



DECISIVE: DEVELOPMENT OF CYPRIOT TWINNING CAPACITIES THROUGH ACTIVE VOLUNTEERING

After a proposal submitted by the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM) in the framework of the "Europe for Citizens" programme (Action 1: Measure 2.2 Support measures), the European Commission decided through the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) to finance the training of volunteers in the Municipalities of Cyprus, in order to support the development of Twinning with other European countries. The project has a duration of 12 months, starting from the 4th January 2010 and the partners are the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM), the Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (VVSG) – Belgium and the Local Union of Municipalities and Communities of Prefecture Chios (TEDK CHIOS) – Greece.

Cypriot municipalities currently underexploit the possibilities offered by Town Twinning. According to the results of a survey conducted by the UCM, the main reasons for that are: a) geographical distance, b) lack of information on town twinning and most importantly c) lack of qualified municipal personnel (to fill in

applications and run the projects). On the other hand, municipalities that have the capacity to run Twinning, develop them mainly with neighboring countries and only give the possibility to a few of the citizens to participate in them.

The same problems exist in other distant and small geographical units such as the island of Chios - Greece. The DECISIVE project targets all these problems:

a) even if distance can be an obstacle for the creation of Twinning, municipalities often pay for travel and other expenses on their own, if they think it's useful. Distance becomes, therefore, a minor problem if a twinning is useful.

b) the UCM had a part of the responsibility for the lack of information, despite the efforts undertaken especially during the last two years. The DECISIVE project helps the UCM and other associations facing the same problems to further develop their capacities by creating a real dialog between citizens, local politicians and municipal officers concerning all practical and political aspects of town twinning.

Future major DECISIVE activities:

9/5/10: Dissemination Event in Cyprus

18/5/10: First training session in Cyprus and launch of the webpage

September: Study trip and training sessions in Belgium

October: Dissemination event in Cyprus

November: Final training session in Cyprus

November: Dissemination event: Annual General Assembly of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities

December: Quantitative Evaluation

c) there are not many ways to deal with the lack of personnel. After discussing with different associations of local authorities around Europe, we have decided to exploit and develop in Cyprus and Chios the methodology used in Flanders: it is the citizens themselves that voluntarily prepare and run twinings. This method not only alleviates the administrative burden from municipalities but also strengthens the citizens' feeling of ownership over the projects.

DECISIVE, therefore, focuses on developing voluntarism and transferring knowhow from Flanders to Cyprus and Chios, through training sessions in Cyprus and Belgium.



Education and Culture DG

'Europe for Citizens' Programme

The project aims to promote volunteering not simply as a principle, but also through the development of specific skills for the participating volunteers. New skills (filling-in of the Online Grant Application Form and project management) will be developed not only amongst those who are responsible for twinning activities at a local level but also among ordinary citizens that will learn how to work with their local politicians and municipal officers.

This way the project will foster the sense of ownership of the European Union among citizens: not only will they have the chance to participate in a European project, they will also have the opportunity to shape it and create something useful out of it.

Finally, the project hopes to promote twinings at least between Cypriot and Flemish towns - currently no twinning exists between towns in the two regions. By including citizens in the process and helping them understand the meaning of Twinning, we also hope to revitalise some

of the current twinning agreements that remain inactive. A dissemination event will also take place on the 9th of May, helping in this way citizens and local stakeholders to better learn and understand the practical meaning of active European citizenship: citizens, local officials and local politicians working together for the same purpose and cooperating with European regions that have the same problems and targets.

Every Cypriot municipality has already indicated a number of potential volunteers along with local officials and politicians. This group of 250 people, along with the representative of TEDK Chios will follow the first training session that will take place in Cyprus in May 2010.

The trainers, five in total, will be selected by the VVSG as follows: Two trainers from a municipality where town twinings are organised only by the town twinning committees (volunteers), two trainers from a municipality where town twinings are organised by the municipality with the collaboration and help of a town twinning committee and one trainer from the Association.

After the first training session, a group of 39 potential volunteers will be chosen among the 250 initial ones. These, along with the representative of TEDK Chios will travel to Belgium at the end of September 2010 for a series of practical training sessions. One of the sessions will take place in the premises of the EACEA and will be focused on the filling-in of the Online Grant Application Form, one in the premises of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities where the Europe for Citizens programme and the CEMR website on twinning (www.twinning.org) will be presented to them and another one, either in the municipality of the trainers, or within the UCM premises, in order for the participants to be more thoroughly acquainted with the work of the Flemish town twinning committees.

The training session in Belgium will hold a key role in the project since it will familiarize future twinning officers with the work and personnel of the EACEA and the EU in general (information visit to the Committee of the Regions and potentially the European Parliament).

A final conference will again take place in Cyprus at the beginning of November 2010 with the participation of all (or even some new) 250 potential "twinning officers" with the aim to conclude the work, set up Cypriot town twinning committees and present ideas for the creation of new twinings or present new ones already created via the project.

