

“Local Self-governments Forum – Green Agenda for the Western Balkans”

Organised by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and NALAS the event in Bar, Montenegro on 19 April 2024 focused on advancing sustainability initiatives and fostering regional collaboration underscoring the critical role of local authorities in implementing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.



From left to right: H. E. German Ambassador to Montenegro, Mr. Peter Felten, Mayor of Bar and NALAS President Dusan Raicevic, Mr. Nenad Vitomirović, Secretary of State, Ministry of Tourism, Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development, Montenegro.

In his opening remarks, Peter Felten, German Ambassador to Montenegro, highlighted the significance of the Regional Climate Partnership between Germany and the Western Balkans, adopted at the Berlin Process Summit in Tirana last year. This major new initiative will support the region in accelerating the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and thus aligning with the European Green Deal.

“2023 Green Champions of the Western Balkans Recognition Award”

Organised within the project “EU4 Energy Transition: Covenant of Mayors in the Western Balkans and Türkiye”, co-funded by the European Union (EU) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the event represented a significant step towards regional collaboration and commitment to environmental sustainability.

NALAS published in March 2024 the initiation of the nomination process for the “2023 Green Champions of the Western Balkans”. This award, launched under the auspices of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan 2021-2030 and the Tirana Conclusions of the Local Self-Governments Forum 2023, aims to honour cities and municipalities showcasing exceptional commitment and

innovative approaches to environmental sustainability, urban greenery, green growth, and eco-conscious initiatives.

Invitations were extended to National Local Government Associations (LGAs), Local Government Units (LGUs), individuals, representatives of public and private institutions, civil society organizations, and regional and international partner organizations from the Western Balkans to nominate 2023 Green Champions of the Western Balkans in various categories.:

- Decarbonisation
- Sustainable Transport
- Fostering community engagement and awareness on circular economy/environment
- Innovation and creativity in addressing environmental challenges – depollution
- Sustainable Agriculture Practices
- Commitment to environmental conservation and protection and Biodiversity

To honour the outstanding efforts of local self-government units (LSGs) across the Western Balkans that have been instrumental in driving environmental initiatives and paving the way for sustainable development in their communities, the winners, one from each of the 6 economies of the WB6 and their respective Mayors, were invited to attend the event in Bar, Montenegro on 19 April to present their winning projects.



The awarded municipalities in their respective topic categories were as following:

City/Town/Municipality	Country/Economy	Topic award category
City of Sarajevo	BiH	Commitment to Environmental Conservation and Protection and Biodiversity
Korçë County	Albania	Fostering Community Engagement and Awareness on Circular Economy/Environment
Municipality of Kamenicë	Kosovo ¹	Innovation and Creativity in Addressing Environmental Challenges – Depollution
Municipality of Nikšić	Montenegro	Decarbonisation
Municipality of Kavadarci	North Macedonia	Sustainable Agriculture Practices
Municipality of Kruševac	Serbia	Sustainable Transport

NALAS General Assembly - 20 years of NALAS

The NALAS XIX General Assembly Statutory Session convened on April 18, 2024, in Bar, Montenegro, marking the 20th anniversary of NALAS and highlighting its enduring commitment to fostering effective local governance and sustainable development in Southeast Europe.

Distinguished figures including Mr. Bernd Vöhringer, Congress Vice President; Mr. M. Ergun Turan, President of NALAS; and Mr. Marash Dukaj, Minister of Public Administration of Montenegro, delivered opening addresses, setting the tone for the assembly.

The inauguration of the new President and three Vice Presidents marked a transition in leadership, symbolizing continuity and fresh perspectives for NALAS's future endeavors. Mr. Dusan Raicevic, Mayor of Bar, Montenegro, assumed the role of NALAS President for the term 2024-2025, embodying a commitment to advancing the organization's mission. Mr. Vöhringer stressed the reliability of NALAS as partner of the Congress and the fundamental role of the network to address current challenges affirming the determination of the Congress to further support local authorities and their associations, on the path to EU membership.

Outgoing NALAS President M. Ergun Turan, Mayor of Fatih, in Istanbul, Türkiye highlighted the ever-increasing role of local governments in the EU integration process making the case for local governments and associations to be recognized by EU institutions as key strategic dialogue partners in our countries' journey towards enlargement. His is already common policy in Montenegro as Mr. Marash Dukaj, Minister of Public Administration of Montenegro made clear. He seized the opportunity to make his point about decentralisation as structural governance reform by emphasising that the best and most effective way for quality and efficient decentralization, based on the responsibility and

¹ "this designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence."

transparency of the work of local governments, lies in the solid cooperation of the central and local levels of government.

