

# Democratisation, Development Cooperation and Civil Society

A three-year project financed by Development Cooperation Ireland, through a voluntary contribution to the Council of Europe

## Introduction

The Local Democracy Agencies have been in existence since 1993. The first Agency was opened in Subotica, Serbia, at the initiative of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Each Agency aims at fostering local democracy, human rights and sustainable development in a decentralised region in South East Europe where international support is rare. Through multilateral partnerships with local and regional authorities as well as NGOs from all over Europe, the Local Democracy Agencies help to build up new capacities in the Balkans and exchange best practices and expertise.

The project "Democratisation, Transborder Co-operation and Civil Society" financed by DCI started at the end of 2002. The primary goals of this project were the promotion of an active civil society and democratic local authorities, community development, capacity building and intercultural dialogue through transborder co-operation, youth and civil society development, exchange of best practices, and strengthening of local authorities, through the setting up of three new Local Democracy Agencies. This was one of the most delicate and critical areas in the Balkans concerning stability and peace: Southern Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro.

The main topics included democracy and governance, education and training, ethnic and human rights, multicultural policies, local development, professional associations and networks, public and municipal services, as well as regional development and policy.

*Awareness raising activities in the streets of Nis (Serbia).*



With the substantial support of the programme, the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) established three new Local Democracy Agencies (LDA) in South East Europe:

- > the LDA Montenegro, based in Niksic (May 2001)
- > the LDA Central and Southern Serbia based in Nis but also covering the cities of Kragujevac, Kraljevo and Leskovac (November 2001)
- > the LDA in Kosovo/UNMIK based in Gjilan/Gnjilane (February 2003)

DCI, through this contribution, substantially enhanced the quantity and the quality of the whole LDA network.

The common aims of the LDAs are:

- > strengthening civil society
- > enhancing participation of minorities and young people in public life
- > establishing and stimulating transborder co-operation
- > strengthening local authorities
- > enhancing the level of co-operation between communities and socio-economic actors through partnership
- > helping to implement the standards of the Council of Europe in South East Europe

The methodologies used to implement these goals were:

- > meetings and debates
- > exchanges of information, skills and best practices
- > publication of reports
- > shared action planning - participatory planning processes
- > trainings
- > seminars and workshops
- > international conferences
- > definition of strategies with and for local authorities and NGOs
- > steering Committees including partner meetings for the identification of needs and evaluation of the projects

This brochure summarises the main activities and results of the three-year project on democratisation and transborder co-operation supported by the Irish Government. The overall budget of the project was 567.000 Euro.

Every LDA promoted also other projects financed by other donors, as it is in the possibilities of the LDAs to do.

Therefore, the first resources were then multiplied and created the synergies towards common goals. All the projects implemented were absolutely based on verified needs and the actions were also adapted in the years, while the project was implemented.

## Evaluation

The Irish Aid contribution undoubtedly contributed to the long-term success of the network of the LDAs and its Association. Three new LDAs could be established that are supported by a stable network of international and local partners. 11 Local Democracy Agencies exist now altogether including a network of more than 200 partners. 30 of these partners were added through the three new Agencies opened with the help of Irish Aid:

- > LDA Central and Southern Serbia (Lead partner, Suresnes, France)
- > LDA Kosovo (Lead partner, Kosovo Ensemble, France)
- > LDA Montenegro (Lead partner, East Staffordshire Borough Council, UK)

Through the projects, local democracy, the respect for human rights and minorities were supported. These values are still difficult to implement in Serbia and Montenegro as well as Kosovo for the interethnic frictions and the various projects conducted by the three LDAs contributed significantly to the stability of the region by empowering disadvantaged groups like minorities or young people.

Thousands of representatives of NGOs and local and regional authorities profited from the seminars, trainings, debates, best practice exchanges and forums that were organised.

LDAs and ALDA have become crucial actors in the stabilisation process in South East Europe. The methodology of decentralised multilateral co-operation has proven to be very successful tool in this process.

## Introductory statements by the Delegates of the 3 LDAs

### › Statement by Kerim Medjedovic, Delegate, LDA Montenegro

”Rapid changes“ is a proper phrase to be used in commenting many aspects of the social and political life in Montenegro. Privatisation of state owned business companies is faster every day, the Parliament is accelerating passing laws, the number of NGOs and intensity of their activities and influence is on the rise.

But the question remains: do we have essential change, the kind of change that is improving the life of citizens and offering them freedom of choice?

The project ”Strengthening local democracy and civil society in Serbia and Montenegro“ conducted by the Local Democracy Agency in Niksic and supported by the contribution of the Irish Government, brought citizens of Niksic and Montenegro several steps towards change. The amount of activities, number of people involved as participants or lecturers coming from many different institutions, cities and countries bear witness of this fact.