Participation in the SKILLS project

In addition to the DECISIVE project, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities participates as a partner in the SKILLS project, which also aims to promote Town Twinning within the Municipalities of Cyprus. The lead partner of the project is ANCI Lazio.

The project's overall goal is to create innovative actions, to bring local authorities from the two associations closer, to encourage the two partners (Lazio Region and Cyprus) to participate more actively in Town twinning activities and to support them in the creation and development of long-term thematic networks for common priority issues.

The following actions have been identified as priorities for the SKILLS project:

- creation of a website linking local authorities and paving the way to participatory processes concerning European policies. The information system will consist of various tools / web services, such as a RESEARCH PARTNER tool and Project IDEA area for the exchange of project ideas within the European Community.

- Preparation of an INFORMATION CAMPAIGN aimed to analyse thoroughly - by means of meetings addressed to the officials responsible of each involved municipality – knowledge and skills on the subject of town-twinning. Special attention will be given to themes dealing with: EU policies and tools and EU co-operation among municipalities. Furthermore, the Seminars' aim will be the promotion and diffusion of the SKILLS project, its contextualized results and learned lessons, as well as best practices to be transferred to other districts and territorial realities. The first meeting between Italian and Cypriot Municipalities will take place on April 16th in Cyprus.

Thanks to a high-quality communication campaign and the accomplishment of information sessions, it will be possible to reach local authorities everywhere with specific activities designed to provide "information, training, increased awareness" to actively involve and alert them as concerns issues of the SKILLS project.

Study for the restructuring of the Local Government

On February 22th, the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus presented to the media, the Study for the Restructuring of Local Government of the Republic of Cyprus, in an event attended by the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and the Union of Cyprus Communities, who have assigned the relative study to the National Centre of Public Administration and Self-Government of Greece.

Following the formal presentation, the study will be the subject of public dialogue, where all the municipalities, communities, political parties and other interested bodies will have the opportunity to express their opinion before implementation starts.

CEMR Directors meet in Cyprus

The future of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the new mandates at the European institutions and the reform of local government in Cyprus, were the main topics discussed at the meeting of Secretaries General and Directors of CEMR's member associations that took place in Nicosia, on 4 and 5 March 2010.

Speaking at the opening of the meeting, the Cypriot Minister of Interior, Neoklis Sylikiotis, presented the reform process of local government that will soon take place in the country. "We want to organise a broad debate on the decentralisation process that should lead to a greater financial autonomy for local government." The Mayor of Nicosia, Eleni Mavrou, welcomed the announcement that Cyprus local government will play a leading role in this debate.



The future of the CEMR was another subject of discussion: What is CEMR's precise role and place in that local and regional galaxy? What is CEMR's *raison d'être* 60 years after its birth? These will be some questions to be addressed throughout the coming year. The Member of Nicosia municipal council and of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), Eleni Loucaides, was invited to present the renewal of CoR's commissions. In her speech, she stressed the need to strengthen cooperation rather than competition between the CoR and the CEMR.

The meeting concluded with an address by former Mayor of Nicosia, Lellos Demetriades, who gave an overview of the situation in Nicosia economically and politically.



The Council of European Municipalities was founded in Geneva in 1951 by a group of European mayors; later, it opened its ranks to the regions and became the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. Today, it is the largest organisation of local and regional government in Europe; its members are over 50 national associations of towns, municipalities and regions from 38 countries. Together these associations represent some 100.000 local and regional authorities.

The CEMR works on a number of issues that concern local and regional authorities, like the EU regional policy, employment, energy, the environment, equal opportunities, governance & future of the EU, information society, international local government, local and regional democracy, local and regional government as an employer, North-South cooperation, public services and procurement, social affairs, sustainable development, transport and town twinning. Today, there are more than 26.000 twinned towns in Europe and the CEMR plays an important role in bringing them together, especially through its website: www.twinning.org.

The Union of Cyprus Municipalities became member of the CEMR in 1990 and is represented in its Policy Committee by two members.

New Delegation of Cyprus to the Committee of the Regions

For the next five years, 6 elected representatives will be the voice of the Local Authorities of Cyprus in Brussels. On February 9th, they undertook their duties as members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the assembly of representatives of Local and Regional Authorities of the European Union, and elected Mr. George Georgiou, Mayor of Kato Polemidia as Head of the Delegation and Mr. Christos Messis, Mayor of Mesa Yitonia, as a member of the Bureau of the CoR.

The Members of the new Cypriot delegation are: Mr. George Georgiou, Mayor of Kato Polemidia and Head of Delegation, Mr. Christos Messis, Mayor of Mesa Yitonia and member of the Bureau, Mr. Savvas Iliofotou, Mayor of Strovolos, Mr. Christodoulos Costa Kattirtzis, President of the Community Council of Kato Zodia, Mrs. Eleni Loucaidou, Municipal Councilor of Nicosia and Mr. Evyenios Michail, President of the Community Council of Omodos.

