire region is now leaving behind the phase of emergency and it is accepting a long term commitment. In this particular area of the world, thanks to the city to city co-operation of this last decade implemented by the local authorities from Europe, the local authorities and communities can be considered the main actors of a development based on the participatory process for the whole society.
- Partnerships and decentralised co-operation, as a methodology of action, in the region is also paving the road to the process of integration in the European Union, which is now of high interest of SEE. The co-operation and the direct contact with colleagues and communities from the EU makes easier the future commitment of those States. Local authorities and civil society, which are actors in these partnerships, have the opportunity to work for a balanced economic and social development of the area. That means that, at the local level and for concrete actions, it will be possible to face – or solve - questions which are of common concern (immigration/emigration, economical exchanges, environmental issues, political stability in the area, intercultural dialogue, etc.)
- Further more, for the partners from Europe and their community, the work in the Balkans remains a good occasion to be involved in an innovative process of building up a young democratic system. Being part of the process gives the opportunity to be more active and aware of our own democracy. The bigger is the effort made in understanding the problems of the emerging democracies and development in SEE, the more we understand our own processes and struggles.
- The city to city co-operation offers means of action, which are of direct impact at the local level and avoids the dynamics of the big international interventions, which will have as beneficiaries only the donors themselves
- The methodology strengthen the capacities of local actors to be part of the decision making process and it participatory planning. This is a difficult and complex task that sometimes, in the short and medium term, is hardly giving the measurable results that the donors' agencies are requesting in their evaluation forms.

The added value of this kind of co-operation stays in long term actions and direct friendship established, the involvement and commitment of the actors involved, the enrichment and importance of being part of the process from both side, the evidence and the role of the local resources (human, social and financial) as a basis for the grass root development.

➤ **Issues to be tackled**

- On the other hand, basic principles (democracy, human rights, state of law) must be fully shared by the counterpart of the local authorities in South Eastern Europe. The conditions for getting good results from this co-operation and partnership depends from the real good faith of the actors, both local authorities and civil society. Their real commitment must be assessed, and then supported, by the international community.

- As we stated above, a current problem of the partnerships and the international decentralised co-operation is also in the evaluation system of the work which has been realised thanks to this methodology. In fact, it is hard to establish a good and relevant matrix of evaluation which would be suitable in giving a correct understanding of the added value which is offered by this kind of co-operation. The results are measurable in the medium and long term and it might be difficult to connect the outcomes to the initial inputs or steps.
- A real effort should be made in the cultural field. Often, they are used to the “donations” and not to “partnership for development”. The first ones are definitively easy to manage. The last ones request efforts and shared vision.
- The partnership requests a real participation of the whole community as well as a full understanding of the approach. Sometimes, this is blocked by the political/short term questions, which bases the strategy for the development on the length of the political mandate. The means used for implementing those strategies are also superficial and without no will to have an effective impact on the community.
- These results might be also jeopardized by problems often identified in the management of public resources in South Eastern Europe such as high and unjustified bureaucracy, corruption, personal interests.
- From the part of international community, there is also, without any doubts, a difficulty to keep high the interest on a long term basis when the public opinion is oriented towards other fronts (Middle East, Afghanistan).

➤ **Trends**

- All the countries in South Eastern Europe are now very close to be full members of the Council of Europe pursuing the same principles and guidelines of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and minorities. That offers a common background and legal framework also to the local authorities.
- In the future, also thanks to the support of the European partners involved in the international decentralised co-operation, the States of the region will enter the process of accession to the European Union. The initiative “Europe Beyond the Borders”, held in Sarajevo on the 5/6th of April 2002 confirmed the necessity and the role to launch this process.. The president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, in many occasions, confirmed his conviction that this is the way to go for stability in the region and for turning eventually a new leaf.
- It is highly time to think of a mature and therefore complex co-operation which implies a two way dialogue, a multilevel approach where all the partners (from Western and from South Eastern Europe, local authorities and NGOs) are actively involved in the programmes. Planning and implementing must take into consideration the local resources and the objectives of both of the actors. The approach and the means are close to the work of action of the Local Democracy Agencies.
- The co-operation will also be characterised by a progressive withdrawal of the “official” “international community” (UN agencies, OSCE, military troops) and their connected grants. The actors of the partnerships will then need to be more innovative for bringing to the front of the stage their own resources rather than being in a more passive position of beneficiaries. Not only understood as a disadvantage, this could be considered as a good starting point for creating synergies and means of co-operation.

- The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies offers a methodology and a framework of action, which would tackle the difficulties expressed in the region and new trends in the international decentralised co-operation in SEE.

Antonella Valmorbida, Director ALDA, 3rd of June 2002

Annexe :

Partnership of European local authorities with SEE and support of the ALDA to their programmes