

# Summary GGBS-Delegation May 2003

## 1: Initial

This paper presents the outcome of the meetings between the GGBS-members Bernhard Demmler and Hans Widmer together with the majors and the city-council-members of Krusevo, Krivogastani and Zitose in May 2003. The central themes of the six meetings were: 1) the new law on local self-government and 2) the question on how the Macedonian partner communities of the GGBS are preparing themselves for the new challenges ahead of them. These two main topics were analysed in depth along the meetings. Although the focal points differed in the course of the discussions, the problems and challenges with the new laws are everywhere of the same nature. The purpose of this paper is therefore, to collect and universalize the ideas and proposals that came out during these days and to present them to the municipalities.

## 2: Results of the meetings, proposals and considerations□

### a) Minority rights/interest-group-representation: Study to the legislative scope of the city council

At different points of discussion we touched the question of minority rights or special regulations for interest-groups:

- In Krivogastani: How to secure an equal representation of all the villages in the city council?
  - In Zitose: What can be done, if Zitose will – against its wish – vanish as municipality and be again integrated into a larger one?
  - In Krusevo: How can non-governmental organizations (NGOs) be integrated in the political system of the municipality (for example fixed NGO-seats in certain commissions)?

Consideration: In all these cases, the problem could be partly resolved by the constitution of the municipalities, where the city council can assure, that minorities or interest-groups have the right of representation in the city council respectively in certain commissions. The cases of Zitose and Krivogastani shows, that “minority” can not only be defined by ethnical criterions, but also by geographical means. One problem is, that for the moment, it is not clear, on how far city councils have the right to implement minority rights or special rights for NGOs.

Suggestion: What is needed, is a juridical analysis showing the legislative scope of the city council. One important point to be considered, would be the analyses of representation rights (see next paragraph).

### b) Cooperation-Rights between municipalities: Study to the legislative scope of the city council

Zitose, as well as Krivogastani, would like to stay as autonomous municipality. Nevertheless, the city council pointed out the general belief that for small communities it would be important to maintain a strong cooperation with neighbour-municipalities.

Consideration and proposal: Also in Switzerland small municipalities tend to strong cooperation with its neighbours. As above, we suggest juridical analysis of the national laws to be implemented, which would point the legislative scope of the city council. Through this analysis, the city council would now, how far he can decide special regulations for cooperation.

Time of realization: If a study like the one proposed is to be realized, it would be advisable that the city councils themselves propose some other fields worth a deeper analysis. As there will be questions on the legislative scope of the city council in economical fields, it doesn't seem to be useful to start such a study before the implementation of the new law on financial autonomy.

### c) Communal information-service: Implementation of consultation hours

One city council found that Krivogastani should offer to its citizens an information center.

Consideration and proposal: We think that our partner-municipalities cannot afford an information center. Therefore it might be more useful having the mayor or another administrator implementing fixed consultation hours, in which citizens could come without making an appointment.

#### **d) Disharmony between community authorities: External mediation**

Our impressions were that, at the moment, a strong disharmony between mayor/administration and the city council is partly impairing constructive politics on local level. Likewise, there are also personal antipathies among politicians in Switzerland. However, our long history in open democracy allows us having an easier debate between parties.

Proposal: in case this situation continues to block constructive politics, an external mediator could help to unbend the relation between the executive responsible and a city council.

#### **e) Expenses for Administration: Benchmarking and institutionalized information-network between comparable municipalities**

How much of its annual income shall a municipality spend for its administration? Is it too much if 80 % of all the community-expenses are costs for the administration? This question was discussed in the city council of Krusevo.

Consideration: To judge the administration costs one must a) analyse the tasks the administration has to fulfil and b) ask whether other municipalities of comparable size fulfil these tasks more effectively and with lower costs.

Proposals:

- Such a comparison is called a “Benchmarking”. This work would have to be done by an independent enterprise, e.g. a trustee.
- Cheaper than a benchmarking-analysis and also effective is - as a first step - the organisation of an institutionalized exchange of experiences between political representatives; if possible from municipalities with comparable size.

#### **f) Finances: Studies to the economic potentials of municipalities?**

For the central government in Skopje, the economic power of a municipality seems to be a central criterion for its right for existence. A member of the city council of Krivogastani therefore, proposed to make a study showing the economic potential of the municipality. Later the same city council member found out, that Skopje will not help to finance this study and so it stopped the project.

Consideration: Maybe a study as proposed above could be a good instrument for the municipality to argue against the abolishment of its independence. But it is clear, that it is not up to Skopje to finance such a project: It would be up to the city council to decide the implementation of such a project. Beside the positive effects of this project, there are also some disadvantages: A study, which only analyses the economic potentials of one community may lack a comparison with other municipalities. Therefore it would be difficult to make clear interpretations of the results.

### **3. Next steps**

So, these are the main results of our meetings with the city councils and the mayors of Krusevo, Krivogastani and Zitose. We hope that our considerations and proposals are helpful to you! In general, we had the impression that the city council is very much aware that the new laws on local self-government will strengthen its responsibility and that the members of the city council like to discuss about reorganization in this context. Unfortunately, we also feel some lethargy within the course of action. We often heard the argument that nothing can be done, because nobody knows which laws will really be implemented. Although we understand this reluctance, we suggest: Act now! Those who do not develop various strategies ahead of the problems, take the risk of being unable to react adequately when the time comes.

In context with our meetings we have four questions:

1. What is your judgement about this paper? Is it any help to you?
2. What are your (city council, executive, administration) next steps in view of the new law on local self-government?
3. In principle, we (Hans Widmer and Bernhard Demmler) are ready to continue our engagement on local self-government. How can we continue? We need suggestions.
4. Apart from our personal readiness to continue our engagement, where in the field of local self-government do you see the need of support?

We ask you kindly to answer these questions at the latest until the end of August. We hope to be your partner and we are sure we will hear from you soon.

Kind regards

Bernhard Demmler, Hans Widmer

p.s.

- of course we will answer your letters as quickly as possible
- special thanks to the Horizont-Office, which translated this letter