



ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCIES

With the support of



REPORT OF THE LDA GEORGIA OPENING CEREMONY Civic Centre, Kutaisi, Georgia, 8th September 2006

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1. Report of the meeting

Welcome address by Mr Per Vinther, ALDA Vice President on the behalf of Mr Gianfranco Martini, ALDA President

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a particular pleasure and privilege for me - on behalf of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies, ALDA, - to welcome you here in The Land of the Colchi today for the official opening of a new Local Democracy Agency. This day is a very special one for ALDA. We are namely also opening a new chapter in our history by extending our geographical area of activities from the Balkans to the South Caucasus. When we all look back some years from now we will hopefully realise that this was also a very special day for Kutaisi and for its citizens in particular. It is indeed a pleasure to see so many people here who have participated actively in the preparations to establish an LDA in Kutaisi and are committed to supporting its activities in the future be it from local, regional, and national authorities or from civil society.

I wish especially to mention Professor Madonna Megrelishvili, chairperson of the Kutaisi-Newport International Association, who has been supporting and encouraging us with tireless energy from the outset. But many others deserve our gratitude and recognition for helping prepare this day whether from Georgia, that is Kutaisi and Tbilisi, from the Council of Europe, or from our own organisation, such as our project manager, Martial Paris.

In a few minutes I will give the floor to a number of representatives of the City of Kutaisi, of international organisations etc., and very importantly to the representatives of the coming partners of LDA Kutaisi without whose support and commitment no LDA can do meaningful work. But it will indeed have to be a long-term commitment in order for the process to be successful.

It is particularly encouraging to see that Georgia's Capital, Tbilisi, through its twinning with Nantes will be among the partners, together with Nantes itself, Monfalcone, Newport, and a number of others who are still sorting out how best to support the LDA Kutaisi

I want to thank them warmly not only for their presence here today to embellish the opening ceremony but also for their support and commitment which is not a given thing in times of budgetary constraints for everyone. I ask them all to bring back to their mayor and city council our heartfelt thanks.

Let me conclude my opening words by conveying warm greetings to you from our esteemed president of ALDA, Mr Gianfranco Martini, who for reasons of health could not travel all the way to Kutaisi – unfortunately thereby depriving himself of the wonderful Georgian hospitality, the beauty of Georgia's landscape and women, and not least – the excitement of driving on Georgian roads!

I will tread his message to the participants:

"The preparation of this new agency is been very laborious but with the aid of the Georgians friends, the Local Authorities, the country and his citizens, the attended result is been achieved also with the important support of the Europe Council and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

For these reasons I'm very pleased but also regretted because I can stay with you personally but I'm represented very well.

My principal satisfaction is realize that the opening of 12th agencies proves that the ALDA activities in the Balkan is been very important and now we are able to broaden this experience also in an other place: the Caucasian region.

In this country there are a lot of problems about democracy, minorities respect, and protection of the Human Rights, economic and civil development.

However, I wish that the new agency, with the collaboration of the Georgian citizens, can reply to our expectations in order to defend the Democracy, the Freedom and the economic, social and cultural development. They are the essential elements in order to realize the necessary conditions to agree in the UE.

Wish you all the best for the future development in Georgia."

Thank you for your attention. I will now give the floor to the first of a rather long list of speakers but I ask you to pay attention to their words which I am sure will demonstrate to you their commitment to this new "animal" in Georgia, Local Democracy Agency Kutaisi.

Mr Mayor, the floor is yours!

Welcome address by the Mayor of Kutaisi, Mr. Chogovadze and Chairman of the City Council, Mr Katamadze.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear guests

I have a great honour to greet you on behalf of all the Kutaisi citizens. I'll try to make my speech brief and relevant to today's ceremony.

Before touching the essential topic, I'd like to speak generally about Kutaisi, the city which is the host of many honourable guests today.

Kutaisi, one of the oldest cities in the world, is situated on the lowlands of western Georgia, on the both sides of the river Rioni. Archaeologists and historians argue about its age even today. It is about 3500 years old. Kutaisi was the first capital city of the united Georgian Kingdom. As a symbole of this fact St. Mary Cathedral was built by Bagrat the III. This cathedral was added to the World Treasury list and UNESCO took it under its patronage.

Geographically Kutaisi has a very good location. The distance to the seaport Poti is only 90 kilometers and the city has an international airport "Kopitnari".

The population of the city (once the second in Georgia) is about 180 000.

Kutaisi has always been one of the most important cultural centers of the country. Centuries ago Kutaisi was the place where one of the oldest academies in the world was established, which continues functioning even for the time being. There is also a quite prospective state university in Kutaisi, we have three theatres and a conservatoire.

Our city has a great experience of international relations. Kutaisi is twinned with 16 cities of Europe, USA and Asia: Vitoria Gasteis, (Spain) Nikea (Greece), Columbia (Missouri, USA), Monterey (France), Karsi (Turkey), Plovdiv (Bulgaria), Ashkelon (the State of Israel), Samson (Turkey), Rashti (the Islamic Republic of Iran), Ganja (Azerbaijan), Gyumri (Armenia), and four Ukrainian cities (Donetsk, Lvov, Krakow, Zaporozhye).

Kutaisi has been the member of the Twinned Cities International Organization since 1996.

I realize the importance of LDA Georgia not only for our city, but the whole country. I hope this process will help our society to appreciate western democratic values.

I'd like to express my gratitude to the EU, ALDA, Newport-Kutaisi Twinning Association, Kutaisi-Newport International Association and all the people who took part in the process of LDA Georgia opening in Kutaisi.