Young people involved in the Participation of youth in the decision-making process at the local level are active members of LDA and many other NGOs in Montenegro and successful students. The experiences they gained through our work, in particular the study visit to the UK changed their perspectives.

Minorities issues and confidence-building measures among the different ethnic groups contributed to better understanding of people within Montenegro and in the region as well. During the regional conference ”Minority rights on the local level“ a Memorandum of cooperation and ideas for future work in the region were developed, in particular for those six Montenegrin towns where the core activities of the LDA will take place. Training for NGOs on advocacy produced projects and commitment to them. These events also gave the opportunity to some participants from Vojvodina, Croatia and Montenegro to meet some time afterwards.

In the strengthening of local authorities (training and exchanges of



*The Town Hall in Kragujevac.*

experiences for local authorities) representatives from 15 municipalities in Montenegro were excited listening to British and German experiences and to learn about good practices which are implemented in some of their institutions. These activities provided the LDA Niksic with many useful contacts and ideas for joint projects with local authorities such as: The Code of Conduct, Local Administration Map and One Stop Shop.

The hardest but not less fruitful work of the LDA Montenegro concerned transborder cooperation issues between Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Political climate is changing, people need to cross borders, young people are interested in finding out what is beyond the border and NGOs are looking for ways to cooperate. This project brought significant change in the attitude of local authorities' representatives on the Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin border. People from three countries met on two occasions and identified and developed four ideas for new joint projects. The step is made, but it needs to be continued with future activities.

Work on all these activities raised the profile of the LDA, strengthened organizational and individual capacities within the LDA, provided the LDA with contacts and ideas for future work together. But the situation in Montenegro is quite promising at present with many committed people being motivated to continue their work to make this a better place for living. The LDA Montenegro will be undoubtedly among them.

**> Statement by Milijana Merdovic, Delegate, LDA Central and Southern Serbia**

The past decade of conflicts and isolation has brought local authorities in Serbia to face a very difficult economic and humanitarian situation. Conflicts and international economic sanctions have shrunk the economy to half the size it was in 1990, resulting in high levels of unemployment (more than 30%, according to official figures), and one of the lowest GDP per capita in Europe. Conflicts and ethnic warfare generated a flood of nearly 400,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as 200,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled Kosovo. Besides this, the Roma community remains a very vulnerable group.



*Milijana Merdovic (in the middle), Delegate of the LDA Central and Southern Serbia informs the citizens of Nis about the EU.*

In this context and due to mismanagement under the centralized decision-making system, the provision of local services has considerably declined. To respond to this situation, the current activities of the LDA are aimed at developing the capacities of the local authorities and of the civil society (capacity building), to make them more able to tackle these problems, while reinforcing local democracy and building up a strong civil society. The overall goal remains the support of local democracy.

Having this in mind, the role of the Irish Government contribution played a crucial role in developing the Local Democracy Agency for Central and Southern Serbia. The LDA worked on capacity building of local authorities, as well as civil society. Moreover, we supported marginalized groups and tried to foster sustainable economic development for them through non-formal education and support for their own businesses. The Irish contribution played a crucial role in these activities.

We should also not forget the importance of working with young people and the added value of building their capacities through the Irish contribution in order to be ready to face all sorts of challenges in the region. We are certain that we are on a good track that we hope to continue in the following years.

#### **> Statement by Steve Duchene, Delegate, LDA Kosovo**

The financial contribution of the Irish Government considerably helped the Local Democracy Agency (LDA) to establish its office in Gjilan/Kosovo. Thanks to this funding, the LDA purchased a considerable part of its current IT equipment and furniture. The fact that it is extremely difficult to find a donor, who would accept to cover the acquisition of equipment, is one of the additional reasons, why this funding was very precious for the LDA.

A considerable amount of the financial contribution was used to implement very concrete and practical projects in the field of youth, economic development and cooperation with the Association of Local Municipalities. The fact that this financing was extended for a period of three years had several positive side-effects:

On the one hand, it gave the LDA an opportunity to prove to other potential donors its capacity to run activities in different fields and being a reliable partner.

On the other hand, it helped the LDA to concentrate during this period on project implementation without having to care about day-to-day financial concerns. Thanks to this generous grant, LDA had the time and opportunity to find a field of action where its impact and capacities were the strongest one. The Local Democracy Agency is currently mainly working on projects concerning various aspects of youth issues. For the last three years, LDA Kosovo has become an acknowledged and important player in the field of youth policy.



