



**Progress Report  
Working Table I meeting  
Prague, 15 November 2005**

Local Democracy and Cross Border Cooperation (LODE/CBC) remains one of the core objectives of the Stability Pact for 2005. It functions in an horizontal way, exemplifying a true cross-table and cross-sectoral approach in enhancing systematic cooperation of local actors across national borders, which provides the practical underpinning of regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe.

Following the debate initiated at the Working Table I Meeting in Sofia, the LODE/CBC Task Force foresees the need for a new chapter of activities, one that is built upon previous efforts, but also has long-term goals with a particular emphasis on follow up and national and regional ownership. During the summer, **a consolidated assessment of the regional ownership process has been conducted** and key challenges and priorities for the future have been identified.

The **LODE/CBC Task Force meeting held in Belgrade on 4 October 2005** reiterated the importance of the Zagreb Ministerial Conference follow up process and the European Commission's cross-border cooperation policies as cornerstones for future activities on LODE/CBC issues in the region. Moreover, it highlighted the need to focus activities towards promoting citizens' participation in local trans-frontier cooperation on different levels, promoting the creation of public private partnerships and assisting the development of sustainable democratic institutions at local and national level.

The LODE/CBC Task Force will continue to work closely with the Council of Europe, the European Institutions, the East West Institute and a number of other partners (NALAS, ALDA etc) in order to strengthen the decentralization process, promote capacity building activities, further develop cross-border initiatives and favour a more efficient communication of the funding possibilities available.

**A) Local Democracy**

An important dimension of the democratisation process in SEE is the strengthening of the capacities of local and regional authorities in the region. Therefore, the Stability Pact has been supportive of their legal and institutional reform and capacity building measures.

In October 2004 the Stability Pact, the Council of Europe and the Government of Croatia organised, in close consultation with the European Commission, a Regional Ministerial Conference on *Effective democratic governance at local and regional level*. As an outcome, the Ministers of the SEE region signed a Memorandum of Understanding and all participants adopted a final declaration that gave a strong political message that it was emphasizing the importance of strengthening local democracy and the decentralisation process in the SEE region.

The European Union, gradually, is getting more involved in local democracy issues in SEE, through the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission. In fact, they have organized, together with the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Stability Pact a Conference on the "**Role of EU regional and local authorities in the process of democratic consolidation in the Western Balkans region**", which was held in Pristina on 22 June 2005. The discussion tackled



issues such as the strengthening of the political dialogue between the different communities, the development of local democracy and the promotion of regional cooperation.

### **Follow up of the Zagreb Ministerial Conference**

The follow up of the aforementioned Ministerial Conference has revealed both prospects and shortcomings regarding local democracy issues in South Eastern Europe.

The SEE Governments have drafted, in close cooperation with the Council of Europe, the required Work Programmes for Better Local Governance and have presented them in Budapest on February 2005. Moreover, they are dialoguing with the local authorities, their associations and local communities in order to agree on the immediate needs and future planning of local governance.

Beyond the finalization of the **Work Programmes, the challenge**, as reiterated at the **CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Plenary Session held in Strasbourg on 2 June 2005**, is to **monitor and evaluate their implementation** in a State-by-State basis. At the moment the situation is uneven as in some cases progresses are evident, while in others there is a certain lack of infrastructure and coordination that hampers the process. In the next few months it will be important to support the monitoring process with a specific mechanism and put additional resources to fulfil these tasks successfully and thus prepare for the Evaluation Conference, which will be held in Skopje in 2006.

### **Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA)**

The Association of Local Democracy Agencies held its **General Assembly** in Zagreb on 17 June 2005. A CD-rom on best local governance practice, which summarises the debates and exchanges of the EU Mayors Project, has been published and diffused. Currently ALDA is developing a follow up project, which will include the EU candidate countries Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Turkey.

ALDA will continue to support the stabilization and association process all over Europe and the Western Balkans in particular on their path to EU integration. Moreover, it will draw on the successful experiences accumulated in the Balkans to expand its activities in other regions as well (e.g. Georgia and Belarus).

### **The Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South Eastern Europe (NALAS)**

The **1<sup>st</sup> NALAS General Assembly** was held on 6 September 2005 in Skopje. This represents a step further in the development of the network, as the President and Vice-Presidents have been elected, Executive organs have been formed and the priorities for future activities have been defined. The Committee of Liaison officers will meet in Pristina in November to discuss the next concrete steps, including financial issues.

Meanwhile, **NALAS organized a workshop**, financed by GTZ, which took place in Pristina on 17-18 October 2005 **on waste legislation in South Eastern Europe**. In four Panel Discussions some 50 experts in municipal waste management from all parts of South Eastern Europe discussed how municipalities could contribute best to an efficient waste management system based on their specific local conditions. They expressed their wish to become a reliable partner in implementing waste legislation, achieving European standards and to promote citizen participation.



Moreover, NALAS has started to diffuse its monthly Info-bulletin, to keep members and interested partners updated on recent developments and future actions.

## **B) Cross-Border Cooperation**

Cross-border cooperation continued to be one of the Stability Pact main objectives.

Just over two years after the launch of the **Gnjlane/Gilan, Presevo, Kumanovo, Trgoviste (GPKT) microregion**, the East West Institute organized in Skopje in July, together with the Council of Europe and the Stability Pact a conference on its **Progresses, Challenges and next steps**. The numerous positive progresses achieved sustain the growing recognition that cross-border initiatives are *de facto* stabilisation initiatives. The Stability Pact pledged for a further support of this kind of locally owned and led initiatives.

The LODE/CBC Task Force gave also full support to the **cross-border cooperation** between Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina **in the Southern Adriatic**. Working Groups on national resources management and environmental protection, tourism and small and medium enterprises development and youth and cultural cooperation have been established.

In order to communicate more efficiently and diffusing more widespread information about the **EC CBC funding opportunities available**, the **European Commission** and the **Stability Pact** are working towards the draft of a **brochure**, targeting local and regional authorities. This will be **complemented by a website** collecting all the most relevant **CBC best practices** from the most relevant actors (namely CoE, East West Institute and others).

Furthermore, as CBC issues cannot be successfully promoted through Working Table I contributions alone, the Stability Pact is in the process of identifying and initiating cross-table CBC projects, with a particular emphasis on cross-border mobility.

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