Welcome address by Mr Katamadze, Chairman of Kutaisi City Council

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear guests

I'd like to greet all the participants of today's ceremony: the representatives of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies, partner organizations, the European Union and European Parliament, the members of the Newport-Kutaisi Twinning Association, the representatives of the local government and Kutaisi-Newport international Association.

I have great honour to be one of the participants in the process of opening the Local Democracy Agency Georgia in Kutaisi. This is a unique event, when the authorities of such an important organization have decided to found their branch exactly in Kutaisi, and not in the capital of the country. I think it is a part of right policy of ALDA in the regions with not so strong democratic values. Our country is still lacking such values. The situation is alarming especially in the peripheral places. If we want to start building democracy, we should start this process from the regions. I hope the LDA Georgia with the help of the international organizations and partners will challenge democracy developing processes on the both local and national level.

I'd like to mention that this process is not new-born. Kutaisi has always been trying to establish friendly relations on the international level. Everything began years ago, when Kutaisi and Newport authorities decided to sign the memorandum of understanding between the two cities. Both sides established the organizations, which backed them in developing friendly relations. The collaboration between the Newport-Kutaisi Twinning Association and the Kutaisi-Newport International Association and experience gathered during the years made the ALDA authorities think about Kutaisi as the host city of LDA Georgia. I think we should be grateful to these organizations.

Kutaisi continues building relations with international institutions, but we still have great problems on the local level in different aspects (mostly concentrating in the economical and democracy building processes). I'd like to turn the focus on the issue of local democracy development. This topic is the most important one in the time of local government elections. Despite of the fact that the general situation in this aspect is gradually improving in the country, I think the process is quite slow, especially in the regions. I can't speak about the definite reasons, but I hope founding LDA Georgia in Kutaisi, will also carry the concept of challenging democratic and transparent elections at least in our city. The level of democracy of elections in the country determines the whole democratic level of the state. That's why it is so important to have such an organization in the city. I will be glad to realize that our international partners share their experience and knowledge for conducting this process in a proper way.

As far as I know, the local organization will work on the whole territory of the country including Abkhazia and South Osetia. It will help in the process of building the country with a strong society, based on western democratic values.

Of course I have to express my gratitude to: the European Union, Association of the Local Democracy Agencies, the Newport-Kutaisi Twinning Association, and the Kutaisi-Newport International Association.

I wish this project will work successfully in Kutaisi and all yours and, of course, our plans will come closer to reality as soon as possible.

I'll do my best to support this process.

Thank you very much.

Statement by the Mr Per Vinther, Vice President of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies: "The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies: A stakeholder in building democracy"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some of you may well be asking what we are doing here today and what is a Local Democracy Agency (LDA)?

Some years ago, the Congress of the Council of Europe adopted a rather critical report about the state of local self-government in Georgia. In the light of that report key people in the Congress asked the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies – ALDA to be short – to look into the possibility of copying in Georgia what we have successfully been doing in the Balkans for the last 13 years. In 2004, ALDA undertook two fact-finding missions to Georgia from which we concluded that our experience and working methods might indeed also be applied beneficially to this country.

I participated myself in both missions, mainly because I was sceptical about ALDA moving beyond the Balkans when we had not yet fully achieved our objectives there. In fact we do not even have an LDA in Albania - but we probably will from next year. However, I admit that I came away from the missions here convinced that we could and should set up an LDA in Georgia and the Governing Board of ALDA approved such a step, subject to finding the necessary partners. The partners have been found. The big moment has arrived.

And with this brief introduction, allow me to briefly present the past, present, and future of the Local Democracy Agencies.

When the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies was established in 1999, it brought together a network of Local Democracy Agencies in existence since 1993. The Local Democracy Agencies were set up by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities under the Council of Europe. Originally, the Agencies were conceived

to provide concrete local assistance and humanitarian aid to war-ravaged municipalities in the former Yugoslavia through partnerships with counterparts in Western Europe.

As the war in the Balkans ended, the focus of the Agencies shifted from crisis management to democratic reform. Nowadays, the mission of the Association and of the 11 Agencies is to contribute to the difficult task of re-building local communities, restoring respect for human rights, re-establishing and promoting tolerant and trust-based relationships within communities, especially within different ethnic groups.

However, from the beginning, the Association's and the Agencies' method has been the same: to partner with community experts and municipal representatives, or to put it another way, to use local efforts to meet local needs.

Since its founding, ALDA has grown from a small pilot programme to one of the most important local actors in promoting a stable, democratic South Eastern Europe. As the network co-ordinator, ALDA facilitates collaboration among 11 Local Democracy Agencies and over 200 members and partners, from 22 European countries, out of which a large number are local authorities.

How are the Agencies working?

The 11 Local Democracy Agencies cover ex-Yugoslavia by their presence in five countries: Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia including Kosovo, Montenegro, and the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". I want to stress the fact that these Agencies operate only in decentralised areas, where the presence of the international community is usually lower. Hence the reason to establish the 12th LDA in Kutaisi rather than Tbilisi.

The agencies are all independent non-government organisations and have all extensive autonomy to respond to local needs. So, they develop their own local projects according to the specific needs of the local authorities and populations, but they also take part in regional projects designed in the ALDA framework. Let me just mention training for local authorities on sustainable development issues or projects, which are fostering local economic development.

The Agencies are playing a role in the fields of local democracy and civil society with projects focusing on intercultural dialogue, trans-border co-operation, young people's participation in local public life, capacity-building, economic revitalisation or refugees. To sum up, they try to foster the development of an inclusive civil society. They also support community-based institutions with training and information services and facilitate other organisations' programmes by providing a forum for contacts and discussion and action.

