

APPEAL FOR LOCAL ACTION FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

We, the undersigned, participants in the Forum "European Integration – Local Task Forces in Action" (Novi Sad, December 4 and 5, 2007), herewith launch our **Appeal for Local Action for European Integration**.

1. WE ARE CITIZENS OF EUROPE

- 1.1. We, representatives of local governments and NGOs in the Western Balkans, are citizens of Europe. We have a common history and culture, and we share dreams of peace, democracy, freedom and prosperity with other citizens across Europe. We see our future - as citizens living in Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia (including Kosovo, area under UNMIK administration) – in the European Union.
- 1.2. We are convinced that the process of European integration will help us in the Western Balkans on our difficult road to stability, democracy, equality of all citizens before the law, economic development and regional and international co-operation.
- 1.3. We call upon our own governments to be more active in fulfilling the reforms needed for the *acquis communautaire*. In particular, we urge our politicians and governments to move forward on the most sensitive issues – the ones related to co-operation with the ICTY, minority issues, decentralisation, legislation promoting civil society development and judicial reform.
- 1.4. We in particular demand that our national governments fulfil their obligations in the field of decentralization, by facilitating equal development of all parts of the country, through financial decentralisation. Also harmonisation of the national laws on local self-government with the European Charter of Local Self-Government is required.
- 1.5. We are committed to truth-finding regarding the recent past, with active participation of representatives of the international community. This is our moral obligation, because without such a truth-finding process we will not be able to develop an atmosphere of trust and understanding.
- 1.6. We call upon the EU member states to confirm their commitment towards EU membership of the Western Balkans states. We ask the EU governments also to clearly voice this to their citizens.

- 1.7. We see the process of European integration as a two-way process. It is the joint challenge of both the EU member states and the Western Balkans states to work towards a bigger, unified Europe that can bring stability and security, democracy and prosperity to all European citizens and can promote European standards and values worldwide.

2. WE WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, BOTTOM-UP

- 2.1. We know that the road to full EU membership will take our states a number of years (the one state less, the other state more). Regardless of the precise moment of full membership of the EU, we have a strong desire to contribute, bottom-up, to the process of European integration, in particular by taking the EU standards and values as framework for the further development of our municipalities and local communities. In order to lead our local communities in this direction, we strongly believe in a value-based and responsible leadership.
- 2.2. We welcome the statements given by Mr. Olli Rehn (November 2007): "It is crucial to maintain the visibility and credibility of the accession process, as well as support for enlargement in the member states. (...) Attention will be given to promoting people to people contacts."
- 2.3. We are aware that municipalities and local communities cannot take a passive role in the European integration. Starting point is their task to follow carefully all relevant discussions, including the developments with regards to the funds and partnership models that the EU offers municipalities and local communities in the process of European integration.
- 2.4. We underline that the process of European integration is working on the *acquis communautaire*, in all spheres of life. We especially appeal on anchoring the principles and practices that underpin stable democracies: respect for human rights; tolerance and inter-ethnic, inter-religious and cross-cultural dialogue; sustainable peace; citizenship and vibrant local communities; professional media; subsidiarity, and so on.
- 2.5. We strongly feel that the citizens do not see enough results and advantages of the process of European integration – due to lack of communication by our governments and due to the EU bureaucratic dynamics. We can and must make an extra effort ourselves as well. We see a variety of roles related to the process of European integration for us, as municipalities and local communities:

- Awareness-raising on the EU and the process of European integration
- Promotion of public debate on the standards and in particular the values of Europe
- Capacity building for municipal staff (and staff of local groups and institutions)
- Identification of needs of the local communities, through genuine participatory models
- Anticipating new rules and regulations by modernising the work of the municipal departments and local institutions
- Development and implementation of projects advancing the equal participation of women in society and politics
- Development and implementation of local and regional development projects under relevant EU programs and funds
- Furthering trans-border and regional co-operation in the Western Balkans
- Internationalising the municipality and local community, by establishing partnerships with counterparts in EU member states
- Local truth-finding projects
- Lobby at the level of the national government
- Lobby at the level of the European Commission and EU member states

2.6. We pledge to work on these principles and practices. We will seek co-operation to that end in our city and towns, between local government officials, NGO representatives and citizens.

3. WE WILL SET UP A LOCAL TASK-FORCE FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

- 3.1. We will set up local task-forces for European integration, in our own cities and towns. These task-forces will consist of representatives of the local government, the local NGOs, the business sector, neighbourhood councils, experts and other relevant and interested local institutions and individuals.
- 3.2. We will organise the local task-forces in a way, that the interests of all citizens – regardless of their sex, age, political, ethnic or religious background - can and will be incorporated. The local task-forces will not function as a formal or bureaucratic local institution, but will have a rather informal, open and action-oriented character.

4. WE WILL INITIATE AND IMPLEMENT A LOCAL ACTION PROGRAMME FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

- 4.1. We will, through the local task-forces, initiate, develop and then implement a local action programme for European integration. The local task-forces will invite all institutions, groups and citizens to

present proposals for activities to further the process of European integration in the local context.

- 4.2. The development of the local action program will be transparent and stakeholders will be challenged to take a pro-active role – based upon the involvement of practitioners and sufficient and effective internal and external communication.
- 4.3. We envisage that the local action programs may comprise of a whole series of possible activities, such as among others:
 - Cultural activities
 - Sports exchanges
 - EU funded and supported development projects
 - Development of international municipal partnerships
 - Educational and awareness-raising projects, language courses, IT projects
 - Annual lecture by an Ambassador of one of the EU member states
 - Competition for essays, short stories or poems on Europe
 - Round-tables on topics relevant for the European integration
 - The annual Europe Award, for the citizen or group that contributed a lot, in concrete activities, to the process of European integration
 - Capacity-building for municipal staff, on European standards in the field of local government
 - Projects developed with and for the most vulnerable groups in society
 - Setting-up of a group monitoring the reforms (not) made by the national government
 - (International) media projects
 - Projects with and for women
 - Seminars on how local governments prepared for EU membership in the countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007
 - Expert meetings on topics such as truth-finding, justice and reconciliation - in the context of Europe's history and present
 - Working visits to European institutions
 - Invitations to members of European Parliament and EU experts to participate in activities in the local communities throughout the Western Balkans
 - Annual report to the national government and EU on the local progress made in the process of European integration

5. WE WILL TOGETHER FORM AN INFORMAL REGIONAL NETWORK

- 5.1. We will, with the help of the Citizens Pact for South-Eastern Europe and others willing to be involved, set up a regional network to exchange our experiences, identify the opportunities and risks of

European integration, and to facilitate a dynamic process of trans-border and regional co-operation throughout the Western Balkans. We will promote inter-municipal co-operation at all levels and will also involve the national associations of municipalities and the European associations of municipalities.

- 5.2. We will also use the network to organise – where useful and appropriate - a joint lobby, directed towards the national governments, the European Commission or the EU member states.

6. WE COMMIT OURSELVES!

We commit ourselves to the implementation of this **Appeal for Local Action for European Integration**. We will do our utmost to fulfil the tasks listed – for the benefit of our citizens, for the benefit of our countries, for the benefit of the region of the Western Balkans, for the benefit of Europe!

Novi Sad, December 5, 2007