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by the Council of Europe

Delivering Good Governance in Lithuania

26 July 2019 – 25 January 2021

Background

The project was designed at the request of Lithuania with the aim to support regional development by strengthening local institutions, promoting good governance, stimulating inter-municipal cooperation and fostering inclusive participation and equal opportunities for women and men in political decision-making. It envisaged developing the capacities of local institutions and officials through promoting respect for the principles of good democratic governance, local ownership, sustainable outcomes and public administration reform based on European standards.

The project was implemented by the Council of Europe's Centre of Expertise for Good Governance in close cooperation with the Ministry of Interior of Lithuania, the DG REFORM of the European Commission and with the support of two national partner institutions specialised in local governance issues - the Training Centre "Dainava" for civil servants and local administration and the Association of Local Authorities of Lithuania.

Activities

The [Centre of Expertise for Good Governance](#) launched the project in September 2019, by assessing the groundwork for providing capacity building support to the Lithuanian municipalities and preparing policy advice on regional development. A detailed roadmap was put in place for transposing into the Lithuanian context the Council of Europe tools

on [Inter-municipal Cooperation](#) (IMC), [European Label of Governance Excellence](#) (ELoGE), [Civil Participation in Decision-Making](#), and the [Leadership Academy Programme](#) (LAP). The roadmap was implemented through a number of trainings, workshops, roundtables, surveys, data analysis and follow-up, on-demand coaching of the interested municipalities, etc. In addition, a series of activities including a peer review gathering experts from relevant European countries was organised to identify a set of recommendations in the form of a policy advice for the Lithuanian regional development.

A project for Lithuania

Testimonials from numerous participants and stakeholders in the project demonstrated the benefits it brought to the involved authorities and the personal satisfaction of the participants. With regard to the policy advice on regional development submitted to the Lithuanian Government, the relevance of the implemented activities was acknowledged by the Ministry of Interior: "*The Council of Europe's reassurance about the importance of such reform made it possible that even the members of opposition voted in favour. The reform, in the current shape and form, would not have happened without the expert opinion of the Council of Europe. There were other, less politically notable amendments from the original project, which were also inspired by your expertise, and I am sure to conclude that Council of Europe has helped us to make the*

best of the planned reform" (Deputy Minister of Interior).

Inclusive approach

During the implementation of the Project, the Centre of Expertise ensured a participatory approach in all activities. An impressive number of stakeholders (including citizens, local representatives, officials of central and local Public Administration, associations, NGOs and Universities) took part in the activities most relevant for them. An example that vouches for the strong inclusive approach in the project is that 60% of all municipalities in the country expressed interest and registered for the implementation of ELoGE in Lithuania.

This helped further disseminate the principles of good governance and will serve as a lasting self-assessment tool for local authorities and civil society to measure good governance at local level. A map presented below indicates the municipalities that were considered to comply with the [12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance](#) against the Lithuanian ELoGE benchmark and were consequently awarded the ELoGE at a ceremony chaired by the Lithuanian Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior. Additional local authorities were actively involved in the implementation of the other Council of Europe tools which contributed to the improvement of the functional and sustainable local government units.

ELoGE awarded municipalities in Lithuania – 30 November 2020



Outcomes

The implementation of the policy advice and capacity-building activities resulted in the following outcomes:

- Provision of European comparative case studies on regional development and a set of concrete recommendations for establishing the Lithuanian regional tier.
- Areas propitious for inter-municipal cooperation were identified and interested local authorities were enabled to prepare inter-municipal cooperation agreements, in line with Council of Europe standards.
- Participating local authorities received know-how for implementing the tool on Civil participation in decision-making and with the support of international and local experts prepared 6 draft Strategies, in line with Council of Europe standards.
- Development of a Benchmark and evaluation matrix to assess compliance with the principles of good democratic governance in the Lithuanian local government.
- Strong increase in the awareness of the Lithuanian municipalities to regularly measure their performance against good governance principles, which will lead to an overall improvement in the local public administration.
- More than 20 local authorities received training through the Council of Europe Leadership Academy Programme and strengthened their knowledge and skills for institutional leadership at the local level. It will feed into ensuring stronger, more reliable and sustainable local governments.
- More than 15 discussions, trainings, workshops, and seminars to strengthen the local capacities were organised. Additionally, over 15 tailor-made consultations were organised

for the interested municipalities to provide them with support in different fields of expertise.

Conclusions

- Lithuania is undertaking a reform of the local government structure with an aim to establish the regional tier and boost the development of its regions. Despite the decisive support provided by the Council of Europe, additional efforts are needed to ensure the setting up of the relevant operational infrastructure. The Centre of Expertise has therefore started a second project with Lithuania to support the reform.
- In addition to the challenge of establishing the institutional set up of the Lithuanian regions, a strong need for capacity-building of the staff and other actors in the new regional entities has already been identified. The new Joint Council of Europe-EU project will focus on this area of assistance too.
- The Lithuanian local authorities confirmed the usefulness of the Council of Europe tools for improving their work performance. It would be therefore beneficial to organise additional activities to cover a wide range of subjects with a view further strengthening the knowledge and skills of the public administration at municipal level. It would be also important to continue the implementation of tools such as ELoGE, IMC, LAP, civil participation to ensure sustainability of results and continuity of capacity-building for the new local authorities in the future.
- The Centre of Expertise for Good Governance is ready to continue supporting Lithuania to reinforce multilevel governance and improve public administration capacity to deliver quality services to its citizens.