



ASSOCIATION OF KOSOVO MUNICIPALITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF 2015 PROGRESS REPORT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, the Association of Kosovo Municipalities has engaged in representing and protecting municipal interests, providing advanced services and improving the performance of municipalities, consolidating its structures and ensuring good financial performance. These activities are based on AKM's Strategy 2011-2015, on the 2015 Annual Plan as well as on specific priorities set by the governing bodies.

In term of lobbying, during the reporting period, the AKM has focused on: (i) the Law on Allocation for Use and Exchange of Immovable Property of Municipality, (ii) Law on Public-Private Partnership, (iii) Law on Forests, (iv) Law on Property Tax, (v) Law on Salaries and (vi) Law on Gender Equality. At the same time, AKM has consolidated its common positions on other issues, such as (vii) Catalogue of Jobs in Civil Service in Kosovo and (viii) draft law on public debts forgiveness, including property tax debts that will be forgiven by municipalities. Also, representatives of AKM have participated in the National Council for Economic Development, where they have presented the position of the Kosovo municipalities. This council is chaired by Prime Minister of Kosovo. In addition to this council, AKM continued to represent municipalities in Anti- Corruption Council and EU council. These two councils are chaired by President of Kosovo

The AKM Board and collegia have drafted their annual plans with priorities, commitments and targets, based on the legislative agenda of the Central Government. In the reporting period, 6 meetings were held for each collegium in average, namely 18 presidency meetings and 79 meetings of the collegia, developing and consolidating at least two positions for each collegium. In addition, the AKM has participated in the meetings of different committees, with the purpose of making remarks and giving suggestions as well as reviewing the draft laws during the legislation review.

Otherwise, some of the achievements made during the reporting period that are worth mentioning involve the following:

- As novelty, the members of the Grants Commission were appointed by the municipalities twice at AKM meetings, which were attended by ministers and general secretaries of ministries.
- The AKM has advanced its relations with the Parliament, the Parliamentary Committees and Members of Parliament, by underlining its central role in advocating for the municipalities. Moreover, AKM representatives have participated in the preparation of draft-laws, as preparatory steps for the final laws.
- Based on AKM lobbying, the Ministry of Finance has committed itself that this ministry will not develop any document that will affect municipalities without AK involvement. In addition, the Ministry of Education has committed not to build school building any longer but the budget dedicated to school building will be decentralised to municipalities, since their assessment was found to be more pertinent in this respect.
- The requests of Serbian majority municipalities to address their problems through AKM indicate that Serbian majority municipalities not only continue to be members of the AKM, but they also see AKM as an adequate mechanism for resolving their problems.
- AKM's assistance by lobbying at the central government for several agencies and governmental institutions in setting the legislative agenda at the central level points to our impact.

In order to fulfil its statutory obligations, the Annual General Assembly meeting was held and the Council of Mayors and the Board have held regular meetings. Another segment is the amendment and supplementation of the Statute of the AKM as per some decisions that were endorsed at the Annual General Assembly of the AKM, which were made upon the request of Ministry of Public Administration to harmonise the Statute with the legislation on nongovernmental organisations. The amendments consist in the following: (a) Before in the AKM statute it was foreseen political a representation, now the political representation of municipalities at the AKM Assembly and AKM Board is not regulated by the statute but it is regulated by the decisions of the AKM Assembly; (b) Before it was fundraising and establishing public institutions mentioned in the AKM statute, the new statute says that AKM can establish mechanisms for building capacities for municipal authorities; (c) Before it was the AKM Board who endorsed and dismissed the Executive Director, now the AKM Board endorses and dismisses the Executive Director in an open competition (vacancy announcement) upon an authorisation received by the Assembly. In addition, the AKM Strategy 2016-2020 was drafted this year and all the parties were involved in the process.

