

Interview with Mayor Tatiana Badan, the 13th NALAS President: *“Mayors - both men and women - shall enjoy their positions, not fear them”*

By: Jelena Janevska, NALAS Knowledge and Communications Manager



The 16th NALAS General Assembly, held online from 12 until 14 April 2021, was a remarkable event. It brought together over 500 registered participants and 55 speakers, in six events centred around local economic development, by leaving no one behind.

During this General Assembly, Mr. Emanuil Manolov, Mayor of Pavlikeni, Bulgaria, successfully concluded his one-year mandate as a President of NALAS and this important role rotated to **Mrs. Tatiana Badan**, Mayor of Selemet Municipality in Moldova and President of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM).

Mrs. Badan is the 13th NALAS President and the first female President in the history of the Network.

Mrs. Badan is an inspiring woman. She has almost a three decades long experience in local public administration and serves as a Mayor for more than 18 years, in five mandates. Her municipality, Selemet, is the biggest village from Cimişlia District with a population of 4,000. Mrs. Badan is proud of all the improvements she has led in her locality, some of which are the social centre for disabled and vulnerable children, kindergarten, general and music school, local museum, regional market for local producers, various infrastructure investments, etc. For her achievements in 2014 Mrs. Badan was awarded “Mayor of the Year”.

Mrs. Badan is President of CALM since its creation in 2010. Also, Mrs. Badan is very active internationally. From 2016 to 2020 she was the Head of the Moldovan Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

Mrs. Badan is a consistent promoter of gender equality and of the idea that women must participate in the governance structures at all levels and she advocates for the most active and fair involvement of women in the decision-making processes.

JJ: Mayor Badan, congratulations for the new role you just assumed, President of NALAS. Since you have been a Vice-President of the Network and a Delegate in its General Assembly on behalf of CALM, you are quite familiar with NALAS’ work. What does NALAS mean to you personally, as a Mayor?

NALAS is a very important partner for the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova. Above all it is a platform of the people united not only by common professional environment, but a

platform of the people united by common goals and aspirations – in terms of advocacy, in terms of reforms, in terms of exchange of practices and consolidation of capacities as well as

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in terms of European and global integration. For me as well as for many of my colleagues, NALAS was the fundamental and the very first school of introduction into the basis of local autonomy and local democracy. The feeling of unification and of being not alone, but supported by the colleagues and friends from different countries was helping us a lot during hard times for local democracy and local autonomy in Moldova. NALAS played a rather important role in creation and consolidation of CALM since its inception. Many NALAS members in their turn have contributed significantly to CALM initiation and

development – National Association of Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria, Association of Romanian Communes, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities from Serbia. CALM itself can be considered as an important success story of NALAS via its contribution to CALM institutional development, consolidation of CALM capacities and support for CALM members and secretariat.



JJ: What are your priorities during the next 12 months? Where would you like to lead the Network and what personal footprint to leave?

Our main goal and aspiration for the forthcoming year is facing the multi-dimensional influences of the pandemic and post-pandemic crisis, resilience of local governments, and the support they get from the national and international levels. During this time would be essential to thoroughly review the existing practices, to make scarce available resources, which will probably become even more scarce if the aftermath of the crisis, much more efficient and to learn the lessons of cooperation between local and central authorities as well as to learn and appreciate the role and place of local authorities in the post-pandemic world. Immediate target will be the European Union development policies directed at the post-crisis resilience for local governments, identification of additional programs and instruments to support local governments, to support local democracy and local autonomy as a pan-European value coming from the European Charter

of local self-government. We are also hoping to benefit towards these objectives from CALM forthcoming co-chairmanship in the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) which will provide even higher leverage for our efforts thus uniting common fundamental aspirations and goals of both Balkan countries and Eastern Partnership countries, especially of the three Eastern Partnership countries which signed the Association Agreements with European Union – Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia.



JJ: The previous NALAS President, Mayor Emanuil Manolov paved the way for leading NALAS in one of the most challenging times, during COVID-19 pandemics. Your term will probably continue in such difficult circumstances. What are the strategies that you are going to implement to continue the successful implementation of NALAS mandate during this post-COVID-19 period?