The alternate members of the new Cypriot delegation are: Mr. Christofis Antoniou, President of the Community Council of Episkopi, Mr. Dimos Yiangou, President of the Community Council of Kyrenia Ayia Irini, Mr. Andreas Mouseos, Mayor of Larnaca, Mr. Charalambos Pittas, Mayor of Morphou, Mr. Costas Hadjikakou, Municipal Councilor of Famagusta and Mr. Kyriakos Chatzittofis, Mayor of Ayios Athanasios.

In Cyprus, the Minister of Interior chooses the members of the National Delegation to the CoR after consulting with the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and the Union of Cyprus Communities. Geographical and political criteria as well as the type of local authorities represented are taken into account for this purpose.

Under the current distribution, the Municipalities are represented by 4 members and 4 alternates and the Communities by 2 members and 2 alternates. The coordination of the National Delegation is assured by the Brussels Office of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities.

Digital City

The Cyprus Telecommunications Authority (Cyta) in cooperation with the Union of Cyprus Municipalities held recently in Nicosia a workshop on the subject of "Digital City: Solutions from Cyta". The workshop was organized within the framework of the wider cooperation with the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and a further practical expression of interest from Cyta to support the local government of Cyprus to meet its modern role.

Cyta is a semi-government organization and is the leading provider of integrated electronic communications services in Cyprus.

The conference was attended by the President of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, Mr. Andreas Christou, Mayor of Limassol, who addressed a brief greeting.

The aim of the workshop was to present the business model for telematics solutions offered by Cyta through integrated, reliable and cost-effective solutions that can support the efficient functioning of municipalities.

The workshop, attended by Mayors, Municipal Secretaries and other officials, presented the following options:

- Managing electronic communication and collaboration
- Managing relationships with customers
- Fleet management
- Parking management
- Managing facilities, buildings and machinery.

Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly

Over seventy local and regional representatives from thirty countries around the three shores of the Mediterranean met in Barcelona on Thursday 21 January, for the inaugural meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM). Cyprus is represented in ARLEM by Mrs Eleni Loucaides, Municipal Councilor of Nicosia, Commissioner of Local Government of the Democratic Rally and member of the Cypriot delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR) who attended the meeting in Barcelona and by Mr. George Georgiou, Mayor of Kato Polemidia and Head of the Cypriot Delegation to the CoR.

In Barcelona, Mayors of major cities from the European Union and the Mediterranean partner countries have joined forces to energise the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The Mayors are determined to go beyond existing traditional diplomatic relations by launching concrete cooperation programmes on issues such as immigration, climate change, urban development or cultural exchange. Closeness to citizens, efficiency in project management and tackling real life issues will be at the heart of this cooperation, which should underpin the institutional framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Union.

The ARLEM aspires to act as a consultative body to the involvement of Local Authorities in the Euromed partnership. During the conference, participants (including Mrs. Loucaides), underlined the commitment of local authorities across the Mediterranean to promote peace, democracy, social and cultural understanding, sustainable development and prosperity in the Mediterranean region. They also proposed to represent the ARLEM Euro-Mediterranean communities and local authorities to

strengthen the reinvigorated partnership, as amended at the meeting in Paris on July 13, 2008, in accordance with the Declaration of Marseille by the Foreign Ministers of the Mediterranean Union.

Participants also indicated that national initiatives on each side of the Mediterranean need to be strengthened in order to achieve sustainable solutions with the involvement of local authorities, to form and implement policies for the citizens and the cooperation of cities in the Mediterranean region and stressed that they intend, by establishing ARLEM, to bring citizens closer to the region and highlight the benefits of joint cooperation between local authorities.

ARLEM is a response to the request to put the role of regional and local authorities in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership on an institutional footing. It therefore gives the partnership a territorial dimension and seeks to involve local and regional authorities in the specific projects of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The Barcelona Declaration, adopted by the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in November 1995, stated: "Municipalities and regional authorities need to be closely involved in the operation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. City and regional representatives will be encouraged to meet each year to take stock of their common challenges and exchange experiences".

ARLEM, a joint project of the Committee of the Regions, regional and local authorities around the three shores of the Mediterranean and European and international associations representing regional and local authorities working on the ground, will facilitate the establishment of contacts, good practice sharing between cities and regions and the promotion of inter-municipal and inter-regional cooperation.

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THE UNION OF CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES

The Union of Cyprus Municipalities was established in 1981. Even though membership is voluntary, all municipalities (33), accounting for 65 per cent of the population of Cyprus, are represented.

The main objective of the Union is to contribute to the development of local government autonomy, as well as to act as spokesman of local government interests vis-à-vis the central government and other national organisations and institutions.

The Union's decision-making power is vested in the General Assembly, which may look into and decide for all issues. The Executive Committee implements decisions taken by the General Assembly. The President of the Union represents the Union before any authority, while the Secretary is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Union.

The Union follows closely and participates in international activities related to Local Authorities and in recent years, especially after the accession of the Republic to the EU, it takes an active stand and develops relations with organisations, institutions and departments of the European Union that concern Local Authorities. In this regard, the Union has, since July 2005, opened an Office in Brussels.

UNION OF CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES

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