The AKM has maintained contacts and communication with its member municipalities. More than 135 different letters, notifications, replies, draft laws, draft regulations, recommendations, draft positions, etc., were sent to the municipalities during the reporting period. The AKM webpage continues to be maintained and updated on a daily basis, and all the news and activities are posted on AKM's Facebook page and published in the bi-monthly Bulletin.

In financial terms, the AKM has managed to collect membership fee of €117,710 during the year 2015 or 91% of the objective that was set for year 2015 and that was €130,000. AKM was really confident that it will accomplish its overall annual target of €130,000 by the end of the year. This confidence was because in 2014 AKM achieved to collect around €138,000.

Cooperation with its partners has helped AKM in its lobbying and advocacy efforts as well as in implementing many projects from which municipalities have benefited by receiving either financial support for projects, or services, training, workshops, exchange of experiences, etc. As the main institutional partner, the SDC has provided a core contribution to AKM's development and advancement. Projects were also implemented in cooperation with DEMOS, GIZ, ACT/USAID, UNDP, and OSCE. In addition, they were organised two annual meetings of Friends of AKM. These meetings have brought together main partners of Kosovo municipalities involved in the field of local government in Kosovo.

During the months May and June 2015, GiZ (The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) has contracted and carried out a survey to measure the satisfaction of local authorities, partners and governmental institutions with the work and performance of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities. The survey has involved 208 respondents (34 mayors, 154 municipal officers, 5 partners and 15 governmental institutions). Results indicate that 90% of mayors are very satisfied with the work of the AKM, and that municipal officers rate the AKM as a serious and influential organisation. On the other hand, government officials praise AKM's commitment to and lobbying for their members highly, emphasising that, to the ministries, the work with the AKM is the easiest way to understand municipalities' challenges

and needs. Partners say that they are very satisfied with AKM's performance, especially when it comes to easy and meaningful communication with the AKM and accurate addressing of municipalities' needs before the donor community. Furthermore, survey results reveal that, scale wise (from 1 to 10), municipalities are satisfied with the work of the Board at a scale of 7.92 and at the scale of 8.14 with the AKM Administration.

2. AKM'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2015

The new bodies of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities have, in 2015 as well, pursued the objectives based on the AKM Strategy and Annual Plan. Major objectives in 2015 have involved: presentation and protection of municipalities' interests through lobbying and advocacy; provision of more advanced services and improvement of municipalities' performance; functionality of AKM bodies; financial viability; cooperation with partners by keeping AKM as a reference point; communication with municipalities and performance of AKM's administration.

3. DEVELOPMENT AND CONSOLIDATION OF POLICIES (POSITIONS)

The Association of Kosovo Municipalities has, through its bodies – the Board, the Council of Mayors, the collegia and the commissions – consolidated its positions in relation to central institutions, with the aim of developing policies that would help strengthen the role of the municipalities continuously.

AKM's lobbying has focused on priority issues for the municipalities, such as: Law on Allocation for Use and Exchange of Immovable Property of the Municipality, Law on Public-Private Partnership, Law on Forests, Law on Property Tax, Law on Salaries and Law on Gender Equality.

Hence, consolidation of positions and policies has resulted in interventions in the Catalogue of Jobs for civil servants in Kosovo, public debts forgiveness, including property tax debts that will be forgiven by municipalities¹, in active participation of the AKM in the NCED², in the initiation of amendments in the Law on the PPP³ and the Law on Allocation for Use and Exchange of Immovable Property of the Municipality and in the AKM's meeting with the Minister of ESP on the Law on Treatment of Illegal Buildings.

In addition, after a reaction by the AKM, the procedure for amending the MLGA Administrative Instruction No. 00/2014 on Imposition and Collection of Fees for Annual Registration of Motor Vehicles in the Territory of the Municipalities was cancelled. The aim of the amendment was to remove the condition of vehicle registration, which enable municipalities not only to collect revenues, but also to pay for public services. The removal of

¹ Erasure of debt for the citizens for the period from after the war and up to 2008 (recommendation of the Collegium for Budget and Finance that debts should be erased provided that all debts accrued from 2008 to the end of 2014 are paid).