The pandemic and post-pandemic recovery and resilience will be a corner stone of our mandate. The reality dictates this. Local authorities all over the world and particularly in the developing and in South-East European countries are experiencing rather important challenges and problems coming from the pandemic crisis, quite often also coming from the central governments' response to the crisis. Local governments apart from scarce financial resources had to take on board a lot of competencies in

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which they did not even have the expertise before. This requires both human and financial resources. Protecting local governments’ rights, helping them to address the challenges, bringing those challenges closer to the attention of our international partners and particularly of the European Union will probably influence the entire NALAS mandate. My responsibility as a President of NALAS will be to assure that all those challenges and problems are properly addressed first of all by our international partners as NALAS is rather active at the international arena, but also via

policy dialogue and peer exchange at national level.

JJ: You are the first female President in the history of NALAS. In the same time, you are a strong advocate for gender equality, for increased role of women in the decision-making and for changes at local level. How many battles have you won thus far and how do you see the future when it comes to equality of women and men in local life?



hard battle, which costs a lot of nerves, health and deprivations.

I see the involvement of women in public affairs not as a privilege or as something that should be imposed artificially, but rather as a natural right of all people to represent and to be represented. In many countries including in mine, positions in local government are so difficult and challenging due to low remuneration, high pressures and huge responsibilities that they are equally unattractive for both men and women. Based on my experience I can testify that our life is a constant and a very

What I am doing together with my colleagues in CALM, with our CALM Network of Women Mayors is fighting for amelioration of the overall operational situation in local governance for both men and women, making people to enjoy their positions rather than to fear them. In CALM we stand for rather practical and pragmatic approaches towards equality including gender equality. We want to see real results on the ground. There is a lot of attention to gender equality in my country and in many other countries including on behalf of our international partners. Unfortunately, these efforts are a bit too theoretical and centre mostly around discussions, advocacy and trainings. While what we really need is the solution of the real women problems and challenges.

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For this purpose, in 2011 CALM has established its Women Mayors Network and since then our common goal has been to make the voice of women in public administration a strong and distinct one. As a consistent promoter of gender equality and of the idea that women must participate in the governance structures at all levels, we have advocated and will continue to do so from national and international platforms for the most active and fair involvement of women in the decision-making processes. Our efforts changed the perception and attitude towards women in leadership roles.



According to the data of the Central Electoral Commission, after the local elections in 2011 we had about 18% of the mayor's positions occupied by women, in 2015 it grew to 20% and in 2019 to 22%. We provide particular attention to newly elected women mayors to the women newcomers in local public administration connecting them to their peers and organising exchange of experiences including on spot in the communities

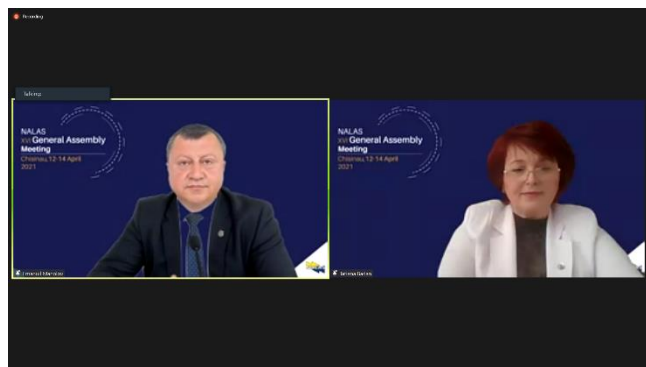
of successful women mayors with many political mandates. We have also created the social media groups for women mayors and women employed in local public administration. This contributes

significantly, including psychologically, to their accommodation in such complex and complicated positions as elected representative or employee in local public administration.

In December 2021, CALM Women Mayors Network will celebrate its 10th anniversary! During this decade we have achieved great results by increasing the number of women mayors, by building their capacities and making them confident and competitive and by making their voice heard.

JJ: We organised a very successful NALAS General Assembly a month ago, where CALM and you personally had a prominent role. Now, after the impressions have calmed, where do you see the future role of South-East Europe local governments in local economic development?

NALAS General Assembly 2021 was excellent and well attended, including high level representatives from the Council of Europe, European Commission and the political leadership of my country. For the excellent organisation of the event, I am so grateful to my colleagues from CALM Secretariat, but above all to the colleagues from NALAS Secretariat, and personally to NALAS Executive Director Mr. Kelmend Zajazi.