## »» LDA Montenegro

The Local Democracy Agency in Montenegro was opened in Niksic on 11 May 2001 with a conference on the Council of Europe's European Charter of Local Self-Government as the first and only international convention to define and protect the principles of local governance in Europe. Representatives from Niksic, Podgorica, Herceg, Novi, Danilovgrad and Pluzine participated in the event.

The LDA Montenegro decided to group the projects realised within the Irish contribution under the title "Strengthening Local Democracy and Civil Society". Direct target groups were local authorities and senior local civil servants from various municipalities in Montenegro as well as representatives of civil society (young people, minorities, NGOs). Indirectly, also other citizens from Niksic and surrounding cities profited from the programme. During the whole programme, special attention was given to the participation of the three cities involved in the partnership, namely Kotor, Niksic and Rozaje as well as to the local partners (Union of the cities of Montenegro and University of Niksic).

The Agency in Montenegro divided the project in four main fields of activities:

- > participation of young people in the decision-making process
- > minority issues
- > strengthening of local authorities
- > transborder co-operation



### **a. Participation of young people in the decision-making process**

The projects with young people started in September 2002. Its aim was to develop capacities for local young people to be more included in the decision-making processes and to motivate and empower them to stand up for their rights within their community.

Main goals of the project were:

- > to train young people on democracy and the work of local governments,
- > to build self-confidence through practical experience so that young people would claim their rights and get active to have their interests taken into consideration,
- > to encourage them to think about community issues
- > to encourage them to express their critical, creative opinion, which would improve the quality of life in their area.

The project included the following activities:

- > Choosing young Montenegrin representatives, already active in civil society or local politics.
- > Training organised by East Staffordshire Borough Council and supported by young people of the partner region. The training was held in Uttoxeter, UK at the end of October 2002.
- > Establishing a Steering Committee for young trainees
- > Defining action plans with local authorities in order to improve the participation of young people in the decision-making processes at local level.
- > Training for local authorities organised by the trainees.
- > Three conferences on the "Participation of young people in the decision-making process at the local level" held in the local authorities of Kotor, Rozaje and Niksic in February 2003.

The implementation phase was very successful. A solid group of young people between 14 and 19 years of age took part in the study visit to Uttoxeter and continued to be active in the Steering Committee for young trainees. This is a result of the careful selection process that was conducted before the projects started. The young participants were selected on the basis of language skills, motivation, ideas and communication.

The Steering Committee helped to identify current problems of young people in their communities such as drug addiction, unemployment and Aids and to find possible solutions. For example, they managed to sign

an agreement with several high schools to install condom machines in the bathrooms of the school and to improve sexual education. Furthermore, the LDA offered them a room to meet on a regular basis even when the Steering Committee was not meeting officially. Like this, they were given public space to use the internet, develop creative projects (for example break-dance performances) and learn to take responsibility. These positive results will undoubtedly be continued even after the official end of the project.

#### **b. Minority issues and confidence-building measures among the different ethnic groups**

Montenegro is a multiethnic region in the Balkans. The last population Census showed that 43,16% are Montenegrin, 31,99% Serbs, 5,06% Albanians, 7,77% Bosnians, 3,97% Muslims, 1,1% Croatians and 6,98% others. As far as minority rights are concerned, they have hardly been developed in Montenegro so far. Even today there is no law on national minorities (there is a draft that has been changed seven times). Therefore, there is a high need for activities in this area.

The LDA projects on minority issues were in September 2002. Altogether three public debates, one round table, one seminar and one conference were organised in Niksic, Kotor and Rozaje, during which representatives of ethnic minorities and the majority population were able to share their experiences and attitudes towards each other. The project also included advocacy training for minority groups.

The objective of the different activities was to promote interethnic dialogue between minority groups and the majority population throughout Montenegro where cultural diversity is common. The LDA prepared the events with the support of some partner NGOs that had already gained experience in minority issues in the past. Other topics that were discussed included:

- > The legislative framework
- > Education on issues of local self-government in multiethnic communities
- > Minority rights, right to employment and protection of property
- > Minority rights, state government and the NGO sector
- > Minority rights and education
- > Public information on minority languages, rights and obligations

The results of the main debates have been collected in a booklet on



*Conference with representatives of minority groups.*

minority issues in Montenegro "Who are they?". The publication deals with different aspects of minority rights with respect to their specific situation in different areas of Montenegro. Moreover, the legal background is depicted in detail including suggestions for changes and amendments in order to correspond to international law. The publication was and will be continuously used as educational material, also in other activities.

### **c. Strengthening Local Authorities**

In order to build up local capacities, three seminars were organised for representatives of local authorities in the municipalities of Niksic, Ulcinj and Bijelo Polje. Mr. Peter Watkins, Director of Central Services of District Council of Huntingdonshire, United Kingdom was invited as a guest lecturer. He presented experiences from the UK, in particular with respect to political management, ethical frameworks and code of conducts as well as decision-making processes at the local level.