² National Council for Economic Development – where the position of the Kosovo municipalities were presented.

³ Upon AKM's initiative and lobbying, the procedures for amending and supplementing the Law on Public-Private Partnership and on Allocation for Use and Exchange of Immovable Property of the Municipality were initiated.

such payment would have caused a damage of approximately **3 million euros to the municipalities and their budgets.**

The AKM has met the Board and the collegia to discuss annual operational plans and priority engagements and aims based on the legislative agenda of the Central Government. This has also included the amendment and supplementation of the AKM Statute as per several decisions that were adopted at the AKM's Annual General Assembly, in full compliance with the legislation on nongovernmental organisations in force.

4. LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY

4.1. Deficit coverage

Context

Following the issuance of the Second Budgetary Circular for the municipalities for 2016 by the Ministry of Finance, the analyses carried out by the AKM (Collegium for Budget and Finance) – by making comparisons with the current budget of 2015, taking the month of July as a sample for wages and salaries – have indicated that all the municipalities already have a deficit and that the municipalities will **lack around 11 million EUR (10 million and 874 thousand EUR)** in total for wages and salaries in 2016. Such a deficit is very concerning for all the municipalities.

Achievements

Following a powerful and direct lobbying by the AKM with the Ministry of Finance, by means of written requests sent to the Ministry to solve the problem, and following a pressure that the AKM has exerted in the media, an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Finance to cover the estimated deficit for the municipalities for 2016 from the budget of the central government.

Impact

Such a cut in municipalities' budgets would have had a significant negative impact on proper municipal operations. **At the same time, more than 1500 elementary and high school teachers risked losing their jobs.** Provision of such an amount through the AKM by the Ministry of Finance for the municipalities will reduce the budgetary burdens upon already limited municipal budgets. This would have been seen as mayors want to dismiss teachers since municipalities are managing primary and secondary education in Kosovo

4.2. Initiation of procedures for amending and supplementing the Law on Public-Private Partnership (PPP)

Context

The Law on PPP, which is in force, provides same requirements for every investment value. This has made the municipalities lose much time until the implementation of a PPP project was approved by the central level. Municipalities have implemented very few PPP projects, thus municipalities' request to amend the law in term of timelines and procedures, at least as regards projects that entail investments of up to 2 million euros.

Achievements

Through AKM meetings with the Ministry of Finance, namely with the Department of Public-Private Partnership, an agreement was reached for the AKM to be a part of the Commission in the process of amending the Law on PPP, where municipalities will have an opportunity to exert an influence by conveying their positions and to benefit from the adoption of the new Law on PP, by simplifying the procedures for selecting the private partner for small municipal projects. Another achievement will be the provision of the opportunity to select the private partner, for specific municipal projects, without undergoing pre-selection procedures. Municipalities will also be able to include municipal projects in which the envisaged investment by the private partner will not exceed 2 million euros.

Impact

The approval of the law is expected to have a direct impact on the Local Economic Development, shorten investment procedures, create a suitable environment for the investors and so help reduce unemployment. Simplification of procedures and shorter timelines would give municipalities more time and opportunities to develop PPP projects.

4.3. Initiation of procedures for amending and supplementing the Law on Allocation for Use and Exchange of Immovable Property of the Municipality

Context

Immovable Property of the Municipality is of a special importance to the economic development at the municipal level and one of the few assets managed at the local level. Though legislation in force in our country provides a major decentralisation from the central to the local level, decentralisation mainly takes place in the field of public fund and property management. However, as regards investment-related procedures, all legal instruments still remain at the central level, and municipalities are handicapped in terms of attracting investments or providing conditions for investors.

Achievements

This was achieved owing to AKM's continuous efforts made in all institutional mechanisms, **despite MLGA's unwillingness to include the amendment and supplementation of the Law in the legislative agenda for 2016.** The AKM has achieved this through the National Council for Economic development, which obliged the MLGA to include the amendment and supplementation of the Law in the legislative agenda for year 2016.

