

Annual Ordinary General Assembly of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)

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First of all, I would like to thank the organisers for giving me the opportunity to address the ALDA General Assembly, for the first time since my election as President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in March.

Let me also tell you how much we, in the Congress, do appreciate the work of ALDA in promoting local democracy and active citizenship, in bringing together local authorities and civil society and in supporting civil society engagement in local communities.

Since 1999, when the network of Local Democracy Agencies was established to coordinate and support good governance and local self-government, the association has continued to grow.

By expanding its field of action, to multiply its activities with regard to the needs supported by civil society, and to develop partnerships in support of its projects.

This is a real success that we are very well aware of and that I would like to salute.

We are also pleased to see the continued expansion of the network of Agencies, and welcome the planned establishment of two new agencies, in Turkey and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Those who are involved from the beginning know that the network was created at the initiative of the Congress.

What is more important, however, is that the Congress and ALDA have developed a close and long-standing relationship over the past more than twenty years.

This relation is reflected in ALDA's status as an institutional partner of the Congress which was granted in 2018.

We share the same objective of strengthening local and regional democracy by promoting active citizenship.

The work of ALDA is complementary to the work of the Congress in implementing the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

The right of citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority is enshrined in the Charter and developed further in its Additional Protocol. It is also a horizontal feature of the Congress priorities for 2021 – 2026 which were adopted last March by the Congress session.

These priorities focus on building societies that are democratic, cohesive, sustainable, resilient and duly equipped with modern digital means.

Dear colleagues,

The health crisis we have been experiencing for more than 15 months now has had a major impact on our societies, endangering not only human lives and the well-being of citizens, but also local and regional democracy. The restrictive health measures, such as the confinement and social distancing, have led to a reduction in the space for public debate and consultation with citizens.

They have also had a negative impact on the citizens' participation in political life.

The record rates of abstention we witness in recent elections for instance in the French departmental and regional elections are one of the unfortunate illustrations of the increasing mistrust and disinterest in relation to the political life, its institutions and its representatives.

And yet trust between the citizens and their elected representatives is more necessary than ever to promote dialogue and to rethink our societies in the aftermath of the health crisis.

It is even more essential if we want to strengthen the democratic functioning of our societies, their resilience and their inclusiveness, as we are rebuilding them in the post-crisis renewal.

All joint efforts must be pursued to restore trust and participation.

Our responsibility is to build concrete action and synergies between all actors in the field.

In view of the respective priorities of both our institutions, I see many synergies that can be developed in particular in the field of quality of democracy, good governance and citizen participation, environment and climate change, social and economic cohesion and digitalisation.

Moreover, as ALDA is active in the Balkans, in the Eastern Partnership and in the Mediterranean area, actions can be further developed in these areas, in the framework of the Congress cooperation projects, be it in Ukraine, in Armenia or in Tunisia

Our common mission takes on its full meaning in this particular context of crisis and makes our work even more important.

I remain convinced that the efforts made by local and regional authorities, citizens, but also networks and partnerships to protect the well-being of all and safeguard the rights of citizens, will bear fruit and will allow us to better manage the exit from the crisis.

They will also allow us to better prepare the future of our communities.

To conclude I wish to recall the full support of the Congress to ALDA's activities and work and wish it every success in the future.

Thank you.