Other concrete objectives were to educate local self-government employees on urban planning (comparative study with Germany) and to discuss possible forms of local self-government. Through two seminars organised in cooperation with the German partner city of Lingen, experts from Germany exchanged best practices with local experts from the municipalities of Niksic, Danilovgrad and Savnik.

In 2005, the activities moved towards local economic development as one aspect of local capacity building with the delegate and several project managers participating in several trainings. Further activities in this area are planned for 2006.

In September 2005, a training for LDAs and for civil society was organised on EU Affairs, in Ulcinj, Montenegro. For four days, the trainers received skills and information to be multiplied in their LDAs and NGOs and in particular as a final beneficiary, the local governments.

### **d. Transborder cooperation**

In order to rebuild the contacts with Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the LDA promoted transborder cooperation meetings dedicated to three



*Training with representatives of minority groups.*

target groups: local authorities, civil society and youth. The idea was also to exchange information on a regular basis and to create an electronic date base on transborder cooperation issues. The latter started in September 2005 (<http://lda-nk.org/modules.php?name=Downloads>) and is of course available for a large public in South East Europe.

As regards the three target groups, different activities were organised for each of them, starting with a seminar for young people "The cooperation between three sides" held in Bijela, Montenegro in November 2004. Participants from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia took part in the event that was organised in cooperation with the LDA in Mostar. The aim was that the young people got to know each other so that they could develop common projects. At the same time, they discussed topics such as conflict management with the help of the expert Tanja Tankosic Kelly from the Centre for Development of NGOS in Podgorica. A declaration was adopted at the end of the seminar on future activities for young people from these countries. Further activities such as two round tables were the direct follow-up.

Another activity implemented within field of transborder cooperation was a seminar on "Models of transborder cooperation - identification and development of concrete projects" held in July 2005. Young people and NGO representatives from Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina discussed current problems in transborder projects and how to improve the communication between young people, students' associations, universities, tourist organisations as well as local authorities between these countries.

#### **e. Partner Meetings**

In order to achieve better relations between local and international partners, the LDA Montenegro organised two partner meetings within this programme. During those meetings, the partners were informed about the main projects of the Agency and future plans and could exchange experiences between each other. Through this, the multilateral partnership could be strengthened. The first partner meeting was held in Niksic on 26 April 2002, one year after the opening. Another one was held in Rome in March 2005.

## **f. Promotional Material**

All the activities of the LDA Montenegro spread through different media and means of communication:

- > a website was created for the LDA
- > the programme was presented at different European local and regional authorities including the Swiss Union of Municipalities, Canton Basel Stadt and FEDRE in Geneva.
- > Participation of the Delegate in the Plenary Session of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities in June 2002
- > Contact with the media in Montenegro
- > Production of a video on the activities of the LDA and ALDA including transborder co-operation issues
- > Publication of the activities of ALDA and LDAs in Serbo-Croatian

## **Evaluation**

Through the Irish funds, a new Local Democracy Agency could be opened in Niksic, covering the whole of Montenegro. A local team of project managers and a delegate have managed to build up the Agency as a self-sustained NGO with a variety of projects. The LDA has reached an excellent level of recognition of its activities in Montenegro and abroad and the lead partner is fully committed to the LDA activities through regular contact with the staff.

Stable network of international partners include:

East Staffordshire Borough Council (UK, lead partner), Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (I), City of Neuchatel (CH), City of Lingen (D), Association Bretton-Montenegro (F), City of Ancona (I)

The concrete activities financed within the Irish fund all supported the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the values of the Council of Europe. The objectives and results pursued through the projects were all in line with the objectives laid down in Recommendation 104 (2001) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the situation of local and regional democracy in the Former Yugoslavia.

All in all, it can be stated that the projects in Montenegro helped to

empower young people, foster intercultural dialogue/exchange, built up capacities of local authorities and civil society organisations, strengthened minority rights, raised awareness on several local governance and human rights issues and strengthened the networking between various communities in Montenegro and abroad.