Impact

The amendment and supplementation of the Law will have a strong impact in that it will provide the municipalities with an opportunity to manage their property more efficiently, with the aim of generating income and developing projects that boost economic growth in the municipalities. The Law will eliminate all the barriers, unnecessary bureaucracy and long periods related to the procedures of allocating municipal property for use by potential foreign and local investors. In addition, it will shorten administrative application timelines and deadlines for filing complaints and provide an opportunity for a procedure of direct negotiation with big investors by introducing accountability procedures between the executive level and the Municipal Assembly. At the same time, there will be a bank guarantee that will amount to 10% of the proposed investment at the least. In case of failure to perform

contractual obligations, the municipal authority will be entitled to execute the guarantee in order to protect the public interest.

4.4. Compilation of the CATALOGUE of Jobs for civil servants at the local level

Context

Kosovo has not had a catalogue of jobs for the civil servants of either central or local levels so far. It was deemed that, in order to embark on the public administration reform process, the Catalogue of Jobs must be compiled first. The catalogue must include all the jobs for all the institutions in order to avoid differences between the central and local levels for the same positions and with different grades. This has also caused a lack of harmony in the career positions between officials holding the same positions at the central and local levels as well as officials holding the same positions in different municipalities.

Achievements

The model document that the AKM has prepared has made municipalities' work a lot easier. In addition, activities between the municipalities and the central level were coordinated, as positions that were missing in the catalogue compiled by the central level were identified. **AKM's proposition to add 30 new positions at the local level (which exist at the local level, but were not foreseen in the document)** was accepted by the central level and the proposed grades and steps were taken into account.

Impact

The failure to include the jobs at the local level has produced inertia at the municipal level and concerns among the local officials about losing their jobs, while the public has perceived the Catalogue as being more favourable to the central level than to the local one. Therefore, the AKM has taken the initiative of establishing a working group to draft the model catalogue for the civil servants at the local level. The catalogue has included all the jobs, which were categorised in accordance with the criteria, and the grades were determined therein.

4.5. Debt forgiveness including debts from property tax that is collected by municipalities

Context

Once the Government of Kosovo announced the idea of forgiving the debts of all citizens and businesses from the end of the war to the end of year 2008, the AKM has carried out activities with the respective mechanisms and come up with the stance that the initiative addressed by the Government was a very reasonable action that does not aim to forgive the debts of those who have failed to fulfil their obligations, be they tax or utility commitments, but has to do, first of all, with Government's policies to clean up the accounts of public companies and the budget accounts.

Achievements

The AKM has, with its recommendations, managed to channel its request to the central authorities (Ministry of Finance) until it was finally included in the Draft Law on Forgiveness of Public Debts, whereby the Government of Kosovo is requested to condition the erasure of debts owed to the municipalities with the payment of debts accrued after 2008, in order to

alleviate the negative effects of the decision on the municipalities in the field of local finance. So, the AKM proposal (that was incorporated in the final law) was that if municipality will forgive the debt on property tax to one person, that person should pay the debt from year 2008 until end of 2015.

Impact

If it weren't for AKM's lobbying, such a decision would have directly contributed to a drop in municipal own-source revenues and would have had a negative impact that would have led further to the failure to pay property tax among the part of the population that has regularly paid its debts to the municipality thus far. It would have also affected the measures aimed at improving the welfare of the citizens and stimulating or prompting them to perform their tax and other commitments to the utilities for the period from 1 January 2009 to the present. On the other hand, debt forgiveness, according to the Law, will create a new momentum that will contribute to the improvement of the overall discipline of physical and legal entities in the Republic of Kosovo in terms of their public obligations.

