



COMMON GOAL: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN AN AREA

New Challenges for Local Governments Role of Umbrella Organisations in the Development Cooperation

Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia

Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska

Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic

Svaz měst a obcí České republiky

Association of Polish Cities

Związek Miast Polskich

Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities

Települési Önkormányzatok Országos Szövetsége

Hungarian Association of Local Governments

Magyar Önkormányzatok Szövetsége

Association of Ukrainian Cities

Асоціація міст України

Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova

Congresul Autorităților Locale din Moldova

National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia

საქართველოს ადგილობრივ თვითმმართველობათა ეროვნული ასოციაცია

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The final conference of the project NEW CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS - ROLE OF UMBRELLA ORGANISATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION was held on April 11th - 12th 2016 in Bratislava. The Conference summarised the results of the project with the purpose to **unify and define objectives and interests of the national associations of towns and municipalities from countries which were involved in the project**: SLOVAK REPUBLIC / SK - Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia, CZECH REPUBLIC / CZ - Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic, Poland / PL - Association of Polish Cities, Hungary / HU - Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities, Hungary / HU - Hungarian Association of Local Governments, Ukraine / UA - Association of Ukrainian Cities, Moldova / MD - Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova, Georgia / GE - National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia.

The final conference confirmed that despite the fact that the positions of local self-governments in the participating countries differ in the structure of public administration, the common task for the representatives of the municipalities is **to improve the quality of life in the area** they administer.

The conference showed that mutual cooperation has a great potential for sharing experience and examples of good / bad practice in relation to a two-level build-up of a strong local government:

- **system changes and reform measures**
- **solving specific problems in an area**

system changes and reform measures

The conference dealt with topics of development cooperation linked to system and structural changes, as well as designing specific reform measures in individual countries by using present experience of partnership countries. The discussion about particular conference contributions



showed that the cooperation should lead to a joint support and cooperation in proposing, promoting and implementation of reform measures which on the basis of identification, current status analysis and set measures solve the problems of local self-government as a whole:

- supporting public administration reform, decentralization process linked to the administrative territorial organisation and fiscal decentralization in EaP countries
- further continuation of reform measures in the V4 countries with the purpose to optimise and improve the performance of local self-government with the emphasis on the potential of mechanism of inter-municipal cooperation
- targeted comparison of selected policies in the countries that signed the Memorandum of cooperation and fostering transfer of transformation experience.

structural changes, or from centralization to decentralization

Consistent implementation of decentralization policies in individual countries should lead to a significant or gradually controlled change. A joint task of umbrella organisations / associations of municipalities is to increase the gravity and broaden competences of local government authorities in the governance of the state (in relation to a current social order). The necessary degree of self-governing competences and responsibilities at the administered areas, encouraged by financial independence from the central government is vital for reform and system changes. This is a transformation from a non-compliant vertical or centralised state governance into a horizontal management with a considerable influence of elected officials (Mayors) and citizens directly at the local level.

System measures and changes are not only the problem of the EaP countries but V4 countries as well. It turned out that the EaP countries often lack the political will to accomplish the decentralization process (especially in relation to fiscal decentralization and transferring competences down - for example, Moldova). Simultaneously, a great restrain may be also



caused either by an unfavorable internal political situation, which does not permit to start a meaningful dialogue between a local government and the central government (Ukraine, Moldova), or by only a partly adjusted institute of transferred performance of activity of the state administration towards municipalities (Georgia).