Despite their diversity, the 11 Agencies all share a common methodology that stresses multilateral decentralised co-operation between local authorities and representatives of civil society. Town-twinning between Northern or Western European local authorities and their counterparts in the Balkans is one of the most efficient measures in this respect. This is indeed a concrete means to exchange best practices, expertise, know-how between organisations and institutions on a European-wide scale as far as local development is concerned.

So what is the role of ALDA?

In addition to coordinating 11 Agencies' activities, ALDA contributes to fundraising, provides them with technical, administrative and personal support, trains staff, maintains an information and publication centre, and represents members in dealing with international institutions and sponsors — especially the Council of Europe.

ALDA works closely with International Organisations including the National Associations of Local Authorities in South Eastern Europe (NALAS), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union, and the United Nations — particularly the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Here I should point out that ALDA and the Agencies have had a very close relationship with the Council of Europe since their very beginning. Firstly, it was its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities that decided to set up the Local Democracy Agencies. Secondly, nowadays, a formal working agreement with the Council of Europe ensures that ALDA and the Agencies manage their programmes in close co-operation with the Council, and that they assist this institution in implementing its programmes in South Eastern Europe. In return, the Council of Europe, in particular the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, provides ALDA and the Agencies with political, financial and logistical support.

However, despite its high level of international involvement, the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies remains committed to its original mandate to focus on supporting democracy on the local level.

Today, the Agencies and the Association are considered to be relevant and fundamental stakeholders in the stabilisation and democratisation process in the Balkans. They have succeeded in building an international recognition and their activities are funded by a wide variety of sources such as international organisations (the

Council of Europe, the European Commission, the United Nations), individual countries (Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, and Switzerland, among others), towns, private foundations, or individuals.

While ALDAs experience in the former Yugoslavia makes it an ideal partner for EU enlargement prospects in South Eastern Europe, the Association's expertise is applicable to other regions as well. To meet that need, ALDA has begun planning several pilot projects to implement its unique methodology and knowledge resources in countries neighbouring the European Union such as Belarus and the Russian Federation.

Since 2000, the Association has undertaken numerous activities to extend its geographical basis. In this framework, the widening of the network of Agencies is a permanent issue: the 11th Agency was opened in Mostar in November 2004 and we are - at long last – today opening the 12th Agency in Georgia.

Mrs Valmorbidia, Director of ALDA, will shortly tell you more about the intended work programme for LDA Kutaisi but let me conclude my intervention by offering some recommendations for efficient democratic governance at local level - based on the collective experience of the LDAs and ALDA:

Actions on the institutional level:

- make the necessary effort to implement provisions and laws, which are often already in place, in order to include an effective and fruitful contribution from civil society into the decision-making process by the local and regional authorities.
- focus on impartiality and professional merits in the employment policies of local authorities and other institutions related to them.
- reduce the distorting influence of political party loyalties on the normal and efficient implementation of duties and responsibilities of local and regional administration.
- prevent confusion in responsibilities between local and national level.
- fight against corruption and nepotism in the management and decision-making process at the local, regional and national level.
- identify rules and provisions to ensure transparency and accountability at the local level.
- increase the funds at the disposal of local authorities for actions benefiting the community and for technological improvements.

Actions on the level of local authorities (elected representatives and civil servants):

- provide locally elected representatives and civil servants with more expertise and knowledge (training, transfer of know-how, and exchange of best practices).

Actions on the level of civil society organisations:

- improve their knowledge of local authorities and their functioning.
- implement awareness campaigns to improve their capacity of advocacy and participation.

We in ALDA are convinced that putting these recommendations into practice the Local Democracy Agency Kutaisi will in the near future be able to make a visible impact on the life of the citizens of not only this city but the whole of Georgia.

I wish LDA Kutaisi, its manager and its board a highly successful future!

Thank you for your attention!

Statement by Mr Alain Chénard, Honorary Member and Former President of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

C'est un grand honneur de vous souhaiter la bienvenue, ici à Kutaisi, pour l'inauguration officielle de la première ADL hors des Balkans, en tant que représentant du Congrès des Pouvoirs Locaux et Régionaux du Conseil de l'Europe,

Depuis de longues années déjà, je suis impliqué dans la démocratie locale: comme ancien maire de la Ville de Nantes, comme membre honoraire et ancien président du Congrès du Conseil de l'Europe,

J'ai eu plusieurs fois l'occasion de me rendre en Géorgie, et je n'ai pas hésité à accepter l'invitation du Secrétariat du Congrès pour le représenter à cette occasion aujourd'hui, et qui me permet de revenir dans ce pays séduisant, envoûtant, fascinant.

Je soutiens le choix de l'AADL d'élargir son terrain de travail, et de s'orienter aussi vers le Caucase du Sud, et non plus exclusivement vers le Sud-Est de l'Europe. C'est une région, assez éloignée de l'Europe occidentale, qui a fortement besoin de plus de démocratie, de stabilité et de paix.

Il y avait déjà, au début des années 80, cette volonté de voir fleurir la démocratie au-delà du rideau de fer, quand j'ai décidé le flirt de Nantes avec Tbilissi. A la fin des années 80 l'histoire a enfin écrit une page tant espérée.

C'est une des raisons pour lesquelles, je voudrais souligner l'importance des efforts fournis par l'ALDA et les partenaires de l'ADL au niveau local, afin de soutenir Kutaisi et la Géorgie toute entière dans sa démarche vers une société plus ouverte et démocratique.

