

Respectable representatives of member states of the Council of Europe,

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ladies and gentlemen,

In the beginning, let me cordially thank for the opportunity to come up at this in the sequence the 10th session of the Committee on Democracy and Governance of the Council of Europe. On May 5, 70 years elapsed since the point considered inception of the Council of Europe, Whereas the Slovak Republic has been its member since 1993. Therefore, we can tell today it is membership in this organisation that helped us build foundations of statehood and parliamentary democracy in line with principles of rule of law and respecting fundamental human rights and freedoms. Undoubtedly, this contributed to successful transformation and democratisation processes of the Slovak Republic. The area of modernization of democratic institutions, reform of public administration or civic participation in governance at all levels – these are the topics dealt with by member countries in this Committee. Within the work of this Committee, various norms and documents have been developed or updated, while individual countries exchange their experience and proven procedures. That is why I consider activities of this Committee as very beneficial to correctly set up a functioning democratic state. I am immensely pleased to share with you experience of the Slovak Republic from this place and to inform you on activities that are implemented at present in cooperation with the Council of Europe, focusing on strengthening of local self-government.

In the course of preparation of amendment to the Act on Local Government (Regulation of Administrative Procedure) in 2017, which is basic legal regulation for self-government in the Slovak Republic, need to comprehensively address internal control in local self-government was fully demonstrated. Internal control in Slovak self-government plays an important role to provide for transparent management and governance of funds as well as guarantee of adherence to legal regulations in taking decisions in self-government. Correct setup of this mechanism may prevent necessity to involve other external control mechanisms or, as the case may be, minimise their participation. That is why, the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic established a working group with the purpose of re-evaluation of the system of internal control, where also other affected

ministries and institutions are represented, including the association representing inspectors of the Slovak Republic and associations representing mayors of towns and municipalities of Slovakia. As the Ministry of Interior did not have available sufficient data in this area, it prepared an analysis based on questionnaire surveys, particularly with information on jobs, number of inspections performed as well as experience acquired or education attained by main inspectors performing control activities in self-governments. Thanks to high return rate of questionnaires, Ministry of Interior managed to trustworthily depict the present condition of internal control, including its shortcomings. Through mechanism of „*fast response*“ of the Council of Europe, at the same time they also managed to collect 13 answers from member states of the Council of Europe with information on various models of internal control of local self-government abroad. At the beginning of 2019, based on initiative of the working group, the Ministry of Interior directed an application to the Council of Europe to carry out „*mutual evaluation by experts*“, i.e. professional evaluation by foreign experts with purpose of independent examination of the system of internal control in local self-government in the Slovak Republic. During their three-day programme that was carried out within 4 – 6 June 2019 on the premises of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, experts directed a lot of questions about their visions, expectations, present internal setup and openness to possible changes in this area to representatives of Slovak ministries, institutions and associations. Outcome from this meeting is an objective and comprehensive report of peer evaluation containing a set of findings and recommendations prepared by foreign experts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me this way thank once more to the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance of the Council of Europe for carrying out peer evaluation in Slovakia as well as foreign experts for their approach, stimulating discussions and preparation of concluding report that I find comprehensive and useful document with recommendations on good improvements of the present system of internal control in Slovakia.

One of the major issues pointed out at by the report of peer evaluation itself, which is also realised by ourselves in long terms, is in fragmentation of Slovak self-government consisting of

2,927 municipalities at local level and 8 self-governing regions at the regional level. Almost 40% municipalities has less than 500 inhabitants, 70% has less than 1,000 inhabitants and 92% less than 3,000 inhabitants. Whereas all municipalities have equal rights and obligations resulting from current legislation, particularly regardless of size categories, funds or personnel capacities. Within this two-degree system of self-government, local level and regional level are not in mutual relationship of superiority and subordination, while they are not mutually interlinked either. Both the levels work independently, which results in frequent overlapping their powers. Therefore, the issue of territorial fragmentation requires a more comprehensive approach. The time has come to focus on overall condition of self-government in Slovakia, which needs to upgrade and make more efficient the overall system of functioning and develop a strategy that would be in consent with European standards. That is why, the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic submitted, within the programme of support from structural funds, a draft project with focus on strengthening self-government. Besides territorial-administration division, there will be also necessary to examine the method of funding self-government, distribution of powers and current legal regulation. Integral part of the project will also be inclusion of outcomes from the previously mentioned working group for solution of the issue of internal control in local self-government.

The project of the Ministry of Interior under the name „Provision for Good Governance of Public Affairs in Slovakia“ was successfully approved for the period of 18 months and since September 2019 its implementation has been carried out in cooperation with the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance that has rich experience in this field from implementing similar projects in several European countries.

The project should be implemented in two lines:

In the framework of the 1st line, there is expected a draft Strategy to strengthen local self-government, including a plan of implementation and funding. At the same time, several „*mutual expert evaluations*“ will be drawn up from various fields of local self-governments, recommendations regarding territorial consolidation, improvement of structure, powers and funding of local self-governments as well as recommendations in relation to improvement and strengthening of collaboration among local, regional and central authorities.

Within of the 2nd line, attention will be concentrated on work in the field with independent self-governments, primarily on provision of better services in relation to citizens. Collaboration with authorities of local self-government will be focused on expert training with the aim to strengthen institutional management at the local level and build capabilities.

However, the original draft project was more extensive and therefore neither the running project covers all areas of self-government, depending on needs of the Slovak Republic. Due to this reason, the Ministry of Interior submitted the European Commission also the proposal of the second phase of the project to be approved. This should focus on the position of the capital Bratislava, so as to better reflect special status of the capital, including its needs, better redistribution of powers among local self-governments with provincial character on the one hand and towns on the other hand, as well as on competences, powers, funding the coordination task of the regional level of local self-government in Slovakia. I firmly believe that we will manage to implement both the projects at high standard in cooperation with the Council of Europe, while highly expert outcomes of high quality will contribute to comprehensive strengthening of local self-government in Slovakia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am extremely glad that, in past years, Slovakia has also tried to pay attention to such areas as upgrading and strengthening of local self-government and that today I could share this information with you in person. Also thanks to mutual cooperation of the Slovak Republic with the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance of the Council of Europe and under active participation of representatives of the Slovak Republic in the Committee on Democracy and Governance of the Council of Europe we still manage to acquire new and for us useful information on proven procedures that are advancing us forward.

In the conclusion, let me wish you, ladies and gentlemen, fruitful discussion full of inspiring ideas in the framework of the session of this Committee.

