

## **LDA SISAK: FOR 15 YEARS KEY PLAYER FOR THE GROWTH OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

"The reforms that the Croatian government will finalize in the next twenty months to prepare the country to the European appointment in July 2013 should be shared with civil society, and European institutions will continue to monitor the situation, which is essential for the completion of the process act". The warning came without metaphor from Ambassador Paul Vandoren, Head of EU Delegation in Zagreb, during the ceremony organized to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment, in Sisak, of the Local Democracy Agency.

Ambassador Vandoren has praised the work done by the ADL during these difficult years and noted the level of cooperation with the municipal administration, which has led to significant results, including the award of "12 star label" given by Congress of Local and regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to the city of Sisak for his commitment to the growth of local democracy.

"But the dialogue that exists today, especially at local level - stressed the Head of EU delegation in Croatia - should evolve in a partnership, a prerequisite for social cohesion and sharing of responsibility. We know that the Croatian government adopted new laws and amended its constitution to not miss the opportunity of entry into the European Community, but often the civil society is not consulted, and the Croatian the governors must remedy in the coming months".

It is not entirely a surprise, this position. It is known that for its entry in 2013, Zagreb will be subject to close supervision because he has to finish the reforms demanded by Europe.

There is no doubt that the future accession of Croatia opens a new chapter for the countries of Western Balkans with a European vocation, and that despite some "Euro skepticism" or "Euro realism" as some call it, there is a high expectation in the completion of this process, especially among the population.

The progress made by Croatia is evident. Sisak, the tenth city in Croatia with more than 55 000 inhabitants, capital of the Sisak Moslavina County, which borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina, is an example of the progress reached in recent years and its image is very different from the one of fifteen years ago when it was established the ADL.

The ruin of the conflict, particularly intense towards the borders with Slavonia, where the Serbian troops created the Republic of Krajina, and Bosnia, are a distant memory and the process of pacification and democratization has reached optimum levels.

"I am proud of the success of this ADL - stressed during the ceremony the Mayor of Sisak Dinko Pintaric - and recognition of the 12 stars label to our city, despite being a small step for European democracy, is a great step for our beautiful Sisak".

At the official ceremony held on November 4, organized by the ADL, in cooperation with ALDA, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies, the Congress and the City, also attended Barbara Toce, member of the Congress and Deputy Mayor of Pedaso (I), the Ambassador of Belgium to Croatia, Nancy Adeline Marie Rossignol, the Ambassador of Norway to Croatia, Henrik Ofstad, Per Vinther, President of ALDA and Antonella Valmorbida, Director of ALDA, as well as Diego Bottacin, Councilor of the Veneto Region, for many years Mayor of Mogliano Veneto, at the time city lead partners of the LDA.

"During these fifteen years the LDA of Sisak has developed more than one hundred projects, promoting values of tolerance, human rights, multiculturalism, cooperation, active citizenship and combating discrimination, involving directly more than fifteen thousand people and establishing itself as one of the key actors of the civil society in the democratic development of the city and the Sisak Moslavina County" said Paula Rauzan President of the LDA.

The conference was also an occasion for thinking about the future of the three LDA now active in Croatia (apart from Sisak, Osijek and Verteneglio-Brtonigla).

"With the accession of Croatia to Europe in 2013 - said Antonella Valmorbida, Director of ALDA - the LDA of this country will no longer exist as they are now structured, and will assume a new role. The experience will certainly be available for further growth of local democracy and European values."

The reflection on their future has been launched and there is time to define together with all their partners form and content of the activity that they will develop once materialized the entry into the EU.

In addition to the international conference, Sisak was selected by ALDA to host the Annual LDAs Delegates meeting and the Annual Meeting of the Lead Partners Representatives of the LDAs (3 - 5 November).