Ces dernières années, le Conseil de l'Europe et le Congrès ont également de plus en plus porté leur attention vers la Géorgie, l'Arménie et l'Azerbaïdjan.

Un des projets le plus important du Congrès en Géorgie, était de soutenir la création de NALAG, l'association des pouvoirs locaux en Géorgie, fondé en décembre 2004.

La création d'une telle association était non seulement une recommandation du Congrès mais surtout une nécessité pour donner aux autorités locales de Géorgie une voix unique. Le Congrès a suivi attentivement l'évolution de NALAG, à travers notamment la participation du Rapporteur sur la démocratie locale à l'une des réunions de son Comité Directeur.

Depuis sa création, l'association a gagné en visibilité et en représentativité.

Le Congrès reste attentif aux progrès de la démocratie locale et aux projets de réformes, tels qu'ils ont été évoqués lors de la visite en février 2006 de M. Di Stasi, le Président du Congrès de l'époque. A cette occasion M. Di Stasi a également fait la promotion de la création d'une ADL à Kutaisi.

Une délégation du Congrès sera également présente en Géorgie pour observer les élections locales le 5 octobre prochainement. Souvent on désigne ces élections comme « le test le plus important pour la démocratie géorgienne depuis la Révolution des Roses ».

Nous espérons qu'avec la décision de fixer la date des élections au début du mois d'octobre, que les autorités géorgiennes gardent leur objectif à organiser les élections locales conformément aux standards européens. Le contraire serait une erreur stratégique grave, sûrement considérée par la communauté internationale, comme une atteinte à la fierté légendaire du peuple géorgien.

La démocratie est une espérance pour tout peuple, C'est un droit et c'est un dû. Notre vigilance sur cette volonté est un devoir pour lequel notre union est nécessaire. L'ADL de Kutaisi en est aujourd'hui le symbole

Statement by Mr Igor Gaon, Special Representative of the Secretary General to Georgia, Council of Europe

Mr Gaon expressed its satisfaction with the opening of this 12th Local Democracy Agency in Kutaisi. He underlined the constant support of the Council of Europe to the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies and its network of Local Democracy Agencies.

He explained that he used to be Mayor of a district in Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He worked with the Local Democracy Agencies of Prijedor (Bosnia-Herzegovina) for the return of the refugees after the war. He underlined that it was a success and stressed the tremendous work achieved by the Agency.

He renewed the full support of the Council of Europe to this new LDA for its future activities.

Statement by Prof. Giorgi Oniani, Rector of Akaki Tsereteli State University)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be present here today and share the happiness upon the significant fact for our town and the whole region.

Democratic values have been openly declared more than ten years in our country. We feel the real perspectives of building up a democratic country day by day along with difficulties what is rather natural for post-soviet epoch. Considering it, I do think it is straight to the point and essential to set up a local democracy agency. I hope the main objective and achievement of such organizations will be establishing the life style of a democratic country. Our university reform goes to this way. New bodies of educational management have been created through which more people take part and feel responsible when making important decisions for society and each person. The university is one of the inevitable parts of our town and we do hope a successful educational reform can bring many positive changes generally to the country, in particular to Kutaisi. In this respect we consider the opening of

a local democracy agency in Kutaisi, in which the lion's share lies upon Prof. Madonna Megrelishvili and Mr. Mindia Ugrekhelidze. It is because of their fabulous work that the head office of this organization is in Kutaisi. This is in fact an example of revealing democracy, so important and necessary for our town. The logical result of all these is the future success I wish you, Kutaisi and Georgia
Thank you.

Statement by Representative of Newport, Councillor David Mayer

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends new and old.

As my colleague from the Newport Kutaisi Association said earlier, I too bring with me today the very best wishes of the citizens of Newport. I think it is important perhaps to stress here that I represent local government in Newport South Wales as there are a number of "Newports" across the UK and I would hate for there to be a case of mistaken identity!

For those of you not familiar with the City of Newport in Wales let me take this opportunity to provide some statistical and contextual background. Newport is the third largest city in Wales and is situated on Wales' south east coast between the Welsh capital city of Cardiff and the English city of Bristol. There are approximately 140,000 inhabitants within our local authority area which is predominantly urban with an agricultural hinterland.

Newport has one university, the University of Wales, Newport, that has already been involved in many successful initiatives with Kutaisi over the years and I know is keen to continue to support in whatever way possible. There is also one further education college. The city has sixty eight schools with approximately 26,000 pupils.

Newport has a rich industrial heritage and was at the heart of the industrial revolution due to its relationship with the coal and steel producing valleys of South East Wales. Following the decline of such heavy industries over the last few decades however, the local authority is working hard to re-skill those people who have lost their jobs in such sectors. The Council is also embarking on an extremely exciting and challenging programme of physical regeneration of the now mainly redundant dock areas and other rundown parts of the city. This is being driven by the need to modernise Newport's employment base and act as a catalyst for the City's renaissance in to a world class city that can compete on the European and international stage.

Newport City Council is committed to delivering effective and efficient democratic services for its citizens. The importance of making decisions as closely to those most affected by those decisions – otherwise known as the 'subsidiarity principle' in European Union jargon – is high on the agenda in Wales. We have made great advances in the use of Information Technology to register and track service requests by residents and this has had unexpected bonuses in the development of democratic structures in service areas. Some of you may know that Wales recently secured devolution from the UK parliament in 2000 and as such now has its own government and Assembly building responsible for making decisions in many areas of public life. The debate about how power is best distributed and managed between national, regional and local governments is a constantly evolving one and I am hopeful that our experiences in Wales will be of interest to you here in Georgia at such an important time in the development of your great country.