The key problem of reforms and adjustment of strategies / concepts of decentralization (the performance manner of original and transferred competencies), or optimizing the performance of local self-government is that it is often designed through the optics of central government authorities. The participation of umbrella associations of municipalities in the process of setting system and structural reforms is a key condition of building an effective public administration in each of the participating countries. This requirement is linked to the next round of reforms in the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, where a new social requirement resonates, which is to optimize the structure and to implement more effective performance forms of transferred competences by merging municipalities and reducing administrative expenses and expenses connected with providing services to citizens (municipal reform).

defined topics for further cooperation

Topics and themes arise from a real supply and possibilities of individual partners (inspired by study visits and specific selection of topics from "the field") and the conference:

- a dialogue with the central government authorities,
- promoting the interests of local governments - including influencing government proposals and legislative process and implementation of the necessary changes and reforms in the structural organisation of public administration, or at the individual performance sections of local government competence (education, environment, internal administration, etc.),



- good governance - including measures aimed at transparency and anti-corruption measures and public procurement,
- sharing experiences with transformation, fiscal decentralization and accession to the European Union.

Inter-municipal cooperation and its contribution to the local self-government

Inter-municipal cooperation on a mandatory or voluntary basis is to become the new key for municipal reform in Slovakia. It was the conference itself which gave room to present the project of inter-municipal cooperation as a viable mechanism for improving the performance of local self-government.

It is possible to solve inter-municipal cooperation of small municipalities, cooperation of the city and surrounding municipalities in the subregions, or cooperation within the boroughs of major cities on a voluntary basis or on a mandatory merging of municipalities by law. Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS) is strongly opposed to forced merging of municipalities, because it is necessary to ensure the identity of each small village, since the identification of the population with a smaller territorial unit is a value to be protected. ZMOS sees the possibility of solving the cooperation of municipalities on a voluntary basis, which uses the institute of joint municipal authorities and forms of inter-municipal cooperation. Currently, there are more than 230 joint municipal offices in Slovakia.

The Mayor of Sveržov, Paul Ceľuch presented existing experience, results and benefits of joining the performance of selected competences into a joint authority of small villages in the district Bardejov based on an agreement about establishing a joint municipal authority. Joint Authority of Bardejov District Municipalities was established back in 2003 on the basis of common need for small communities to effectively share personal and financial cost when performing specific competences. Nowadays the office covers more than eighty small municipalities within the performance in the fields: building regulations, specialised building



authority for local and tertiary roads, state water management, air protection and flood control. At the same time it performs selected assignments in the field of education (school authorities, compulsory education attendance, the education of children with special needs) and overall performance in the area of salary administration of municipal authorities and bookkeeping for all participating municipalities.

The presentation gave room for a discussion to the conference participants about the use and possible models of inter-municipal cooperation as well as a further insight into use of joint offices' potential in other areas (establishing local labor markets and increasing local employment, social integration and security). The discussion showed that the topic of merging municipalities as a principle to optimise the administrative territorial reform of public administration (local self-government) is current not only in Slovakia but also in other countries (Moldova, the Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine).

solving specific problems in the area

A part of the presentations at the conference was devoted to specific examples and solutions which lead to local government' s direct assumption of responsibility for the quality of citizens' life and solving their key problems and needs. Discussion about particular contributions in the conference showed that cooperation and mutual support will be directed to the proposition, promotion and implementation of actions, to the creation of a database of innovative policies which lead towards a selected (defined, agreed on) section of administration performance and solve specific problems at the level of individual municipalities in order to increase the quality of people' s life and solve their underlying problems such as:

- local unemployment and the need for developing local labor markets,
- poverty reduction and the integration of marginalised and disadvantaged groups of people into the everyday life of the local government,
- providing a wide range of possible public services for citizens.



the revitalisation of local labor markets

The conference presented the Hungarian model of recovery for local labor markets, especially in areas and regions suffering from high unemployment, caused by the collapse of cooperative farms, as well as a high proportion of almost unemployable population (low education, Roma ethnicity, old age). The aim of the program was to create new jobs in the public sector, help people get back to work and increase their self-sufficiency (eliminating dependence on the welfare system). The program Social Land Programme was launched in 1992 and more than 500 municipalities engaged in it.

The key moment of the program was to involve local government in job creation through agricultural production and revitalisation of traditional farming in rural areas. Municipalities established local companies or cooperatives with the objective to grow fruit and vegetables, breed cattle or other animals while promoting the production of "domestic products" (bread, jams, preserves, meat products).