Local economic development in my view is one of the essential dimensions for consolidation of local governments' efforts and capacities. In my country and in many other countries I see that local governments became quite proficient in raising funds from our international partners, in implementing international projects and in community development based on internal and external financial resources.

Where we are probably behind – is in raising private funds, both nationally and internationally. The process of raising and attracting private national and international investments is going much slower and we see a lot of reserves here. In fact, it might be said that in many cases local governments are becoming addicted to the international funding and often are not doing enough in order to earn money on their own including via taxation, attracting private business, foreign investments and designing appropriate local fiscal and economic policies.

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Quite often persists the lack of confidence in proper forces, people consider that their small community or even small town will never represent an interest for any potential foreign investor. Successful examples of many active mayors including in my country testify that this is hardly so. But at the



same time such lack of confidence attests also psychological barriers for local economic development. Therefore, in my view, acknowledging the important work carried out already in many countries in raising of public investments and funds from international partners, from now on we need to focus much more exactly on local economic development generating funds locally rather than expecting them from somebody else, especially in the pandemic and post-pandemic world when all resources will become extremely scarce.

JJ: What are the main challenges of the Moldovan local governments today?



In Moldova local governments are experiencing quite similar challenges to the challenges of our colleagues in many European countries including in NALAS countries. Pandemic crisis has certainly consolidated all the other problems and now the political agenda of CALM and local governments became much more intense. One of the key problems influencing many others is almost complete lack of funding – particular for investment projects, although sometimes

resources are lacking even for recurrent expenditures. Funds for investment projects are extremely scarce triple with local governments, at the central level and those coming from our international partners. This is also the most heavily aggravated aspect on the background of the pandemic crisis.

Another issue would be weak, short lasting central governments and almost destroyed system of central public administration. Under the conditions of permanently changing central governments (in 2019 we have had three governments, in 2020 – two) reforms are constantly on standby and are being implemented on a rather unpredictable ad-hoc scale.

At CALM we spend quite a lot time fighting centralisation recipes coming from our central governments and sometimes also from our international partners rather than advocating for positive changes and reforms. The situation is rather difficult and complicated also due to a very contradictory legislation being taken from different legal and legislative systems (British, American, French, German, etc.), which rarely correlate with each other. Because of such



contradictory legislation a lot of minor, semi-important and very important aspects of local government operations face numerous problems. Thanks to CALM we managed to resolve certain issues, but the process is going really slow due to many factors, including the above-mentioned weak political institutions in the country.

JJ: You have an impressive biography in local government, serving as a Mayor of Selemet for over 18 years. What is the achievement that you are especially proud of?

The biggest achievement is that we managed to consolidate the community and the diaspora



in order to mobilise and get involved in all local processes and development projects of Selemet. As a general trend for the Republic of Moldova, lots of Selemet citizens have left abroad looking for a better life and better job opportunities. At the beginning of my career as a mayor the village had mainly elderly people and children left behind whose parents went abroad and the population was not involved in the public life of the community. The public infrastructure was in

a very poor condition.

Along the years, my team and I managed to mobilise the local citizens and also those that left abroad to get involved in the Selemet life, in all the local events, processes, strategic decisions, projects, etc.

The results are common: local public institutions provided with modern working conditions, with happy children and students and dedicated teachers; improved local infrastructure; local businesses increasing their number year by year.

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JJ: You often emphasise that you are not politically affiliated, that makes it very difficult to attract funding from the state budget. This "weakness" made you think outside the box and focus on attracting foreign investments, thanks to which you achieved remarkable changes in your community. What is your key to success in mobilising diaspora?

The key to success is the trust of the citizens, the transparency of the activities and the responsibility of the Selemet local public administration. The creation of the communication bridge with the diaspora in 2005, their permanent information about the problems Selemet

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is facing, developments that are happening, as well as asking the opinion of the diaspora on how they see the solutions for the Selemet problems and how they can contribute, resulted with the involvement of the diaspora in all development projects of Selemet locality. We have the strongest Home Town Association of natives in the Republic of Moldova that has managed to mobilise and contribute to the modernisation of the community of origin.