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EUROPEAN UNION – COUNCIL OF EUROPE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT ON INSTITUTIONAL ENHANCEMENT FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GREECE

Implementation period: September 2016 – March 2018

Background

The EU-CoE Technical Assistance Project on Institutional Enhancement for Local Governance in Greece was specifically designed at the request of the Hellenic Ministry of Interior to support the administrative reform process. Policy advice and capacity building assistance was provided by the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform of the Council of Europe to:

- Improve the Greek institutional framework on decentralisation and local governance; and
- Strengthen capacities of local authorities to enhance implementation of reforms and provide better services to citizens.

These priority areas laid down in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the European Commission, the Hellenic Republic and the Bank of Greece, signed in August 2015.

The project was run with the support of three partner Institutes specialised in local governance issues in Greece, namely the Institute of Local Administration, the Regional Development Agency and the Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government.

Activities

In September 2016 the Centre of Expertise started the project by carrying out an extensive analysis of local capacities and training needs. These findings fed into the design and implementation of 5 actions to strengthen local skills in the field of public ethics, strategic municipal planning, inter-municipal cooperation, good governance and local economic development. Likewise, stakeholders' feedbacks complemented the wide-ranging review of the Kallikratis Law which underpinned 5 policy advices addressed to the Ministry of Interior. Main fields addressed were allocation and exercise of competences, exercise of competences by island municipalities, metropolitan governance, fiscal monitoring system and intergovernmental fiscal relations.

Inclusive approach

During the implementation of the Technical Assistance Project, the Council of Europe enabled an impressive number of stakeholders (including citizens, local representatives, officials of central and local Public Administration, associations and Universities) to inform the Decentralisation reform process by contributing to the needs analysis and the review of the existing framework. The extensive collection of qualitative and quantitative data was carried out at the beginning of each activity. The involvement of stakeholders in any inception phase was extremely important to build a sense of ownership and commitment to the project. Indeed, the numerous focus groups, interviews, study visits, workshops and trainings organised in the framework of this project, provided stakeholders with a space for open debates where they could exchange views and experiences, learn from each other and familiarise with European and National good practices. In addition, the Centre of Expertise utilised these discussions to promote Council of Europe standards and to build a common understanding of good governance across Greece.

A project for Greece

More than 70% of Greek municipalities were involved in the project during the whole implementation period. This is particularly relevant considering that participation was based on voluntary decisions and/or upon request of local authorities. The stakeholders map presented below shows that the project engaged any type of municipality and that it contributed to the harmonisation of the level of governance across the country, including remote regions such as islands, mountain and rural areas. The use of skype, video conference facilities, as well as the creation and regular update of the [dedicated website](#) allowed to reach-out a wide spectrum of municipalities and ensured smooth communication and transparency of actions and results.

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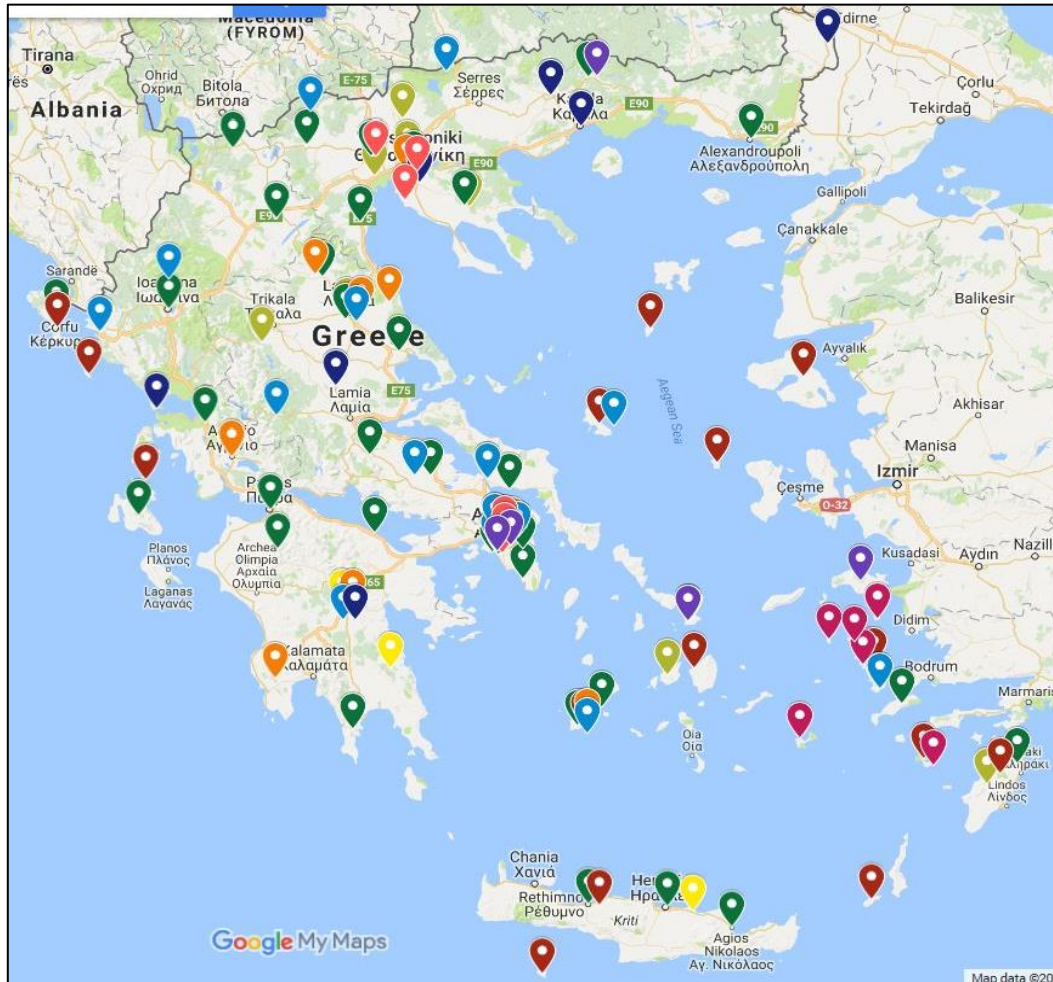