There can be no room for 'democratic deficit' in an emerging economy keen to work with other partners in European and beyond. The integral workings of democracy however can sometimes be difficult to understand and sustain and it is therefore incumbent on all of us to continually demonstrate the benefits and relevance of 'government'. In recent elections, Newport saw quite a large number of new Councillors elected to the City Council. A series of training events for local Councillors in key areas of responsibility such as planning for example have taken place. All councillors both new and old have benefited from this process and we are hopeful that such experiences could be shared and developed here.

The Council works closely with the private / business sector and the voluntary sector (NGOs) to deliver important services for our citizens and we would be happy to share the models for achieving such rewarding partnership working with those present here today. We are also keen to learn from you and partners of other alternative ways of achieving effective service delivery.

Despite having a population of only 3m, Wales punches well above its weight and benefits from close working relationships between organisations and sectors within its own borders. We also have good experience of having to negotiate and make our voice heard among other, often larger players at the UK and European level. As a City we have benefited enormously from the support of the European Union in regenerating our run down areas and in developing the skills and employment potential of our people and, with our new international partners, we look forward to developing joint projects for the benefit of us all.

The Council has a varied experience of international working and in addition to Kutaisi, the City is twinned with cities in Germany and China. We also have strong links with the Nkhata area of Malawi where Council staff have raised a lot of money to help the hospital there. The latest project involves fundraising to transport a whole 'dental practice' to the area.

I could continue to talk about all the areas for potential future collaboration and mutual development such as in industrial heritage and tourism, business support and social services but I fear that I would risk overstaying my welcome! Instead I shall leave such discussions for the international partners of this new Local Democracy Agency to debate at a later date.

In closing, may I thank you all for the opportunity to be involved in such an exciting initiatives and may I wish us all well in the future development of the Local Democracy Agency initiative here in Georgia. In particular I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Association of Local Democracy Agencies – Mr Per Vinther, Antonella Valmorbida , Mr Martial Paris and many others for their continuing enthusiasm and support in making today possible.

As we would say in Wales 'Pob lwc am y dyfodol' – 'good luck for the future'.

Thank you.

Statement by Representative of Monfalcone, Mrs Chiara Valdesolo

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the congress, honourable colleagues and hosts, good afternoon.

I would like to bestow to all of you the message of greeting and support from the administration of Monfalcone, which today I represent.

First of all I would like to state that we consider ALDA our main partner in our European related activities and international soft policy, that is why I would like to highlight the sense of satisfaction and pride we feel, as a small local authority in the North-East of Italy, to be involved in the foundation of the first Caucasian Local Democracy Agency.

We have already been involved in the setting up of the Bosnian LDA in Mostar and another source of satisfaction is that the delegate in that LDA is actually a former colleague from the municipality of Monfalcone.

We began to play a role in international projects not long ago: it is difficult to begin a proactive foreign policy in a small community, especially if the opposition voices that we should not dedicate our funds and efforts to far away places, while internal affairs ought to have a priority.

Our community had to undergo a transition, meaning that everyone had to figure out that co-operation does not mean charity and that being part of the European Union and of the international community means to share both burdens and wealth; otherwise we cannot be considered worthy of sharing nothing else if not emptiness. It is needless to take pride in being a founder of the European Union, or in being guaranteed our freedom by the State of right, if we cannot share and cultivate such values elsewhere. We then decided to take pride in our responsibility because, as George Bernard Shaw puts it "Freedom means responsibility, that is why many are afraid of it" and we chose to face openly our challenge and pursue our vision.

That is how we began co-working, over two years ago and look how far we have gotten until now.

Thanks to the experience gathered so far we were able to test our skills in a variety of projects instead of sticking to the old-fashioned twinning with our neighbouring Austrian region.

Monfalcone, although a small industrial town, keeps a considerable record of participation in international projects: development co-operation in India and Bangladesh, women support and micro credit in Senegal, a project on good governance with the Czech Republic and many initiatives for democracy building in Bosnia and Serbia, which is considered our main international activity.

The Caucasus is an important step forward in the new Europe for Monfalcone: as a matter of fact, in spite of our previous co-operation experience, we did not know how to reach further Countries involved in global themes such as active citizenship, human right education, strengthening of the local authority and gender issues. We were fascinated by ALDA's proposal of joining in this exciting project, we were there in the right place and at the right time. We are looking forward to putting our enthusiasm and ideas in the projects to be brought up in this region, so rich in history, culture and warmth.

So let us now begin a new chapter for ALDA and for its growing number of partners and supporters. More hard work expects us in order to be allowed to be part of the international community.

Thank you

Statement by Representative of Kutaisi-Newport International, Mrs Madonna Megrelishvili, Chairperson

Honoured guests and friends,

I am privileged to participate in this truly interesting and business meeting representing the Kutaisi-Newport International Association the chair of which I have been since the very first days of its formation in 1991. The Association was the result of a Twinning Agreement signed between the two cities in 1989.

The Twinning has enjoyed 17 years a success and was recognized with justification an international model for sister cities.

Positioned at opposite ends of the European continent, Newport and Kutaisi were then separated by far more than just the daunting distance of thousands of miles. Telephone and postal links were non-existent, travel between Kutaisi and Newport depended on a long journey via Moscow. Many observers believed that the project would fail.

