

**SEENET PROGRAM: A TRANS-LOCAL NETWORK FOR THE
CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ITALY AND SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**

Bilateral Partnership Agreement
for the implementation of the “**Horizontal Action D**” called
“Networking between local authorities in South-East Europe”

Between the following partners:

1. The National Association of Italian Municipalities (hereafter “**ANCI**”) of Via dei Prefetti n. 46, Rome, represented by Angelo Rughetti in his capacity as Secretary General and legally authorized representative;
2. The Albanian Association of Municipalities “Shoqata e Bashkive te Shqiperise” (hereafter “**AAM**”) of Rruga "Abdyl Frasheri", pall. 11, shkalla 2, ap. 14, Tirana, represented by Mr. Fatos Hodaj, in his capacity as Executive Director of Albanian Association of Municipalities.

Hereafter also referred to as “Partners”,

WHEREAS:

- ANCI represents Italian municipalities at national and European institutions and administrations and pursues among its statutory goals the development of the role of Municipalities in all the fields and sectors that constitute the sphere of local administrative action;
- ANCI has long been actively involved in decentralized co-operation, building relationships and networks with associations of local governments from different EU member states, the Balkan area and developing countries;
- ANCI and the Directorate General for Development Co-operation of the Ministry of the Italian Foreign Affairs (hereafter “**DGCS-MAE**”) signed a Protocol Agreement on 3 May 2001 in which they committed themselves in working together to improve the contribution of decentralized co-operation promoted and carried out by Italian municipalities within the framework of Italian development co-operation policy;

- the program “*SEENET: a trans-local network for co-operation between Italy and south-east Europe*” was launched on 23 November 2009 and has a duration of 3 years;
- the SEENET Program is promoted and co-financed by the Directorate General for Development Co-operation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCS-MAE) and Region of Tuscany, in partnership with five Italian regions (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Marche, Piemonte, Veneto) and the Autonomous Province of Trento;
- the SEENET Program has the following goals:
 - (a) to support access to EU pre-accession funds and national and international funds for the local development in south-east Europe;
 - (b) to support the adoption and development of programs and innovative services on issues such as the improvement and management of the territory, economic development, and territorial and social planning by south-east European institutional and territorial stakeholders, which are partners in the program;
- the actions of the program support local development in the following fields:
 - enhancement of cultural tourism;
 - enhancement of rural land and the natural environment;
 - support to SMEs and cross-border business co-operation;
 - territorial planning and social services.
- within the framework of the SEENET Program, the Region of Tuscany is the Project Leader of the “Horizontal Action D” and ANCI, as technical partner, has the task of carrying out project activities (*Protocol Agreement ANCI- Regione Toscana signed on 29/01/2009*);
- AAM is the short name of Albanian Association of Municipalities and is the representatives of 65 municipalities of Albania.
The mission of Albanian Association of municipalities:
“Guarding of the common interests of the Albanian municipalities with the aim to achieve and further develop the decentralization and the real democratization of the local governing, in order to reach European standards of local self-governing, according to the principles of the European Charter of the Local Autonomy ”.
To achieve this mission, the Association has focused its activities in several key areas:
 - Promote best practices in local governance
 - Knowing the problems that EU integration calls for local government
 - Addressing local problems in seminars and training with the municipality specialists
 - Projects for local government
 - Participation in international activities for local government
 - Publications for local government

The work of the association is focused on a summary:

- Identify, expand and protect the common interests of the municipalities in the framework of the implementation of the decentralization reform and local autonomy.

- Providing services to municipalities, with the aim of enhancing the decision-making skills, executive bodies and municipal administration, through training, expertise, organization of workshops or seminars, publications, information and statistics, study visits within and outside the country to expand best practices, etc..
 - Lobbying central government bodies, in the process of drafting and implementing legislation, also with international partners, for various development projects of municipalities.
- **AAM** is a full member of the *Network of Local Authorities for South Eastern Europe (NALAS)*, that unites the local authorities of south-east Europe, promotes the collaboration between them and supports common activities at regional level, promoting the process of decentralisation, contributing to reconciliation and stabilisation and furthering the process of the European integration of the whole region.

CONSIDERED THAT:

- that the Municipalities of Scutari, Elbasan and Valona, all partners of the SEENET Program, are also full members of the Association **AAM**;

NOW, THEREFORE, it is agreed and stipulated as follows:

Article 1 The Preamble

The Preamble and the Considerations constitute integral part of this Agreement. All acts and documentation mentioned in this Agreement constitute integral and substantial part of this Agreement, although not attached hereto.

Article 2 Purpose of the Agreement

The overall purpose of this agreement is to formalise and encourage a fruitful and continuous collaboration between the Parties within the framework of the SEENET Program aiming at:

- increasing the efficiency of the local development strategies promoted and implemented by the Program, by offering an adequate support to the initiatives promoted at local level and by bringing out local best practices into a wider arena, which other municipalities could learn and benefit from;
- facilitating the partnership and partners' contribution to the SEENET Program, by establishing a network for communication and liaison between partnering territories;
- Strengthening the role and the political weight of **AAM**, in view of the prospective future European integration of Albania.