4.6. Spatial planning

Context

Upon AKM's request, a meeting was organised with the Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) with the aim of clarifying some issues raised by the AKM and implementing and revising the Law on Treatment of Constructions without Permit as well as other issues that affect the day-to-day spatial planning activities in the municipalities. The issue was dealt with through direct questions that the AKM has addressed to the ministry about their problems with out-dated urban regulatory plans, their revision, preparation of detailed plans, discrepancies between urban and development plans, urban development plan, legalisation, law on construction, "Cursed Mountains" National Park, etc.

Achievements

The Legal Department and the Spatial, Construction and Housing Department of the MESP have responded to AKM's requests by explaining the actions that the municipalities can take based on the existing laws. In addition, since municipalities have come across difficulties in implementing the Law on Treatment of Constructions with Permit, the amendment of the Law was initiated and the AKM will take part in the process.

Impact

Many lessons were learned while implementing the existing law and these lessons will contribute to a more successful legalisation program if the law is redrafted. The citizens who have failed the registration deadline may apply for legalisation. The municipalities in Kosovo may process 350.000 illegally constructed buildings more quickly and efficiently. Accordingly, certain constructions that were excluded from legalisation before may now be taken into consideration under certain circumstances. The initiation of the amendment of the Law on Illegal Buildings based on the needs and recommendations of municipalities will have a multidimensional impact on the municipalities and on spatial planning and regulation and will also **contribute to an increase in municipal revenues**. In addition, explanations provided by the MESP on other aspects brought up by the AKM will facilitate a progress in the regulatory field.

5. THE WORK OF THE COLLEGIA AT THE SERVICE OF MUNICIPALITIES

The AKM collegia have, in their annual plans, set their operational priorities and activities in identifying the topics of importance to the performance of activities that are beneficial to the local government by focusing on the improvement of municipal services, building their capacities, for the best of the people. Each collegium has held 6 meetings in average, and 18 presidency and 79 collegium meetings were held this year. In the course of the process, the collegia have developed and consolidated at least two positions on their operational activities and have continuously held meetings of various commissions with the aim of making remarks and giving suggestions in the course of draft legislation review by the central government. Some results (see below) that the collegiums have achieved by their engagement in analyses and in giving concrete recommendations have changed and improved AKM's services to the municipalities. During this year, on their demand, AKM was organising training sessions on different topics which were identified by collegias and commissions which are functioning within collegias.

Collegium for Budget and Finance – The decision of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo to forgive the debts, including the debts accrued from the failure to pay the property tax by the end of 2008, and the inclusion of the recommendation by the Ministry of Finance in the 'Draft Law on forgiveness of Public Debts' to condition the forgiveness of debts to municipalities with the payment of debts accrued after 2008, in order to mitigate the negative effects of such a decision on the municipalities in the field of local finance, are worth mentioning.

Collegium for Inspection – despite the centralisation of the competencies of municipal inspectors by the Law on Market Inspectorate and Inspective Supervision, which has not been implemented yet and has produced disarray and confusion among the citizens about the provision of services, the Collegium for Inspection has, in cooperation with DEMOS and in a constant consultation with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, taken an initiative to amend the law by way of a completed analysis that aims at identifying the challenges in the functioning of the market supervision as well as in finding a functional model to overcome the situation. In 2016 the deep reform will start in inspection. **The aim is to decrease the number of inspection bodies from 36 bodies to 15 or less.** The AKM will play an crucial role on this reform.

Collegium for Spatial Planning – Bearing witness of a failure to deal with constructions without permit, the Collegium for Spatial Planning has initiated the amendment of the Law, which was a joint position expressed by all the municipalities, by presenting the urgent need to overcome this situation as a reason. The Collegium is working intensively through the working groups established by the decision of the Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning and Association of Kosovo Municipalities to find ways out of the situation.

Collegium for Economic Development – Procedures to amend the Law on Public Private Partnership were initiated with the clear aim of shortening the procedures for the examination and approval of PPP projects in order for the Law to be more substantial and conducive to local economic growth.