The main activities implemented by the LDA Montenegro in chronological order:

- > **11 May 2001**  
Inauguration of the LDA Montenegro
- > **May 2001**  
Conference on the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Niksic
- > **22 April 2002**  
Partner Meeting in Niksic
- > **25 October - 3 November 2002**  
Youth work week/study visit in Utttoxeter, UK
- > **8 November 2002**  
Debate on Minority Rights in Rozaje
- > **30 November - 1 December 2002**  
Establishment of a Steering Committee for young trainees in Bar
- > **14 December 2002**  
Debate on Minority Rights in Tuzi
- > **9 February 2003**  
Conference in Kotor "Participation of young people in the decision-making process"
- > **11 February 2003**  
Debate in Tivat "Place and Role of Croatian Minorities in the Montenegrin Society"
- > **17 - 18 February 2003**  
Second Steering Committee for young trainees in Kotor
- > **20 February 2003**  
Conference in Rozaje "Participation of young people in the decision-making process"
- > **22 February 2003**  
Conference in Niksic "Participation of young people in the decision-making process"
- > **10 March 2003**  
Seminar in Niksic "Urban Planning - Montenegro and Germany"

*Transborder seminar with NGOs.*



- > **11 March 2003**  
Seminar in Tivat "Local self-government systems - Montenegro and Germany"
- > **25 October 2004**  
Round Table in Bar "Multiethnic Relations in Bar - Today and Tomorrow"
- > **27 October 2004**  
Round Table in Pljevlja "Pljevlja - Interethnic relations and confidence-building between different ethnic groups"
- > **8 November 2004**  
Round Table in Berane "Minority Rights and Interethnic Relations in Berane"
- > **20 - 21 November 2004**  
Seminar in Mostar (BiH) "The co-operation between three sides"
- > **12 - 14 December 2004**  
Capacity building seminars for representatives of local authorities in Niksic, Ulcinj and Bijelo Polje
- > **24 - 27 February 2005**  
Seminar in Ulcinj "Minority rights and confidence building measures for different ethnic groups"
- > **22 March Rome 2005**  
Partner meeting in Rome, Italy
- > **18 June 2005/11 October 2005**  
participation of two senior trainers and delegate in trainings on local economic development
- > **22 - 24 July 2005**  
Seminar in Kutor Muo "Models of transborder cooperation - identification and development of concrete projects"
- > **26 - 27 July 2005**  
Regional Conference in Kotor Muo "Minority rights on the local level"
- > **10 September 2005**  
Database started on transborder co-operation
- > **September 2005**  
Ulcinj, training of trainers on EU Affairs



## »» LDA Central and Southern Serbia

The Local Democracy Agency in Central and Southern Serbia (LDACSS) was opened on 23 and 24 November 2001. The LDA is operating in Nis, Serbia's second biggest city, as well as in Kragujevac, Kraljevo and Leskovac. The projects were implemented in the four different towns in order to improve also the network of cities at the local level.

The main activities involved the empowerment of young people to have them participate more actively in the decision-making processes; trans-border cooperation between Serbia, Bulgaria and the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and minority/refugee issues. In addition, the LDACSS decided to work on economic development models and to raise awareness for disabled people and their needs.

### a. Strengthening local authorities

The LDACSS worked in the field of strengthening local democracy thanks to training and exchange of experiences of the cities involved.

Six seminars for local authorities were organised on the following topics:

- 1) decentralisation and regionalisation
- 2) local authorities and environmental protection
- 3) co-operation with civil society: strategic cross sectoral partnership development
- 4) definition of the roles of and function of local officials
- 5) public information and transparency of local administration



#### 6) Land register reform as a precondition for direct investment and economic development

The Charter on local self-government was translated into local languages together with other seminar material.

#### **b. Involvement of young people in the decision-making process at the local level**

The activities in this area aimed at developing capacities of local young people to be included in the decision-making process at the local level. The following activities were organised:

- > selection of young representatives from Central and Southern Serbia already active in civil society or local politics
- > training in the partner cities with the support of young people of the partner region
- > Steering Committee of the young trainees
- > Definition of an action plan with the local authorities for the participation of young in the decision-making process at the local level
- > Training for local authorities organized by the trainees
- > Pilot activities in the participating local authorities
- > Exchange of views with young people from Carlow, Ireland
- > International exchanges with young people from partner cities.

#### **c. Models of local economic development/sustainable development**

An overall strategy on environmental development activities was identified as well as cross-sectoral partnerships between different actors of society established. Further, one of the main needs in this area was to ensure a land register reform. The rural area around the national park in the municipality of Raska was identified as a priority area for strengthening local authorities. Therefore, several round tables and workshops were organised in summer 2002 with the relevant actors. As a result of these, a permanent working group of experts was established which dealt with sustainable development in the area of the national park including six municipalities. In addition, a leaflet on environmental protection targeted at children was produced.

The LDA supported the development of local skills and capacities and promoted the setting-up of a group of municipal civil servants.

*The Delegate, Milijana Merdovic, helped car mechanic Osman Vasic to open his own garage.*



#### **d. Minorities and refugees**

Being located in an area which is still very much affected by refugees, the programme developed a project for promoting their integration and return. The activities started off with two assessments of the condition and needs of vulnerable groups in Nis, Leskovac and Kraljevo. They indicated that support was needed to support the integration of minorities in these areas.

