



**Progress Report**  
**Task Force Local Democracy and Cross Border Cooperation**  
**Working Table I Meeting**  
**Belgrade, 29 May 2006**

Local Democracy and Cross Border Cooperation (LODE/CBC) is one of the core objectives of the Stability Pact for 2005/2006 and remains in the following period the area of intense engagement of the Working Table I (WT I). The LODE/CBC Task Force operates in a horizontal manner and it is a true example of intense cross-table, cross-sectoral activity of WT I. LODE/CBC is working on the enhancement of systemic cooperation of local actors across national borders, incorporating in this process, both national governments, representatives of local self-government, as well as civil society organizations operating at the local level. Cooperation in the field of LODE/CBC presents the practical foundation of effective regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe (SEE).

The LODE/CBC Task Force meeting held in Brussels on 28 April 2006, saw the official launching of the final phase of the Zagreb follow-up process. LODE/CBC Task Force, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Policy Association for an Open Society (PASOS), Open Society Institute- Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (OSI-LGI), is working on the preparation of the follow-up of the Zagreb Ministerial Conference on *Effective Democratic Governance at Local and Regional Level* (Zagreb 25-26 October 2004). Thanks to the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, that gave its agreement to host the Zagreb follow-up Conference, the Ministerial Conference is due to be held towards the end of 2006 in Skopje.

In cooperation with the Council of Europe, European Commission (DG Enlargement) and other EU Institutions, Open Society Institute-LGI, East West Institute, Citizen's Pact for South Eastern Europe, Association of Multi-Ethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe-PHILIA and numerous other key partners (such as NALAS and ALDA) LODE/CBC Task Force continues to work closely on the strengthening of the process of decentralization, promotion of capacity building initiatives in the field of local government and public administration reform, further intensification of the cross border cooperation initiatives and active engagement in donor coordination efforts.

A) Local Democracy

Local democracy reform, and the process of decentralization of power in particular, present a fundamental pillar in the process of overall democratization of the region. Consequently, SP is engaged in capacity building measures and the reform of the legal framework aimed at achieving the better functioning of local and regional authorities in South Eastern Europe.

**Zagreb Follow-up Process**

On 25-26 October 2004, the Stability Pact, Council of Europe and the Government of the Republic of Croatia organized a Ministerial Conference on the *Effective Democratic Governance at Local and Regional Level*. The purpose of this Conference was, "to review the current state of local government in the Stability Pact beneficiary countries,



to elicit commitments to promoting local democracy, decentralization and capacity-building, and to encourage partnerships between state authorities at the central and local levels and the respective associations of local authorities.” (Proceedings of the South Eastern Europe Regional Ministerial Conference, p. 5). As an outcome of this conference, Ministers of the SEE region signed a *Memorandum of Understanding On the Commitments of the Ministers Responsible for Local Government of South Eastern Europe*, as well as all participants of the Conference adopted a *Final Declaration*. Both documents gave a strong signal underlying the fundamental importance of the strengthening of local democracy and furthering of decentralization process in SEE. Moreover, the SEE Ministers gave their commitment to “fully implementing the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government” (Proceedings of the South Eastern Europe Regional Ministerial Conference, p. 135). As a result of the conference, with the support of the Stability Pact and assistance from the Council of Europe, National Work Programs for Better Local Governance were drafted and adopted.

Progress in the implementation of the national Work Programs will be evaluated at a follow up conference at the end of 2006 in Skopje. During the LODE/CBC Task Force Meeting held in Brussels, 28 April 2006, in cooperation with CoE, SP key partners were informed about the following steps concerning the Zagreb follow-up process. Currently, the PASOS/LGI network is conducting a thorough evaluation and analysis of measures taken in each country to implement the national Work Programs and progress made since Zagreb. The process leading to the Zagreb follow-up Conference in Skopje comprises a holding of national roundtable debate focusing on the implementation of national work programs. The outcome of the roundtable meeting will be embodied in the production of policy recommendations, individual country reports, and a consolidated report that are to serve as an important tool for the preparation of the review ministerial conference due to be held in Skopje. These documents will highlight key priority areas where problems persist and provide recommendations for specific actions and commitment. This could result in modification of the national work programs or the adoption of new ones.

### **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 geographic areas.

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

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

On February 21-22 2006, in Strasbourg, NALAS held its Executive Bureau Meeting and their Committee of Liaison Officers Meeting. During this meeting NALAS presented and discussed with the Donor community its action plan and projected budget for 2006-



2008. Moreover, NALAS is currently engaged in the selection process of its executive director and the establishment of the secretariat. This represents an important step further in the development of the network. Most important medium term objectives of the NALAS Action Plan 2006-2008 are “becoming a first rate knowledge centre on local issues in SEE” and “building of advocacy groups or *task forces*”. During the Committee of Liaison Officers Meeting, NALAS identified two top priority themes for 2006: local finance and fiscal decentralization and municipal service dealing with waste and water management.

The Stability Pact continues its active participation at regional multilateral and bilateral conferences supporting the overall local democracy reform initiative (e.g. *The International Expert Conference on Decentralization and Local Self-Government in Albania*, organised by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Tirana and GTZ, held 3-4 February 2006).

### B) Cross Border Cooperation

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

The Stability Pact organized a conference “Vojvodina European Region and the Integration of Serbia and Montenegro”, held in Belgrade 28 and 29 March 2006, in cooperation with the Open Society Institute, Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Ministry for Public Administration and Local Self-Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Serbia and Montenegro and Forum for Ethnic Relations (Belgrade). The Conference concentrated on the role of Vojvodina in the process of European Integration of SaM and on prospective of intensifying regional cooperation in this area of SEE, through the use of structures of regional cooperation such as Danube-Tisza-Maros-Körös Euroregion. In cooperation with the European Parliament SP is planning to organize a follow-up event to this conference due to be held in Brussels in the second half of 2006.

In cooperation with the East West Institute SP continues its active engagement on the establishment of the Ohrid/Prespa Euro Region. As the first step in the establishment of this very important Euro Region connecting Greece, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania SP is currently working on the organization of the formation of the Trilateral University Cooperation between the Universities of Kozani, Korça and Ohrid. As a first step, in cooperation with the Greek government SP is preparing the signing of the official document launching this university cooperation. Furthermore, SP continues its active engagement in support of the activities of Gnjilane/Gilan, Presevo, Kumanovo, Trgoviste (GPKT) microregion and the cross border cooperation in the Southern Adriatic.

During the 28 April 2006 LODE/CBC Task Force Meeting, with the help of the European Commission (DG Enlargement), the Stability Pact organized a presentation of the structure of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) in the field of Cross Border Cooperation. The Open Society Institute updated the participants about the Donor Assistance Mapping Exercise (DAME), the online-database about local government specific donor assistance in South Eastern Europe. The Stability Pact is furthermore preparing an overview about funding possibilities for South Eastern Europe in the field of Cross Border Cooperation with the aim to provide a practical tool for the local actors with concrete information about how to proceed to access the available funds. This compilation will be published on the Stability Pact webpage.



The Stability Pact continues active cooperation with numerous civil society initiatives in the field of SEE regional cooperation at the local level, such as the Citizen's Pact of South Eastern Europe and the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe-PHILIA. During the 28 April LODE/CBC Task Force Meeting the representatives of AMC SEE-PHILIA announced the holding of the Donors Conference aimed at supporting its current activities and the establishment of a permanent secretariat. The Donor's Conference will be followed by the holding of the First General Assembly of AMC SEE-PHILIA.

SZC WT I 02/05/2006