Collegium for European Integration – by signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, Kosovo has signed the first all-inclusive agreement committing to comprehensive reforms and approximation with EU legislation in different sectors. The Collegium of Municipal Officers of European Integration is, in cooperation with the Ministry of Integration and Ministry of Local Government Administration, working on coordinating the activities in the framework of the European agenda with the aim of exchanging information about and discussing issues that relate to the process of European integration in the municipalities as well as better coordination between central and local institutions in implementing European integration programs.

Collegium for Public Services – has through the Beacon Scheme Project – which aimed at promoting the best municipal practices in the field of public services – managed to have its effect and help motivate the identified successes, exchange the best municipal experiences and practices between all the municipalities and increase the competition between ideas and successes that were manifested in the identification and promotion of innovation at the local level.

6. AKM'S FINANCIAL VIABILITY

6.1. Short background

The Association of Kosovo Municipalities constantly aims at building a system of financial viability that guarantees retention of its functional and statutory independence. Even though AKM has come across multiple difficulties and challenges that have had a direct impact on its financial viability ever since its inception, the AKM has managed not only to foster a positive trend in building a financial liability, but to also change municipalities' perception of AKM, which has resulted in establishing contractual bilateral relations based on good trust. This was demonstrated by the massive participation of municipalities in the AKM's General Assembly that was held in June 2015 and by the membership of the Serbian majority municipalities and other minorities. Good trust is still being maintained in 2015.

6.2. Achievements in 2015

The objective foreseen in the AKM budget as regards income from the membership fee for 2015 was 130,000 €. During the reporting period, the AKM has achieved the 91 % of the foreseen objective, by collecting 117,710€. The reason for not accomplishing 100% of the objective during the reporting period has to do with some difficulties that the municipalities have faced and that include the missing budgets for some categories and the need to prioritise expenditures for 2015. As a result, some municipalities have pledged to fulfil their remaining obligations for 2015 in the beginning of 2016. If we take into account the reasons above, we can conclude that the AKM is keeping the positive trend in the income generated from the membership fee and that, moreover, such trend is likely to become even more sustainable in the future.

Continued lobbying activities that have aimed at urging the municipalities to fulfil their financial obligations to the AKM can be considered as a success that was achieved in the framework of this objective. The lobbying was done through AKM mechanisms, such as

professional collegiums and the Council of Mayors in particular, as a mechanism that brings together all the mayors.

The AKM is maintaining its excellent cooperation with the DEMOS project in order to encourage the municipalities that benefit from the grants of the project to pay the AKM membership fee. AKM's cooperation with different partners in this direction will have a very positive impact on AKM's financial viability. It is worth mentioning that the AKM has also expanded its projects in favour of municipalities with the German GIZ too, projects that have had an effect in sensitising the municipalities to fulfilling their obligations to the AKM.

Within the reporting period, the AKM Board – namely the President and the Executive Director – have continued their regular visits to the municipalities to listen to their concerns about the problems that they are facing. The President and the Executive Director of the AKM have expressed AKM's readiness to convey the concerns of all municipalities to the respective institutions. These visits have served as a good opportunity to explain AKM's financial position and the need for a continuous financial viability.

6.3. Funding from third parties

Funding from third parties implies grants received by the AKM in addition to those received from the program funded by the SDC. In this direction, the AKM has foreseen a total budget of €136,885 for 2015 from different funding organisations, such as NALAS, COUNCIL OF EUROPE, GIZ. In the reporting period, the AKM has managed to receive a number of foreseen grants. Namely, during this period, the AKM has signed a €96,400 contract with the GIZ; a €4,590 contract with the Council of Europe and a €10,300 with NALAS. The total amount of grants signed during the reporting period is € 111,290 or 82 % of total grants foreseen for 2015.

7. COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

A context of engagement of a host of organizations in the local government in Kosovo determines and encourages the Association of Municipalities to strive for a partnership with these organizations, with which it coordinates its activities, because they relate to its own operations. Cooperation with the partners has helped the AKM to lobby and advocate and implement many projects from which municipalities have received funds, financial support for projects, services, trainings, workshops, exchange of experiences, etc. Likewise, such partnership has also contributed to an increase in municipalities' performance, capacity building, facilitation of provision of various services, bridging gaps in terms of absence of required documentation, cooperation between municipalities and various organisations, etc.

SDC - As the main partner in developing and advancing the AKM, provides a substantial contribution to the financial support for the AKM and plays a dominant role in AKM's activities and budget. The program financed by the SDC provides more leeway for covering AKM's activities, depending on the time and the need for lobbying, unlike projects of other organisations. The SDC finance support program is all-inclusive in terms of AKM's activities and integrated in the base budget.

The AKM friends / annual meetings - with main partners of Kosovo's municipalities that deal with and are working in the field of local government. "AKM's friends" is functioning as a very

important mechanism in the coordination of activities between the local institutions and their partner organisations. The major role that the AKM plays in coordinating their meetings and activities is worth emphasising. This year, the forum has also discussed the AKM Draft Strategy 2016-2020.

So, the AKM partnership with different projects relates to the following activities:

- Cooperation with the European Union Project of Support to the Ministry of Finance, a project that is being implemented by the GIZ, in partnership with Ernst & Young; the presentation of the manual entitled Codification of Programs. A study visit was also paid to Montenegro and Albania on topics such as property, construction tax and other taxes.
- Preparation and publication of the manual entitled Gender Integration in Spatial Planning – A Step by Step Approach for the Municipalities.
- In cooperation with the OSCE, the handbook for municipalities entitled Model Municipal Regulations was published in three languages and is being disseminated to all municipalities.
- Analysis of work and return of competencies to the local government i.e. market inspectors, in cooperation with HELVETAS.
- In the framework of an inter-institutional cooperation between the GIZ, the MLG and the AKM, a workshop on the topic of Challenges and Achievements of Municipalities in Fulfilling Obligations arising from the European Agenda was organized.
- With the support of the Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA), a conference was organised with the aim of presenting the results of the report on competitiveness in municipalities, which was compiled by the Kosovo SME Promotion Programme (KOSME).
- In cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Project, a workshop on institutional support for waste management in Kosovo was organised, with the aim of presenting and discussing good municipal experiences and strengthening the solid waste management capacities in the Municipality of Prizren.
- With the GIZ support, the program of good practices named Beacon Scheme was implemented, for which 19 municipalities have applied with 22 applications. Through a competition process, the following were selected: Maintenance of green spaces - Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Municipal Environmental Task Force - Municipality of Gjakova/Đakovica, and Public Lighting - Municipality of Ferizaj/Uroševac. The good practice sharing phase was implemented in October/November.
- The AKM has, in cooperation with the GIZ, built synergies in the project related to the exchange of best municipal practices and with GIZ / NALAS related to energy efficiency, and carried out some joint activities with the DEMOS, USAID/ACT and UNDP.
- The Model Regulation on the Description of Duties and Responsibilities of Gender Equality Officers in Ministries and Municipalities was drafted in cooperation with the DEMOS Project and Gender Equality Agency.

8. OTHER ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

8.1. Development of AKM's Strategy 2016-2020

The AKM Board has adopted the decision and established the Planning Committee made of three mayors for the process and preparation of Association's Strategy 2016-2020. The AKM executive office have held two meetings, where AKM's internal structure was analysed, including AKM's strong and weak points, and an analysis of external factors that may have an impact on AKM's and municipalities' operations and activities in the next planning phase was also conducted. The strategy development process has continued with the inclusion of other AKM mechanisms, including the delivery of a questionnaire to all AKM members. The process has continued with AKM's professional collegias, the Board of the AKM, AKM's friends from the donor community and AKM's partner international organisations and at the end of this year the draft strategy was approved by AKM council and it was proceeded for adoption by AKM assembly in 2016.