One part of the programme was rather theoretical in form of debates on intercultural dialogue and training seminars. However, a second part was much more practical, namely a group of 35 Roma received education on different crafts professions and were then given technical and financial support to start their own micro-businesses.

#### **e. Transborder co-operation activities**

The projects aimed at establishing first contacts between local authorities, journalists, young people as well as economic, academic and civil society actors from Bulgaria, Serbia and the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Therefore, a joint cross-border vision for a wider regional development strategy was initiated through the creation of a cross-border Council with regular Steering Committee meetings and seminars on educational/cultural cooperation, environmental protection and economic sustainable development. Like this a Euroregion was agreed between more than 60 municipalities.

Further, a database on socio-economic cross-border and socio-cultural cooperation were and a website for cross-border cooperation set-up ([www.nis.org.yu/euroregion](http://www.nis.org.yu/euroregion)).

#### **f. Enhancing the cooperation at the local level through partnership**

Several partner meetings for the action planning, evaluation and needs/results analysis were organised. The Delegate of the LDACSS was also involved in some internal networking with other LDAs through the participation in a summer school in Ohrid in July 2002 and the regular attendance of the Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

### **g. Awareness-raising on disabled people**

A campaign was organised in spring 2005 to raise awareness on the importance to include disabled children in today's Serbia in a better way. Four workshops were organised in primary and secondary schools and a TV documentary was produced with the help of the children. In addition, an art exhibition was organised with art works made by children with disabilities and pupils from regular schools.

### **h. European integration**

A series of five seminars for the departments of public affairs, international relations and the Cabinets of the Mayor of the City of Nis were organised in spring 2003. The aim was to educate the city officials and administrators on issues related to European integration and practical techniques on how to develop international relations. The seminars had the objective to prepare local authorities from Serbia to apply more and more European standards in their administration.

The projects were completed with a number of promotion activities in the streets of Nis including a "euro stand" on the main square and a training on "Bringing a case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg" in March 2005. The demand for the latter training was very high, since Serbia and Montenegro had ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in December 2003 after having become a member state of the Council of Europe. Many citizens, however, still do not know what kind of new rights the Convention gives to them.

### **i. Partnership with Carlow County Council**

Through the Irish funds the partnership with Carlow County Council, lead partner of the LDA Central and Southern Serbia until 2004 could be improved. Several study visits to Ireland were organised.

### **j. Promotional material and PR activities**

- > Website including cross-border consultations started in September 2002
- > Leaflet on land register reform (Serbian/English)



*Disabled people and social workers from the social cooperative in Kragujevac that was opened with the help of the LDA Central and Southern Serbia.*

- > Documentary video on young Roma issues
- > Euroregion website (Serbian/English/Bulgarian/Macedonian)
- > Leaflet on environmental protection in the Kopaonik Area for children
- > Documentary video on the study trip to Carlow
- > Participation in the COMPA Fair in Bologna, Italy

## Evaluation

Through the Irish funds, a new Local Democracy Agency could be opened in Nis, covering the whole of Central and Southern Serbia, in particular the cities of Nis, Leskovac, Kraljevo and Kragujevac. Today the Agency is self-sustained and has started a variety of different projects, also outside the funding of the Irish programme.

Stable network of international partners include:

Suresnes (France), Carlow County Council (Ireland), City of Reggio Emilia (Italy), Municipality of Vefsen (Norway), Municipality of Saltdal (Norway), Tavolo Trentino per la Serbia, Association of the LDA Zavidovici, Citizen Committee of Ivrea, Codess Sociale Venezia, Institute for Public Administration - Dublin, Italian Consortium of Solidarity, Cités Unies France, City of Barcelona (Spain), Kent County Council (UK), Balkan Assist Association, East West Institute, the cities of Nis, Kragujevac, Kraljevo and Leskovac, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities.

All in all, the projects in Nis helped to empower young people, foster intercultural dialogue/exchange including transborder cooperation, built up capacities of local authorities and civil society organisations, strengthened minority rights, raised awareness on disabled people and human rights issues including European integration. In addition, the projects opened a new perspective to Roma.