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Map of stakeholders actively involved in the project from 01/09/2016 to 31/03/2018



Peer review – distribution of competencies
Training Needs Analysis
Best Practice Programme
Local Financial Benchmarking & Policy Advice on Fiscal Supervision
Policy advice on exercise of competencies by islands municipalities
European Label of Governance Excellence
Inter-Municipal Cooperation
Public Ethics Benchmarking
Strategic Municipal Planning
Policy Advice on Metropolitan governance

Municipalities	Total Greece
153 (pilots, benchmarks and interviews)	47%
231 (engaged in total – including participation in events and surveys)	71%
Almost half participants (47%: 109 LGs) engaged in 2 or more activities	
13%: 21 LGs in more than 4 activities	
24%: 55 LGs are island municipalities	
All regions / 12 out of 13 major cities-capitals of regions	

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The impressive level of participation could be explained by the pertinence of activities, the openness of local governments to innovative international activities and the capacity of the CoE to adapt to and meet local needs. It is worth noticing that 13% of participating municipalities took part in more than 4 activities, meaning that these benefitted from a regular and continued assistance throughout the 21 months of project implementation, touching upon different components of good governance.

Outcomes

The implementation of policy advice and capacity building activities implied:

- Creation of a database on municipal fiscal dependency in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior;
- Development of evaluation matrices, service cards and Benchmarks to assess local financial management, corruption risks, level of good governance and public ethics in Greek local government;
- Assessment of the capacity and training needs, with a view to developing a National Training Strategy;
- Provision of comparative studies, trainings, seminars, open days and study visits to strengthen capacities and exchange European and National best practices;
- Establishment of a Network among 7 island municipalities to cooperate in areas of common interest and the drafting of legal tools (agreements and contracts forms) to set-up different schemes of inter-municipal cooperation according to National Law and Council of Europe principles;
- Definition of guidelines to run the Council of Europe Best Practice Programme in Greece;
- Development of questionnaires, e-surveys and mobile app for citizens' feedback, tailor made for Greece;
- Organisation of coaching activities to improve business planning skills and capacity to carry out stakeholders' analysis through Council of Europe tools.

Conclusions

Greece is undertaking a significant revision of its institutional structure. With regard to the local governance reform, the project clarified that the existing legislation is quite comprehensive and detailed. Yet, in some cases it could be streamlined and rationalised to simplify administrative procedures and upgrade the role of local government. The introduction of e-governance tools and the standardisation of administrative procedures would reduce risks of corruption and increase transparency and accountability.

The project provided a solid base of data and evidence with a view to informing the revision of the Kallikratis Reform. The new law on local government, "Cleisthenes

I" was adopted by the Hellenic Parliament in July 2018. It contains provisions in line with several recommendations and lessons learnt, such as the categorisation of municipalities based on new criteria, the streamlining of the distribution of financial resources to municipalities, the mapping and re-definition of local government competences, the amendment of the supervision system, the enhancement of civil participation and public consultation at local level and the strengthening of strategic planning and inter-municipal cooperation.

A sound preliminary assessment of the legislation in place and its practical implications is a key element for successful reforms. The policy recommendations, tools to ensure a more effective engagement of citizens in the decision-making process as well as the indicators to monitor the performance of local government in different areas are available online.

One of the major findings of the project regards the need to support the revision of the legal framework with more effective and systematic participatory initiatives and capacity building actions. Indeed, failure to build a social dialogue during the reform process would increase citizens' distrust towards Institutions, particularly in those countries which are now recovering from economic and financial crisis such as Greece. Likewise, investing in trainings and raising-awareness activities is crucial to improve the performance of local public administration and to ensure ownership of reforms.

The project demonstrated that an increased dialogue and coordination with colleagues and between elected representatives and senior officials would have a positive impact on the daily functioning of local government. Among the skills to be strengthen, the most relevant is the capacity to plan strategically (identify local needs, engage stakeholders, develop long-term visions, draft effective action plans and monitor their implementation). The project provided a number of activities focusing on strategic planning, coordination and leadership skills, receiving excellent feedbacks from participants. Future actions should further the improvements achieved and capitalise on the results of the project.

The Centre of Expertise is ready to continue supporting Greece to reinforce multilevel governance and improve public administration capacity to deliver quality services to citizens.