Guidelines on LGAs' Committees on Water and Sanitation Services

NALAS developed within the Regional Capacity Development Network for Water and Sanitation Services (RCDN) Guidelines on Local Government Associations' (LGAs') Committees on Water and Sanitation Services.

Based on the conviction that well-structured, effective, and efficient Committees for Water and Sanitation Services can play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges, shaping sector-related policies, and guiding Local Government Associations win Water and Sanitation services, guidelines for the establishment and functioning of an "ideal" Water & Sanitation Services Committee were developed. The Guidelines are based on LGAs' staff and committee representatives' contributions collected during a workshop organised within RCDN, in January 2024 in Budva, Montenegro. These Guidelines focus on WSS committees, but the principles are the same and they can be applied for any other LGA's sectoral committee.

Ensuring the success of these committees requires clear procedures and standards related to the establishment and functioning of the Water & Sanitation Services committees, such as nomination and selections of members, optimal organisational and membership structure, key responsibilities and functions, active participation in the decision-making process of the LGA, contribution to advocacy and policymaking, communication, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

Background:

The overall impact of RCDN+ is increased effectiveness and efficiency of Association of Public Utilities Companies (APUCs) and LGAs in Western Balkans that contribute to better service provision towards and by their members, the public water utilities, and municipalities, ultimately allowing to reach a large population with equitable, safe drinking water and sanitation services in line with the EU Acquis Communautaire (chapter 27)

COMO Western Balkans & Türkiye

The mayors attending NALAS' General Assembly in Bar, Montenegro endorsed on 18 April the Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate SEE Commitment, reaffirming NALAS's dedication to sustainable urban development and climate action, and fostering collaboration among local authorities.

Since 2011, NALAS has been registered as supporter of the Covenant of Mayors, mobilising and supporting SEE municipalities to attain the Covenant of Mayors' objectives. NALAS has been leveraging its political power, advocacy, communication, and networking activities to promote the Covenant of Mayors initiative and support the commitments of its signatories.

The General Assembly in Bar opened a new chapter in NALAS support for the Covenant of Mayors in the region. It was the official launch of the establishment and promotion of the Help Desk for the Covenant of Mayors in the framework of the "EU4 Energy Transition: Covenant of Mayors in the Western Balkans and Turkey" project. NALAS will focus its efforts to the set up and operation of a longstanding support system for the COMO members of the Western Balkans and Türkiye in delivering on their pledges under the energy and climate targets. The COMO Help Desk for Local Authorities of

Western Balkans and Türkiye will provide support services on demand, act as an established and promoted knowledge base for development, review, approval and implementation of Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) as basic service offerings and, finally, connect with the Global Covenant Office (GCOM) and other regional Covenant Offices for effective exchange of knowledge.

On this special opening, GCOM Director Piero Remitti welcomed NALAS to the '*Club*' as 14th member of GCOM. Some follow up was agreed on this occasion like for e.g. to extend the connection to GCOM communication officers, to link social media and other communication interfaces as well as participating at GCOM monthly coordination meetings.

CoR opinion on Enlargement Package 2023

NALAS long lasting uphill battle to achieve recognition for Local Government Associations and regional networks as dialogue partner of EU institutions involved in the Enlargement process, received recently important back up from the European Committee of the Regions. In its official opinion on the Enlargement Package 2023 – Western Balkans and Türkiye (CIVEX-VII/027), approved during the 160th CoR Plenary session on 17-18 April 2024 in Brussels, the Committee of the Regions states under heading 'The role of LRAs in the enlargement process' point 96 the following: THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS recommends that the European Commission establish direct communication and cooperation with LRAs through existing regional networks, such as NALAS.

NALAS considers this recommendation as an appreciation of the work that the Network of Local Authorities of South-East Europe has been doing to make the point for improvements of the EU enlargement process via a bottom-up approach that will provide support from the local level upwards; a process that will ensure more direct benefits for the citizens of the enlargement countries and will clear out any doubt about their future as EU citizens.

Direct communication and cooperation, as recommended, reflects a crucial NALAS position to apply the inclusive partnership principle where no one and no territory is left behind. To face the global challenges and to mitigate their effects, multilevel governance implies a coordinated and concerted approach among all levels of government.