The main activities implemented by the LDACSS in chronological order:

- > **23 and 24 November 2001**  
Inauguration of the LDACSS
- > **6 July 2002**  
Workshop on land reform in Nis

- > **21 October, 29 November 2002**  
Two workshops on environmental issues in the National Park of Kopaonik
- > **July, September and October 2002**  
Steering Committee meetings on transborder cooperation
- > **From September 2002 onwards**  
scholarship programme for young experts on local reforms and development processes.
- > **September, October 2002**  
three workshops on environmental protection and education with primary and high school children
- > **16 - 17 September in Zajecar**  
**20 - 21 October in Nis**  
**25 - 26 November 2002 in Soko Banja**  
three seminars on regional intermunicipal cooperation for economic development
- > **14 - 18 October 2002**  
study visit of LDA staff to Carlow
- > **28 March 2003**  
**4 - 5 April 2003**  
**11 - 12 April 2003**  
**25 - 26 April 2003**  
five seminars on international relations and European integration in Nis
- > **7 May 2003**  
High school competition in Raska and study visit to Carlow, Ireland
- > **September 2003**  
start of an internship programme for young graduates (in the local administration and media in Kragujevac)
- > **October 2004**  
Regional Meeting of Youth Centres connected to the LDAS in Central and Southern Serbia, Kosovo, Prijedor and Zavidovici (Kraljevo)
- > **October - December 2004**  
four workshops on conflict management and participatory planning (in Leskovac and Kraljevo)
- > **November 2004**  
Participation in the Compa Fair in Bologna, Italy
- > **November and December 2004**  
Assessment of the situation of minorities in Central and Southern Serbia

- > **December 2004**  
four-day training on transborder co-operation between Serbia, Bulgaria and the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"
- > **26 February 2005**  
Conference on economic and sustainable development (Kragujevac)
- > **27 February 2005**  
Partner Meeting in Nis
- > **January - March 2005**  
training of Roma in different craft professions
- > **January - March 2005**  
training of refugees and internally displaced people in craft skills
- > **March 2005**  
Training "Bringing a case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg" in Nis
- > **May 2005**  
Awareness raising campaign on disabilities through various workshops in high schools



## >> LDA Kosovo

The LDA Kosovo was inaugurated on 15 February 2003 in the city of Gjilan/Gnjilane. The main aim of this new Agency was to develop local democracy and civil society in the region which still does not have a stable status, in particular:

- > to enhance the participation of minorities and young people in public life
- > to establish and stimulate transborder cooperation
- > to strengthen local authorities
- > to enhance the level of cooperation between communities and socio-economic actors through partnership

The setting-up of and the implementation of activities by the Local Democracy Agency was in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, without prejudging the development concerning the future development of Kosovo. It therefore contributed also to the accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the Council of Europe in spring 2003 and promoted confidence-building measures, civil society and local development in the region. The Agency works closely with UNMIK and the OSCE in the area of institution-building and training.

The City of Gjilan/Gnjilane was chosen since there is a Serb minority and Albanian refugees from the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". The city administration was from the beginning willing to promote understanding between the different ethnic groups, which was one of the prerequisites to open an Agency in the city.



*During a transborder training.*

The main projects realised through the Irish Aid fund dealt with the participation of youth in the decision-making process, transborder co-operation, strengthening local authorities and micro-economic development.

#### **a. Participation of young people in the decision-making process**

Working with young people has over the past three years become one of the priorities of the LDA in Kosovo. The main activities included first of all an analysis of the present situation through an opinion poll at the beginning of 2003. This was followed by several awareness raising activities, in particular trainings and, debates. The main objective was to enable young people and elected representatives to express themselves on the role that youth can play in the political decision-making process at local level local.

The youth issue became in particular topical again during the new outbreak of violence in March 2004. The LDA Kosovo reacted with a debate on the role of youth during the March events in the presence of the Mayors of Kosovo.

#### **b. Transborder cooperation**

The activities with young people were also connected to the transborder projects. On 25 and 26 September 2004 a cross-border forum on NGOs was organised in Kumanovo in, the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" during which one workshop was devoted to youth issues. The others treated education, women, and the media. The event was very successful with more than 700 people being involved, many of them coming from local and international NGOs, municipalities and international organisations.

The main transborder activities focused on the cities of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Preshevo (Serbia) and Kumanovo (FYROM).

#### **c. Strengthening local authorities and civil society**

After the outbreak of violence in March 2004, the LDA Kosovo participated in the crisis committee which drafted several reports/recommendations on the situation. In April 2004, a meeting between Albanian and Serb Mayors was organised to discuss the March events. Interethnic dialogue and reconciliation was one of the main topics



when working with local authorities and civil society organisations. In May 2004, a trip was organised to Strasbourg during the session of the Congress in order to reintegrate Serb elected people in the Association of the Kosovo Municipalities. This visit proved to be very successful for the interethnic relations.

Another topic which has been at stake in the past month is the status of Kosovo. In June 2004, the LDA Kosovo organised a meeting with Kosovo Mayors on the "Standards application plan for Kosovo (UN and EU)" in cooperation with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities.