8.2. Functioning of AKM's structures

Owing to its own engagement, the AKM has fulfilled the legal obligations with regard to the operation of its structures in 2015. The Council of Mayors, whom we have empowered further, has held several meetings, and the meeting of the General Assembly was held, where, in addition to reviewing the annual reports, the AKM Statute was also amended and supplemented and this was preceded by some Board meetings and harmonisation of draft amendments with the legislation in force.

8.3. Communication

The Association of Kosovo Municipalities has maintained regular contacts and communication with municipalities over this year as well. More than 135 different letters, notifications, reports, replies, draft laws, draft regulations, recommendations, draft positions, etc. were sent to municipalities during the reporting period. To improve the transparency, all publications and brochures that were drafted by the AKM and some of our partners and associates were posted on AKM's website on regular basis, and an IT Officer is maintaining the web page himself on daily basis. In addition, in terms of periodicals, the AKM compiles, prints and disseminates its own bulletin on bimonthly basis. Accordingly, six bulletins were prepared, published and disseminated this year. The AKM has also engaged in strengthening its image by publishing identity products. In this regard, the AKM has its Facebook page, where it posts all its news and activities. A major role in this regard was plaid during the meetings of the collegia and various conferences and seminars at the central level, etc.

8.4 Other services and achievements

In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), it was agreed that the municipalities should build schools buildings even if a grant is obtained from the MEST. This is another achievement and has been a longstanding request that the municipalities had made, because no one can take stock of and monitor such processes for the best of the public better than the municipalities can.

The AKM has also managed to substantiate and include in the draft law a provision stipulating that the Mayor shall receive 70% of the base salary for another year, if he/she does not have another job. In this way, the Mayor has joined the same category as a deputy minister, minister and member of the Assembly of Kosovo.

The AKM has also conducted some “special” lobbying for various ministries and institutions, upon their requests addressed to us, considering AKM role and its impact on setting the legislative agenda at the central level and AKM influence in decision making processes . One of the recent case was related to gender equality issues in the preparation of the Regulation on Duties and Responsibilities of Gender Equality Officers in Ministries and Municipalities, as requested by the Gender Equality Agency. The Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) didn't foresee the position of gender officer in municipality even though that in the law on gender (signed by the President of Kosovo in September 2015) such a position was foreseen. The gender equality officer asked AKM to lobby in MPA in order to allow this position at local level. With AKM lobby now municipalities can have this position in their administration. Another case was the case of Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, which has asked for cooperation and lobbying with the Office of the Prime Minister to include the amendment of the Law on Treatment of Illegal Buildings into the legislation agenda for 2016. There are some other cases in which central institutions and agencies are asking AKM to lobby in order to change or amend something.

The municipalities have appointed the members of the Grant Commission at AKM meetings, which was also attended by ministers and general secretaries of the ministries. This was done once for 2015, and, in the end of the year, that was done for the selection of the members of the Grant Commission for 2016. It is the first time that this was done at the meetings organised by the AKM and it mirrors AKM's strengthened role and importance. This is also confirmed by the fact that the Minister of Finance has committed that no document that affects municipalities will be developed without the involvement of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities.

Relations with the Assembly of Kosovo and parliamentary committees and other bodies and Members of the Assembly themselves have advanced, and the strengthened role of the AKM is noticeable. This also includes the participation of AKM representatives in the development of draft law concept papers, as a prelude to the preparation of the laws.

The Serbian majority municipalities have made some requests to organise meetings of AKM structures to address specific issues. The latest case was the request of the Gračanica Municipality to organise a meeting of the Council of Mayors to deal with the phenomenon of street dogs and to consider cooperation with neighbouring municipalities in resolving the problem. Such requests indicate that the Serbian majority municipalities not only continue to be members of the AKM, but they also see AKM as an adequate mechanism for resolving their problems. Another case is when mayors from Serbian majority of population asked AKM to lobby regarding the law on census for municipalities with Serbian majority of population because most of them boycotted the census of Kosovo population in year 2011.