Simultaneously, the program supported the production and the sale of products through public facilities, which were covered by the local government (catering, schools, kindergartens, retirement homes, local market, or commission system sales in local groceries). Gradually, the program expanded to new activities. Depending on the skill of mayors, local government began to generate new jobs through the production of concrete pillars, paving stones, maintenance of public green areas, waste collection, disposal of invasive plants and renovation of the roads. Egerág, Pusztaföldvár and Rozsály were presented as model communities.

poverty reduction and integration





A valuable contribution was the presentation devoted to the integration of people at risk of poverty (including the Roma population) into the daily life of the Hungarian town of Papa which chose a comprehensive approach oriented on the low level of education, high unemployment and unemployability rate, poor financial situation in families, inadequate living conditions and alarming health condition. They used a mix of financial instruments and programs which allowed gradual improvement in the quality of life in individual families.

The key moment was to support employment through training and educational programs targeted to prepare people for specific jobs (herbal plant collector and producer, assistant agronomist, communal service provider, paving specialist). It was the training programs and training courses for specific jobs in the public service government – e. g. waste disposal and maintenance of public greenery, construction and agricultural work with a mandatory practice within securing services provided by the municipality or the work enhancing environment and municipal property.

The second support was a complex system of intervention tools (additional education and creating conditions to improve study results of children, health care, preparation for a job and building a strong community) which considered individual needs of clients and at the same time the intention of the local government - to build a healthy, solidary and cohesive community.

The basic building block of the program was to build a community center, which provided not only space to work with clients but also specialized programs for Roma and non-Roma population. Programs focused on social work, professional training, expert assistance and advice (e.g. in the financial and legal fields) as well as creating conditions to ensure hygiene for families with children. A separate chapter was formed by special "programs for all",



reinforcing their identity of the local community, as well as separate events for families with children or for children and youth.

development strategies, public services and revitalisation the local labor markets

On the contrary, the example of Poland shows that by consistent application of financial decentralization, application of the European legal framework, strengthening the tax base and transparent mechanisms when forming budget for municipalities, creating industrial development strategies and enhancing the range of services to citizens on the principle of natural subregion on participatory principles (public participation), it is possible to effectively manage even small municipalities up to 250 inhabitants. Specifically, it was the presentation of the Polish delegation - Jaslo The Public Service Zone, which gave a new insight into increasing the availability, quality and efficiency of services for the city of Jaslo and nine subregion local governments (rural municipalities). The City Jaslo is a region, which is industrially underdeveloped and due to a lack of employment opportunities and developing impulses gradually depopulates. The strategy showed how to return "life" to the region and how to build local labor market on a coherent system of public services, covered by a local government.

An important innovative element for the conception, development and implementation of the strategy was to engage the public and interested groups into creating a new policy as well as setting solutions and measures which ensure gradual and purposeful development of the area.

defined topics for future cooperation

Topics and themes are based on a real supply and the possibility of individual partners (inspired by study visits and specific selection of topics from "the field") and the conference:

- service delivery and improving administration performance - including public security, transport, environment, education, social affairs and integration, local employment,



- financial mechanisms for municipalities,
- cross-border cooperation,
- regional development, territorial planning, investment and tourism.

new ways to share the experience with the use of the PLATFORMA program CEMR

The conference provided a direct support to the activities of the partners involved through the implementation of the agenda of the European PLATFORMA, which is covered by CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions) within a new project with the same name, realised in partnership with the European Commission, which seeks to promote development agenda, development cooperation, as well as the implementation of development policies in municipal environment. Representatives of CEMR - Patrizio Fiorilli, CEMR PLATFORMA Director and Boris Tonhauser, Executive Advisor expressed support for the new PLATFORMA of associations of local authorities for development cooperation and offered to the partner organisations covered by newly created platform the opportunity to actively participate in the activities of the CEMR PLATFORMA (including financial provision for regular working meetings aimed at sharing good practice).