It was important to include the citizens in this debate. Therefore, a campaign was organised with the OSCE and the Association of the Kosovo municipalities to inform citizens in a better way. 20,000 posters were distributed in all cities and villages of Kosovo in November 2004.

#### **d. Economic development and minorities**

The topic "economic development" was also included in the transborder forum in Kumanovo. Local NGOs and local authorities were involved in the drafting of a proposal for a working group on economic development. In addition, all NGOs active in this area were registered by the LDA for future activities.

In addition, in 2005, the LDA started to consult local enterprises on how they could find partners abroad, how they can use the internet for their research and how to organise visits and participate in international fairs.

The following enterprises profited from the programme:

- 1) Dea, an enterprise that is putting sparkling water in bottles, creating 38 jobs.
- 2) Eksimor, production of rugs using Turkish half-finished products. Project of buying these materials in Germany to make rugs.
- 3) Magic ice, enterprise for ice cream, creation of 12 jobs. Project to use the refrigerator of the enterprise to keep meat produced in Kosovo.
- 4) Aqua Therme, materials for heating, Building up relationships with the European enterprise COMAP. This led to the signature of a commercial contract and in the long run a production area will be created. At the moment they are working on the development of warming water and heating by sun.

- 5) Eng Office, installations of sanitary facilities. The organisation of trips to industrial fairs regarding buildings.
- 6) Ataq Consulting, internet provider. Organisation of the visits to professional fairs to do research on information materials to be transferred by internet radio. New jobs were created through this.
- 7) Hotours, development of relationship between the professional assembly of hotels in Kosovo and alike assemblies in the Balkans and Europe.

## Evaluation

The projects financed by DCI helped to empower young people in Kosovo - an important process for the future of the region. Youth issues have become one of the priorities of the Agency also for future projects with other funding. The Agency in Gjilan/Gnjilane has built up a sustainable network of partners on the international and local level. It does not only work in the city of Gjilan/Gnjilane, but also in the surrounding areas, even in the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". The Forum in Kumanovo is the best example of this successful transborder cooperation where interethnic dialogue and reconciliation was fostered.

The stable network of partners include:

Kosovo-Ensemble (France), Municipality of Gjilan (Kosovo), Equipe de Paix dans les Balkans (France), City of Chelmsford (UK), City of Arun (UK), Youth Planet (France), Mouvement pour une Alternative Non Violente (France), Maison de la citoyenne Mondiale (France), ALFA, AFASAK (France), East-West Institute.

The main activities implemented by the LDACSS in chronological order:

### > February 2003

inauguration of the LDA

### > Beginning 2003

Meeting with mayors: "the place of youth in the decision making process at local level" through an opinion survey

*Albanian houses  
in the Serbian part of Mitrovica, Kosovo.*



> **16 February 2003**

Awareness raising and training to survey techniques among the population, attended by an elected person and young people

> **22 February and 8 March 2003**

Follow-up of the training and application on the field.

> **29 - 30 March and 5-6 of April 2004**

Survey

> **March 2004**

Observation of the role of the municipalities during the violent March events

> **March, April, and July**

contacts with the cities of Gjilan (Kosovo), Preshevo (Serbia) and Kumanovo (FYROM) and CoE with the aim to work on the transborder cooperation programme

> **April 2004**

Organization with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities and OSCE of a meeting between the Albanian and Serb Mayors about the March events

> **May 2004**

Reintegration of Serb elected in the Association of the Kosovo Municipalities during the meeting of the CLARE (COE) in May in Strasbourg

> **May/June 2004**

Preparation meeting for the cross-border forum in Kumanovo

> **June 2004**

First processing of the data collected through the survey

> **28 June 2004**

Meeting debate youth/elected councillors

> **6 July 2004**

Training/debate: participation in local political decision-making by carrying out opinion surveys.

> **July/September 2004**

Identification of all NGOs active in the areas of local development and cross-border projects

> **July 2004**

Organization with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities of a meeting with Kosovo Mayors on the subject: "Standards application plan for Kosovo (UN and EU)"

> **25 and 26 September 2004**

Cross-border forum of NGOs in Kumanovo

> **September 2004**

Preparation with the OSCE and the Association of the Kosovo municipalities of a campaign in order to invite the citizens to take part in the public debates with their Municipality

> **throughout 2005**

Consulting for local enterprises on the organisation on European fairs. About 12 enterprises took part in these activities which contributed to the economic development of the region of Gjilan/Gnjilane.

> **24 and 25 September 2005**

transborder fair for youth NGOs from Gjilan/Gnjilane (Kosovo), Kumanovo ("Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), Presovo (Serbia). Speakers and participants from the Council of Europe, the Youth Centre, the Centre for Ressources Salto Youth SEE were present and a debate on the future of the region was organised.