



## **NALAS Declaration on Active Involvement of Local Authorities of South East Europe in EU Integration Process**

During its 5<sup>th</sup> general assembly held in Istanbul on December 11, 2009, NALAS, the network of 15 local governments' associations of South East Europe, adopted the following declaration:

**Affirming** the commitment of NALAS and its members to an effective process of EU integration, and recognising that countries in SEE are in different stages in this process,

considering that local authorities have an essential role to play in this integration, taking into account that around 70% of the EU legislation is implemented at local and regional level,

considering the need for capacities, skills, time and resources at local level in order to fulfil this heavy responsibilities,

considering the desirability to use the broad variety of financial and political instruments meant to facilitate EU integration (IPA, transnational and cross-border cooperation programmes and networks, etc.), the capacity to learn, exchange and enhance, and at the same time the vast amount of available but unused funds and possibilities,

considering that local governments are the best place to represent the interests of citizens and address their needs,

considering the need to involve local governments and their associations in the EU negotiation and integration processes, and

considering that local governments should be subjects, and not objects in the EU integration processes,

**we, elected representatives, mayors, politicians and executives, leaders of local authorities and their associations:**

Encourage LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

- To elaborate an Action plan for EU integration covering the local authority itself and means for informing and involving their citizens in European issues;
- To use opportunities given at national and EU level to get involved in EU negotiations and decision-making processes by participating actively in joint committees, working groups and larger consolidations;
- To appoint municipal EU officers or offices that will promote EU values to citizens, regularly inform and educate municipal administration about EU standards and innovations, develop partnerships and support applying for EU funds;
- To use European networks (such as NALAS, CEMR, Energie Cités) as well as the capacity of cross-border cooperation programs and the potential of twinning and national local government associations;
- To be prepared for effective use of EU funds by prioritizing, developing and implementing strategic plans, by identifying and formulating beneficial projects, and participating in regional programming;
- To use EU integration process to promote predictable and transparent legislative environment for modernization of the public administration for citizens' benefit;

We also call on NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION:

- To recognize local authorities and their associations as valuable partners in EU integration processes;
- To involve local government associations in the EU integration and accession processes through regular negotiation, consultation, information and inviting them to participate in working groups and committees;
- To support local governments to access available EU funds and ensure pre- and co-financing of municipal projects;
- To increase the number of transparently selected municipal projects financed by the First Component of the IPA Programme;
- To raise capacities of local governments for implementing EU legislation.

We appeal to EU INSTITUTIONS AND EUROPEAN PARTNERS:

- To use the spirit of the Lisbon Treaty and ensure a broader inclusion of local level issues in relevant EU policies, programs and funding;
- To set up transparent communication channels to all level of governments during EU accession and integration process;
- To include on permanent basis SEE local governments and associations in their activities and initiatives;
- To follow the concept of multi-level governance and deepen the ties with the local governments in SEE using the potential of the trans-national networks and associations of local authorities in the region.

We request LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS:

- To adapt its internal capacities to the challenges of EU integration through staff training, nomination of EU officers and establishment of a European Integration committee or council;
- To elaborate and implement an Action Plan on EU integration activities of the association;
- To lobby and speak with one voice at national level and participate in European integration working groups with the central government;
- To be fully aware of the consequences of the *acquis communautaire* for local governments and screen the relevant EU and national legislation;
- To develop position papers on relevant EU topics, such as waste and water, energy efficiency and public procurement;
- To provide learning opportunities for their members and collect and disseminate relevant EU information;
- To support municipal EU offices and officers through networking and coaching;
- To network at EU level and establish access to the EU institutions and partners.

Additionally, we request NALAS:

- To support local government associations by joining efforts in networking at EU level, supporting their Brussels presence, and strengthening the members' EU officers' network;
- To identify the associations' needs and explore opportunities for capacity building, cooperation and best practice exchange among its members and with other networks on European level;
- To use its observer status in the Committee of the Regions and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, as well as the associate membership with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in order to get actively involved in European policies, programs and funding.