



ODGP online Open Days 2020

Closing remarks by Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

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I wish to extend a heartfelt thank you for taking part in this unusual, online version of the ODGP Open Days.

Even in this new format, we have again had the opportunity to become more familiar with the way in which the ODGP co-ordinates the strategic co-operation and technical assistance of our Organisation and to understand how that work has been adapted to the current situation.

At the close of this event I want to put ODGP's important work in the perspective of reform: indeed, ODGP itself is an example of successful organisational change.

Ten years ago, many member States expressed their wish that the Council of Europe should be closer to them and provide more help with the everyday problems their national administrations were encountering.

The Organisation's assistance activities had the potential for significant growth, but they needed more direction, co-ordination and standardised processes.

A limited field presence already existed, but it was disparate and based largely on Council of Europe Information Offices.

That is why ODGP was created.

It became fully operational in 2012 – a reform measure undertaken by the then Secretary General, and with the support of the Committee of Ministers.

As with all reforms, there were costs.

After all, every co-ordination structure requires funding and support.

But let us look in perspective at what it has delivered.

Its activities are now guided by clear strategic direction.

In 2019, we had another record year for extrabudgetary resources.

And there are now 17 fully operational Offices and new potential locations.

In addition to the core staff, there are now over 300 colleagues working on projects in these Offices - three times more than when ODGP was set-up.

The ongoing, multi-annual contracts include more than 200 projects, with more than 5,000 different activities supporting national administrations.

And, in total, our support now reaches 38 countries and territories.

The goal of the 2011 reform was not to produce savings.

Rather, its aim was to create a coherent and efficient structure to support our co-operation activities.

This in turn has delivered more direction and efficiency.

Successful reform is seldom a one-off measure.

Instead, reform needs to be supported and reinforced.

So, the change concerning our co-operation and assistance was accompanied by targeted policy measures, particularly the delivery of financial and administrative decentralisation, which is still so important today.

ODGP was also meant to be a driver of further reform – and on this too it has delivered.

The Field Offices are an example of a working matrix organisation, where both the Head of Offices and the Directorates in Strasbourg play important management roles.

ODGP is also a driver for results-based management and gender mainstreaming.

Two Gender Advisers work in the field, one in Kyiv and the other in Pristina.

Better co-ordination has enabled the design of bigger and more transversal programmes too.

This also means programmes of a longer duration.

Today the total timescale for some large programmes is six years.

This is one of the longest perspectives in the Organisation and examples include the European Union/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility for South-East Europe and Turkey.

Such longer-term aspects increase the impact of our co-operation programmes and are to be welcomed.

More broadly, ODGP is an example of sustainable and value-adding reform, which only has succeeded through its close work with the other parts of the Council of Europe that implement our co-operation activities.

In the current crisis, its ethos and approach have proven valuable, as it has undertaken a swift and comprehensive revision of the working methods and timelines of Council of Europe Action Plans and other co-operation programmes.

The objectives remain the same of course: to support and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the most efficient and effective manner.

However, due to the current travel restrictions and distancing guidelines our working methods have had to adapt very rapidly.

In Strasbourg and in the field offices, Council of Europe staff have been teleworking since mid-March, in accordance with local sanitary guidelines and rules.

They continue to implement co-operation projects and communicate regularly with their interlocutors.

And Heads of Office support and supervise staff both individually and with the help of virtual team and co-ordination meetings.

Travel restrictions have put a temporary stop to the participation of international experts and Strasbourg staff in events and distancing rules forbid the organisation of conferences, seminars and training.

So instead we are concentrating on desk work, offering expertise, and on-line communication and training.

You may have seen some examples of this on Day 2 of the Virtual Open Days.

In the specific context of combatting the COVID-19 virus, I am pleased that Offices have been able to support authorities in reaching out to minorities and in rapid capacity-building in penitentiary institutions.

These things are important.

So, I end by thanking all donors for their financial contributions that enable our progress.

As always, the European Union is the biggest partner for co-operation activities, but most member States, too, support this work.

In 2019 the extra-budgetary income reached a record €77.8 million.

Without this, the co-operation work would simply not be possible.

It is also a clear sign of how the reform we undertook in 2011 has the trust of our partners and is helping the Council of Europe deliver impact.

And that is something for which we can all be grateful.