

## *HAPPY BIRTHDAY ALDA!*

The celebration of the 10th anniversary of ALDA took place at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels on the 27th of May with the presence of more than 100 representatives of local authorities, institutions and NGOs from all over Europe.



**The Birthday Cake**

The Birthday Cake of ALDA was brought all the way from the city of Bydgoszcz in Poland, member of the Bureau of ALDA. The position of ALDA is held by Mrs. Imislava GORSKA, from the Office of the Mayor of Bydgoszcz. Bydgoszcz has a famous chocolate and biscuits company in town and they offered the wonderful present to all the members of the Association.



The President of ALDA, Mr. Per VINTHER, presented the upmost relevant achievement of the Association and its members and LDAs since its establishment and thanked the Council of Europe and the Congress for the support given throughout these years, in the field of local democracy in South Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe too. A special emphasis was given to the essential role that ALDA is has been playing these last years in filling the gap between citizens and European institutions, contributing actively to the objectives set by the programme "Europe for Citizens", of the Directorate General for Education and Culture.

"ALDA is an important support for our programme in Europe and in the new acceding countries, like Croatia, Macedonia and Albania, now eligible for the programme", said Mr. Risto RAIVIO, Head of the Unit Europe for Citizens at the DGEAC. "We appreciate ALDA, which already contains in its own diversified membership, the component local authorities and civil society. They have experience and are hungry to work in this field", confirmed M. Raivio.



The important panel of the X° celebration included also the important presence of the President of the Congress, Mr. Jan MICALLEF, who reminded the long lasting cooperation with the LDAs and ALDA. He also requested a new form of join activities more dedicated to reach common objectives : those of the Congress and those of the grown up European NGO that ALDA represents today. On behalf of the Conference of the INGOs, its President, M. Jean Marie HEYDT, reminded the role of NGOs in promote the European identity and to be active, constructive and positive part of the construction of Europe. He thanked ALDA for being active and eager to learn and to share its experience with the other INGOs. ALDA is member of the Conference in 2008 and already represented by its Director, Mrs. Antonella VALMORBIDA, as Chair of the important Committee on Democracy and Civil Society.

The key note speaker, M. Francesco JORI, journalist of the Group Espresso and professor of political communication at the University of Padova, focused on the essential role of communication and real contact with citizens and communities, who have the full right to be properly informed about the decisions and the role that Europe has today. "Europe needs intermediary organisations - which are neither political parties nor States - who could dialogue and be in touch directly for with citizens. The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies, with its networks and the LDAs has an essential task in this. They gave evidences they can make it", said M. JORI.

The whole experience of ALDA was reported by Mrs. Antonella VALMORBIDA, Director of ALDA since its creation. "In these 10 years, we learned that there is more money than good and efficient instruments to promote democracy and participation. There is a great demand to promote Local Governance and citizens' participation but we need to prove that we are making a real change ! And I guess that our success is due to the fact that we do not only talk about democracy but we are actually able to do ...it . "

She also focused on the capacities of groups of citizens and "natural" leaders, who are often not in the official circuits of powers. ALDA gives them a voice. ALDA is growing and the growth should include quality and efficiency.





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