

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 22 September – 3 October 2014

Working Session 1 Democratic Institutions, including: Democracy at the national, regional and local levels

Contribution by the Council of Europe

Good Democratic Governance

Responsive, transparent and accountable institutions are the bedrock of democracy. Council of Europe member states are committed to the fundamental principles of political democracy - individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law – and engage into dialogue and action in order “for the maintenance and further realisation of these ideals and in the interests of economic and social progress”.

In the field of democracy and governance, the Committee of Ministers has established a **new intergovernmental committee (CDDG)** as a forum where member States can exchange information and good practice and engage in constructive partnerships through peer reviews, direct assistance and the development of new standards.

Thanks to its Charter of Local self-Government, the Council of Europe has laid the foundations of solid local self-government across Europe. To date, all 47 member states have subscribed to the principles of the Charter, are implementing it and are subject to the regular monitoring by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. In order to promote transparent and responsive local democracy, the Charter has been supplemented in 2009¹ by an Additional protocol that fosters citizen participation in public life at local level. The Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2008 encourages member States to implement the twelve principles of good democratic governance through targeted action at local level and with the direct involvement of local authorities themselves.

Taking into accounts the most recent work of the former CDLR committee – on the human rights dimension of local governance, the promotion of good governance at local level, the impact of measures to counter the financial crisis on local governments and the suppression of the obstacles to trans-frontier cooperation – the CDDG generates

¹STE 207. <http://www.conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/207.htm>. At 1 September 2014, the following States were parties to the Protocol: Armenia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden.

new opportunities for promoting good governance and strengthening democratic institutions across Europe.

One of the major fields of action continues to be the design and proper implementation of legislation and policy for **local and regional government reforms**. Given its accumulated experience and know-how, the focus is on:

- local/regional government structures, their powers and their operation,
- local finance, fiscal decentralisation and municipal property,
- mechanisms of administrative supervision of local and regional government,
- legal status of local authorities' staff, human resources management.

The geographical focus of the activities, in line with the guidelines adopted by the Committee of Ministers, is on Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, South-Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. In 2013-2014, substantial assistance was offered in particular to Ukraine. Smaller-scale assistance was also offered to Albania, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova.

The Council of Europe attaches great importance to the establishment of effective synergetic **partnerships with other international Organisations** and other institutions that are active in member states and pursue objectives similar to those of the Council of Europe. In the field of local and regional democracy, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is a major partner and the Council of Europe has concluded a co-operation agreement with the OSCE - Democratization Department/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) aimed at streamlining and coordinating each Organisation's work on the promotion of sound and democratic decentralisation in SEE countries.

Annual co-ordination meetings with ODIHR and OSCE field missions in South-Eastern Europe enable regular assessment of ongoing co-operation, exchange of information on the respective country projects and discussion of emerging issues with a view to identifying opportunities for joint action.

Another priority of the Council of Europe is the **reinforcement of the capacities of local self-government** to provide quality services to their inhabitants and more generally, to be managed in a way that is effective, transparent and democratic. Through its Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, the Council of Europe puts at the disposal of local authorities a set of tools (from "national training strategies" for local authorities' staff to training programmes on local finance, public ethics, performance management, etc.) as well as "best practice" initiatives that facilitate the implementation, at local level of (elements of) the instruments and *acquis* developed by the Organisation. The Centre also helps local authorities and their associations to implement programmes based on its tools, ensuring quality control, expertise, supervision and sometimes general management.

The latest toolkits developed and finalised by the Centre deal with leadership development, human resources management and cross-border co-operation (prepared in co-operation with the Nordic Council of Ministers).

In 2013, the Centre had a high level of activities, as measured in terms of full programmes (29) and countries (19). Full description of the Centre's activities can be found in its annual reports (www.coe.int/local, follow Centre of Expertise – Advisory Board).

The Centre co-operates with many national (in particular local government associations, but also ministries) and international stakeholders. Very good in-field co-operation with OSCE was ensured in particular in Montenegro (in 2010-2011) and Albania (2011-ongoing). In Ukraine, where it implements a substantial capacity-building project composed of eight different programmes, the Centre organises co-ordination meetings with partners, including OSCE.

Good working relations exist with the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities in Vienna.

The Council of Europe continues to promote the implementation of the **Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level**, based on the assessment of how the local authority conducts its affairs in respect of the twelve principles, the identification of possible changes to be made and measures to be adopted, the establishment of a partnership between central (regional) authorities and local authorities (their associations) with a view to promoting the implementation of the “right” policies at both central (regional) and local levels.

The Strategy has been adopted and is being implemented in a number of countries (Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Norway) while awareness raising action is being pursued in many other ones.

The Council of Europe assistance and co-operation programmes as well as the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform are at the disposal of the states (and regions) with a view to delivering legislative assistance, the exchange of information and practice and the provision of capacity-building programmes that suit their needs.

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