The beginning of Twinning from the USSR coincided with a new wave of Georgian national movement for independence secession and great economic crisis following it. We are proud that it has survived through the most difficult years of civil war and political instability in the country thanks to the free will and hard work and dedication of every member of the two Associations. For a time even communication was difficult and Newport could only look on from a distance at the hardship and difficulties we faced. But being aware of them its people said that they had admiration for the Georgian people.

We discovered how much Welsh and Georgian people had in common - warmth, friendliness, mutual traditions of hospitality, supper countryside, a shared love of music, a joint enthusiasm for learning and the knowledge that the future of both our nations now lies in our own hands. The people of Newport have learned how deeply we feel for our roots, our dignity and pride in the past traditions and our hopes for the future. We demonstrated to them the essence of the Georgian national character and the people's pride and desire for freedom. It appealed to Welsh people in particular, and as a result a strong bridge has been formed, not only between our cities but also between the countries - Georgia and Wales. The purpose of the links was for the benefit of as many people as possible.

Our links have opened up a lot of opportunities for Kutaisi and Newport. Over the period of 17-year Twinning there have been many exchange visits involving city councillors, scientists, musicians, artists, architects, museum experts, social security and ecology workers, police, transport managers, hotel personnel, writers, journalists, tourism experts, folklore troupes, English teachers, school and University students, representatives of local government departments, Women's League and the church, etc.

From these visits have come several important programmes for Kutaisi:

A highly successful TACIS Project of Technical Assistance in the development of Small Business Initiatives in Kutaisi;

- A TACIS Project of Energy Management and Development;
- A TEMPUS Project with EC to Recognize and Enhance the Management of Kutaisi State University;
- A Project of Medical Equipment to one of the oldest hospitals in Kutaisi from the Gwent Health Care Trust (UK).

Thanks to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the University of Wales, Newport and Kutaisi State Universities students from Kutaisi have an opportunity to gain a year scholarship funded by Newport University. Several students have already completed Master degree courses under this Programme. At present they successfully work for the benefit of Georgia in Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

At the 1000th Anniversary Celebration of the proclamation of Kutaisi as the capital of the State of Georgia, the Newport delegation donated USD 1000 to the Bagrati Cathedral Foundation which supports this important World Heritage sight.

The Association in Newport has, over the years, provided Kutaisi schools, lycees and Universities with books, video and audio cassettes, magazines and newspapers thanks to which they are now well resourced with a range of valuable materials to enhance delivery of the English Curriculum.

Newport in turn, has gained an excellent library of Georgian books and exhibitions of Georgian arts and crafts have been held in the Newport Museum and Art Gallery.

In 2002 a Kutaisi delegation headed by the Mayor was honoured to visit Newport on the occasion of the celebration of the golden Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen of Britain Elizabeth II and granting City Status to Newport.

British and Georgia media including the BBC through their world service give a full coverage of all important events of two sister cities-Kutaisi and Newport. Both Associations first regularly produced their newspapers and then journals - The Land of the Colchi (Kutaisi) and Aviel (Newport).

The two communities formed a deep commitment towards maintaining and increasing friendship links and understanding in all social, culture and economics spheres of life.

The activities of the Twinning are acknowledged by the Georgian government, the British Embassy in Georgia, the Georgian Embassy in the United Kingdom, the British Council, Newport and Kutaisi Local Administration.

Members of Newport Association are invited to participate in Georgian Studies day organized by the Georgian Embassy in Great Britain. This event held every year is dedicated to the latest political development in Georgia, its economy and culture. The 17th Georgian Studies day was held in Newport University and was very successful.

This friendship and commitment are becoming much more meaningful and mutually beneficial for the people of Kutaisi especially in the time when Georgia has embarked on the road of democracy and is building a civilized state aimed at the protection of state and public interests.

Important steps are being made for the restoration of the country's integrity. The constitutional order was restored in Adjara. The country is battling against corruption and criminals and by rebuilding the country on a European model. The nation is determined to settle difficulties through cooperation and economic means. The experience of our friends in Newport is applied to assist us with the development of good government structures and democracy in Kutaisi.

Their country's experience in perfecting democracy and building new infrastructures is very important for us as well as our experience is important for them. It is a two way process.

We are proud that the Kutaisi-Newport Twinning played its great part for the decision to establish a LDA office in Kutaisi under the umbrella of the Kutaisi Association.

The members of KNIA got very interested in the objectives and functions of the LDA and got involved in its activities in Georgia from the very first days. We put a lot of work and effort in founding the LDA GEORGIA in Kutaisi which resulted in forming a team of like minded people who expressed their willingness to found it.

To publicize the opening of LDA Georgia we issued the journals in English and Georgian dedicated to this event. Local newspapers and televisions are giving a full coverage of our activities.

We are very interested in fruitful and successful functioning of LDA GEORGIA which has embarked of the road of democracy and is taking the first step on it. We'll do our best to perform the work of LDA GEORGIA perfect in order to become it very beneficial not only for our city but for the whole country.

We believe that the main aims of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies of the promotion of an active civil society, community development, democratic local authorities, and exchange of best practices, youth and civil society development coincide with the main aim of the Twinning serving the benefit for all people. We all must join our efforts for promoting civil society and local democracy in Georgia to secure further successful development of our country.

In conclusion, I can't help mentioning that today this significant occasion is taking place in the beautiful mansion generously donated to us by Mr. Mindia Ugrehelidze, a judge of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and a follower of the best traditions of his distinguished family. His father an outstanding Georgian lawyer and his grandfather, a famous Georgian educator made a great contribution to the development of democracy and human rights in Georgia. The work started by them will now be continued by a new generation of people keen on building a civilized society in Georgia. Mindia apologized for not coming. He is on a business trip in Italy.

