

***Speech of the State Secretary of
The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic***

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On 12th meeting of the Committee on Democracy and Governance

Representatives of member states of the Council of Europe,

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by thanking you for this opportunity to address you today, at this 12th session of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance of the Council of Europe.

Currently, all member states are facing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly, it has had an immeasurable impact not only on the work processes but also on our daily life. I am therefore all the more pleased that the CDDG is showing its flexibility by providing a smooth continuation of its activities as well as by organizing this online intergovernmental platform for exchange of information and experiences in different topics.

Despite the current situation, it is a real pleasure to be here with you, and for the first time in the position of State Secretary at the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic to share with you our plans and visions on how to improve the self-government in Slovakia. I believe that we are more than ever all aware of the fact that citizens are not looking for words and recommendations alone but they are hungry for real action, the improvement which moves us forward. Therefore, this crisis should not be used as an excuse not to prepare and carry out important pending reforms. In this context, I consider it important to highlight the great

cooperation with the Council of Europe and its Center of Expertise for Good Governance on the project Delivering Good Governance in Slovakia, thanks to which we will be able to deliver even more concrete plans which are pre-discussed with all relevant stakeholders. Nowadays there is an ever-growing need expressed by the people to participate in the decision-making processes, in order to feel truly involved and in order for their voices to be heard. I can honestly and openly say that this cooperation is helping us to better serve our citizens and respond to their needs.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me move on the ongoing progress regarding the implementation of the activities within the project focused on the strengthening of local self-governance in Slovakia.

This project was planned to be implemented in two parallel lines:

Within the first line, attention has been drawn towards the strengthening of institutional management and building capacities at the local level. In the last couple of months, the Leadership Academy Programme has been implemented through several training sessions, which were focused on developing institutional leadership skills of mayors. In the light of Covid-19 and due to the impossibility of holding trainings in person, the webspace had become even more useful. The trainings appeared to have generated most interest among the mayors from medium-sized villages and small cities, also due to its easily accessible online form. I am really glad that thanks to the expert from the Council of Europe, we have been able to deliver effectively an important topic such as crisis management. It has been the most appreciated topic by all participants due to its relevance.

In September, the accredited local partner organization of the Council of Europe, the NGO Good civil servant, in cooperation with the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance, successfully launched the implementation of the European Label of Governance Excellence

(ELoGE) in Slovakia in order to provide better governance by identifying strengths and weaknesses of local authorities. Currently, local experts are providing capacity building support to the local authorities which were interested in participating in the ELoGE pilot programme.

Another toolkit of the Council of Europe which successfully started with its implementation during the previous year, is the Training and Capacity Needs Analysis (TNA). Based upon the implementation of this particular toolkit, we were able to identify the gaps and needs of local authorities through surveys, interviews and focus groups. The Partner organization of the Council of Europe responsible for delivering this activity just initiated the preparation of the National Training and Capacity-Building Strategy (NTS), based on the findings of the TNA.

Within the other line of the project, it is expected that the Strategy to strengthen local self-government will be delivered. This Strategy will incorporate policy and legal advices prepared by the experts from Council of Europe, in cooperation with local experts on territorial consolidation, improvement of structure, redistribution of competencies as well as recommendations in relation to improvement and strengthening of collaboration among local, regional and central authorities.

In this regard, I have to emphasize that the reform of the public administration is perceived as highly important also by the newly elected government. This dedication was visible within the Programme Statement of the Government, where it was mentioned that one of the priorities of the Government of the Slovak Republic is to optimize the processes of public administration so that the authorities do not perform duplicate activities. The Government of the Slovak Republic is supposed to create a commission which will analyze the possibilities of adjusting the local and regional organization of self-government. It will be a subcommittee of the Commission for Structural Reform of Public Administration under the responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister for Legislation and Strategic Planning.

I am certain that the outputs delivered within this first part of the project as well as the second, and whose implementation phase will start at the end of this year, will help us support and carry out better communicated, more accurate and well targeted structural reform in Slovakia. We also feel the need to ensure stronger collaboration and cooperation between different tiers of Government in order to provide better communication with our own citizens.

Another important aspect is that within the last couple of months, not only have the state institutions been challenged by the current COVID-19 situation, but also municipalities. In this regard, I have to point out that we have seen the great importance of the decentralization processes. Slovak municipalities have shown us the importance of their role not only because they are better placed to understand the problems and needs of our communities but they also showed their flexibility, competence and ability to react and perform tasks given by the Government quickly and in a very short timeframe, such as in the case of the nationwide testing that Slovakia recently undertook.

Allow me to once again express my sincere gratitude to the Center of Expertise for Good Governance and the experts from the Council of Europe for an outstanding collaboration on this project. I wish you all a very successful meeting and fruitful discussions.

It has been an honour for me to be here with you all today.