Article 3 Object of the Agreement

The collaboration described in Article 2 will be carried out through:

- a) drawing up of common positions and signing of several position papers concerning the four thematic pillars of the SEENET Program;
- b) drawing up and signing of a joint political declaration on the perspectives of administrative decentralization and of European integration in the south-east European countries;
- c) organization of thematic workshops within a conference to be held in Rome, in the first half of 2011;
- d) creation of a *Regional Platform* via the activation of an on-line forum, which will give the possibility to the associations of local authorities to discuss regularly and evaluate the efficiency and progress of the actions of the SEENET Program that take place in the partner territories. This will be done in order to agree on and support common positions on the key issues dealt with the Program, thus laying the groundwork for new local development models and political strategies to be promoted in front of national and European decision-makers;
- e) technical assistance to the associations, via sharing of instruments, best practice and knowledge in the fields of decentralization of the functions of LG units, EU Integration as well as organization of lobbying activities.

The Partners also commit themselves, within the bounds of their own competence, to undertake all efforts to ensure successful implementation of the above described actions.

In order to deliver project requirements, ANCI will:

- organize and host a conference in Rome, dedicated to the launch of the network (name of the network) and to the elaboration of common positions on SEENET Program themes, where the Association of local authorities of SEE will play the key role. Furthermore, ANCI will cover all travel, accommodation and food expenses of invited AAM officials (two delegates);
- organize thematic workshops at the conference;
- set up and mediate an on-line forum to enable the associations of local authorities, as well as other stakeholders and interested parties, to address SEENET related issues and other relevant themes identified in course of the project;
- carry out a needs assessment at the regional level, related to the key issues of the Program (local tourism, rural territory and natural environment, transnational entrepreneurial co-operation, territorial planning and social services), required for the elaboration of position papers;
- assist AAM by providing advisory services concerning drafting Projects for EU funds, twinning activities, best services to the members, municipal services and/or by helping AAM via its Brussels office to lobby the European Institutions;
- share relevant information with AAM.

In order to deliver project requirements, AAM will:

- share relevant information with ANCI related to planned project activities;
- participate to the conference and the thematic workshops organized by ANCI;

- participate to the discussions of the on-line forum organized and handled by ANCI to contribute to the coordinated efforts of the associations aiming to establish a coherent approach of the network's action;
- contribute to the elaboration of common positions (*Position Papers and Political Declarations*) of the Associations of local authorities of SEE.

Article 4

Operational Modalities

- a) To implement the above described collaboration, ANCI will operate through its "Department for Southern Italy and Co-operation" and will be responsible of the general coordination and design of the co-operation activities;
- b) AAM will have the task of identifying and nominating a *Project Contact Person* who will dedicate part of his/her time to the discussions of the forum and will represent the association in the discussions. The person chosen should have among his/her abilities excellent communication skills and knowledge of English, as the latter is the official language of the project and, hence, of the forum discussions.

Article 5

Financial Aspects

Each Party shall be responsible for financing the work that is done under its direction of by its staff, related to the collaboration under the present Agreement; on the contrary, all projected costs related to the participation at conferences, meetings, seminars and workshops (travel, accommodation, transport and insurance costs) within the financing framework of the SeeNet Program, shall be covered by ANCI.

Article 6

Official Language

The official working language is English.

Article 7

Promotion

Should the Partners intend to publish information or results directly connected to the activities described in this agreement in the national or international, traditional or electronic, media, or to use these during conventions, meetings, seminars and the like, they will do so only after agreeing on terms and conditions of publication. Partners are, nonetheless, obliged to quote both the Directorate General for Development Co-operation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCS-MAE) and the regions, each of which with its own logo, together with acknowledgement that these data were obtained from the SEENET Program.

The Partners commit themselves to giving visibility to the SEENET Program, to Region of Tuscany and to DGCS-MAE, which is the main sponsor of the Program, via informative initiatives both in south-east Europe and in Italy. They also commit themselves to coordinating and sharing information with similar initiatives financed by DGCS-MAE.

For any other aspect related to the promotion of the contribution of DGCS-MAE, reference shall be made to the “Linee Guida sulla Visibilità della Co-operazione Italiana allo sviluppo” (Guidelines on visibility and promotion of Italian Development Co-operation) approved by C.D. of DGCS with decision n.51 of 24 March 2000.

Article 8 Entry into force

The following agreement enters into force on the date of the stipulation and remains valid for the entire duration of the project.

The following agreement is signed in Rome, on _____, in two identical copies, in English.

For AAM
Mr Fatos Hodaj

For ANCI
Mr Angelo Rughetti

Executive Director
Albanian Association of Municipalities

Secretary General
National Association of Italian Municipalities