From now on the mansion will house three important organizations – the Kutaisi-Newport Association, The English Language Centre and a Local Democracy Agency. The three of them will join their efforts and work together for promoting democratic values in this country.

I am also very pleased to tell you that our meeting is attended by Mindia Ugrehelidze's son and his wife. It's a great honour.

And to finish with I'd like to thank the Mayor of Kutaisi and the Chairperson of the City Council for the help and support they gave us to arrange this ceremony.

Thank you.

Statement by Representative of Newport Kutaisi Association, Mr Bernard Tyson, Vice Chair

Can I first say thank you for the opportunity to speak at this historic occasion not only for Kutaisi and Georgia but also for wider European collaboration in the building of local democracy on our continent?

I bring with me the very best wishes and congratulations from the Newport Kutaisi Association to ALDA and to all who have been involved and work so hard on the establishment of the Local Democracy Agency here in Kutaisi. Perhaps I should explain that the Newport Kutaisi Association was formed after the decision of the city of Newport, in Wales, to twin with Kutaisi in 1989, to allow the citizens of Newport to play an active role in the twinning of our two cities. Since then we have arranged exchange visits between such different groups as medical workers to artists, tourist officers to bus drivers and councillors to dancers. We have sponsored students from Kutaisi at the University of Newport and supplied medical equipment to hospitals. Our most recent venture, jointly with EveryChild, a UK based charity, is to host a study programme, in collaboration with Newport City Council and the university for Georgian social workers working on the reform of children's services across this country. Please visit our website www.nkta.org for more details.

As a representative here today of a non government organisation I would like to address, what I see as one of the central challenges facing NGO's working for a democratic world.

I come from the country of Wales which has a long tradition of NGO's, such as political parties and trade unions, who for many hundreds of years have struggled against the established order to secure real gains for ordinary people.

We also know that one of the first victims of totalitarian regimes are groups such as NGO's, as they often fail to fit in with governments concept of what the state thinks is best. I know that Georgia has been through those times during the years of the USSR.

The idea of a non-government organisation playing an active role in the building of local democracy should not be that remarkable. We often are able to bring specialist knowledge and experience to the building and sustaining of local democracy.

However as NGO's we should also remind ourselves that we are only part of the democratic picture.

The ballot box and elections are not everything but we should never forget that in an active democracy, politicians at both local and national level, put themselves and their ideas and policies in front of the voters and are sometimes rejected by them.

NGOs are not open to such rigorous testing. We do not face the electorate, as politicians have to do. Perhaps because of this we can sometimes be accused of not being outward looking but seeking only to push the views or interests of our own group to the detriment of helping to paint the bigger picture of local democracy.

Many NGO's now exist in Georgia and want to play an active part in the LDA. We hope you will welcome us and recognise what we have to offer. But at the same time let all NGO's accept these special responsibilities.

I would ask that we become beacons of openness, be prepared to adapt and change and to be welcoming to all. All best wishes from the Newport Kutaisi Association for the tasks you will face in the coming months and years. And, again, can I sayremember, you will have friends in Newport.

Statement by Mr. William Robinson, Political Adviser, UK Embassy

Mr. Robinson welcomed the initiative of creating a Local Democracy Agency in Kutaisi. He congratulated the representatives of Newport and the other international partners. He confirmed the will of the UK Embassy to support the future activities of the LDA.

"The role of the partners in the LDA Programme" – Mrs. Antonella Valmorbida, Director of the ALDA

Role of the Lead Partner:

1. Provide key support to the LDA
2. Exercise effective financial and managerial control of the LDA
3. Be an effective link between the LDA and International partners
4. Promote the LDA within the Association and represent its interest
5. Encourage International partners to provide support to the LDA

Role of the International Partner:

1. Provide core financial support
2. Participate in activities where they have the skills and capacities
3. Encourage their own partners to participate in the work of the LDA
4. Promote the work of the LDA in their own community and encourage wider participation

Role of the local partner:

1. Support the LDA at a local level
2. Contribute to ideas for activities and ensure local needs are being addressed
3. Participate in activities
4. Promote participation by other local authorities and organisations
5. Encouraging their International partners to become involved

“Proposed programmes for the LDA Georgia in 2006” – Mrs. Antonella Valmorbida, Director of ALDA.

Actions on the institutional level:

- make the necessary effort to implement provisions and laws, which are often already in place, in order to include an effective and fruitful contribution from civil society into the decision-making process by the local and regional authorities.
- focus on impartiality and professional merits in the employment policies of local authorities and other institutions related to them.
- reduce the distorting influence of political party loyalties on the normal and efficient implementation of duties and responsibilities of local and regional administration.
- prevent confusion in responsibilities between local and national level.
- fight against corruption and nepotism in the management and decision-making process at the local, regional and national level.
- identify rules and provisions to ensure transparency and accountability at the local level.
- increase the funds at the disposal of local authorities for actions benefiting the community and for technological improvements.

Actions on the level of local authorities (elected representatives and civil servants):

- provide locally elected representatives and civil servants with more expertise and knowledge (training, transfer of know-how, and exchange of best practices).
- Actions on the level of civil society organisations:
- improve their knowledge of local authorities and their functioning.
- implement awareness campaigns to improve their capacity of advocacy and participation.

The main axes of the activities of the LDA will be:

- Training for local authorities and civil society such as participatory planning process, waste management; budget management and human rights awareness
- Local economic development
- Youth empowerment
- Exchange of best practices with the international partners

Proposal of activities over two years and priorities

Setting up of the LDA:

A LDA is recognized as a key tool for the democratisation and stabilisation on a local and regional level. The task of an LDA is to strengthen the civil society and to promote a pluralist democracy. In this sense an LDA might be seen as a project as such (to appoint local staff; to set up the office (generator, furniture, etc.), to secure the international and local partnership, to identify possible donors, to organise the first partner meeting and the

opening ceremony). The partner meeting is essential in the life of an LDA: it gives the opportunity to all the partners to meet and discuss the strategic objectives of the LDA.

Second partner meeting:

A second partner meeting will be organised between 6 to 10 months after the first anniversary of the launch of the LDA in order to assess the work achieved by the LDA and to identify future activities with the inputs of all the partners involved.

Exchanges on best practices on local government issues:

One of most important advantages of an LDA is to promote concrete and interactive activities that fit to the local needs. The project foresees activities on local government issues through the exchange of best practices. The topics of these activities will be defined by the partners during the partners meeting. The international partners could propose their officers or elected people to share their knowledge in a specific field defined. The goal is to strengthen the capacities of the local authorities in city management, one of the main problems expressed during the ALDA fact finding missions. The project will also strengthen the network.

Women Rights Advocacy: another key issue in Georgia is to promote the rights of the women. In the scope of the project, capacity building will be organised with local and international experts (from the Council of Europe) in Women Rights. It will be open to the representatives of local authorities, NGOS dealing with these issues, and to the civil society.

Youth Empowerment: the LDA will develop activities in favour of youth to promote their participation in the local civil life and to help them to be represented in the decision making process.

Human Rights Education and rights of minorities: The topic of human rights and protection of minorities will be also tackled in the training and projects of the LDA, having as target groups the civil society and local authorities.

2. List of participants

1	Antonella Valmorbida	ALDA
2	Per Vinther	ALDA
3	Martial Paris	ALDA
4	Bernard Tyson	NKIA
5	David Mayer	Newport City Council
6	Drago Djekovic	LGIB
7	Clare Evans	Newport Civic Centre
8	Lukas Van Damme	Congress
9	Alain Chenard	Congress
10	Chiara Valdesolo	Monfalcone
11	Zurab Kajaia	Governor
12	Giorgi Tevdoradze	Deputy Governor
13	Giga Sushania	"
14	Giga Chogovadze	Mayor
15	Omar Kikvidze	Vice Mayor
16	Niko kachkachishvili	"
17	Gela Katamadze	Chairman, City Council
18	Vano Zhorzholiani	Secretary, City Council
19	Giorgi Oniani	Principal, Kutaisi State University
20	Zaza Soxadze	Deputy principal, KSU
21	Eka Topuria	ESD, KSU
22	Madonna Megrelishvili	KNIA
23	Maia Abdaladze	"
24	Maia Alavidze	"
25	Rusudan Gvilava	"
26	Tsitsino Todua	"
27	Tinatin Kutivadze	"
28	Leila Pkhkadze	"
29	Lala Kobeshavidze	English Language Centre
30	Eka Archvadze	"
31	Mariam Babukhadia	"
32	Marina Iobidze	Founders of LDA Georgia
33	Natia Zviadadze	"
34	Tamar Gviniashvili	"
35	Marika Megrelishvili	"
36	Giorgi Tsurtsumia	"
37	Nino Nizharadze	"
38	Manuchar Chitaishvili	"
39	Madonna Basiladze	Young Lawyers' Association Kutaisi Branch
40	Nodar Jikia	"
41	Kakha Gvanceladze	Young Economists' Association
42	Archil Elbakidze	Apkhazinterkonti
43	Nino Gachava	Institute of Freedom
44	Levan Chanchaleishvili	Democracy Support Centre
45	William Robinson	UK Embassy to Georgia
46	Igor Gaon	Council of Europe
47	Nino Tavadze	Urban Institute

3. Agenda

**Local Democracy Agency Georgia
8th of September 2006
Agenda of the Opening Ceremony
Conference Hall
Civic Centre
Kutaisi**

Chairperson, Mr Per Vinther, Vice President ALDA

13:00	Registration of participants
13:15	Welcome address by Mr Per Vinther, ALDA Vice President on the behalf of mr Gianfranco Martini, ALDA President
13:30	Welcome address by the Mayor of Kutaisi, Mr. Chogovadze and Chairman of the City Council, Mr Katamadze.
13:50	Statement by the Mr Per Vinther, Vice President of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies: "The Association of the Local Democracy Agencies: A stakeholder in building democracy"
14:10	Statement by Mr Alain Chénard, Representative of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
14:25	Statement by Mr Igor Gaon, Special Representative of the SG to Georgia, Council of Europe.
14:40	Statement by Prof. Giorgi Oniani, Rector of Akaki Tsereteli State University)
15:00	Statement by Representative of Newport, Councillor David Mayer
15:10	Statement by Representative of Monfalcone, Mrs Chiara Valdesolo
15:35	Statement by Representative of Kutaisi-Newport International, Mrs Madonna Megrelishvili, Chairperson
15:45	Statement by Representative of Newport Kutaisi Association, Mr Bernard Tyson, Vice Chair
16:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
16:15	Statement by Mr William Robinson, Political Adviser, UK Embassy
16:30	"The role of the partners in the LDA Programme" – Mrs. Antonella Valmorbida, Director of the ALDA "Proposed programmes for the LDA Georgia in 2006" – Ms. Antonella Valmorbida, Director of ALDA.
17:00	Presentation of the newly appointed Delegate – Mr. Joseph Khakhaleishvili
17:15	Signature of the Memorandum of Understanding