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Municipality of Škofja Loka

PROJECT REPORT TO THE PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

EU Programme: Europe for citizens : Democratic engagement and civil participation / Town twinning

Title of the project / conference: »Minority organisations in thinking and shaping the future of the EU«

Date and venue: 16 – 18 March 2018 Škofja Loka

Participating organisations: Applicant organisation *Croatian Cultural Association Komušina Škofja Loka* in cooperation with Municipality of Škofja Loka and partners: Municipality of Dupnitsa, Bulgaria, Municipality Rieбини, Latvia, Municipality Szödliget, Hungary, Society of Bosnian Croats PRSTEN, Croatia, Slovenian House - Cultural and Educational Society BAZOVICA Rijeka, Croatia and Croatian Cultural and Educational Society MATIJA GUBEC Tavankut, Serbia

Participants: There were 224 citizens involved in the project activities, 67 from Slovenia and 149 through different partner states: Latvia 2, Hungary 3, Bulgaria 4, Serbia 21, Croatia 119. 8 citizens also came from Italy (2) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (6).

Description of the project:

Under the Europe for Citizens' Town Twinning Programme The Croatian Cultural Association Komušina from Škofja Loka, in cooperation with Municipality of Škofja Loka and together with six partners from five different countries, has organised the international conference as a part of the project Minority organisations in thinking and shaping the future of the EU. The international project included participants were from partners' organisation countries: Slovenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia and Serbia. THE MAIN AIM of the project, which was awarded with the 22.000 EUR, was to organise international conference and to discuss on the future role of minority organisations in the EU.

OTHER OBJECTIVES of the project were to exchange different examples of good practices from different European countries, to set up activities for strengthening minority organizations and to find ways to exploit the existing minority's strengths, capacities and encourage them to become active in cooperation with their local communities. The conference included various set of activities, from plenary sessions, workshops, cultural programmes and exchange of good practices on how to develop participatory approaches for the empowerment of minorities and minority organisation in the EU.

Today, around half a billion citizens are living in the European Union, of which almost 15% could be declared as members of various ethnic minorities. The number of ethnic minority members in the EU is constantly increasing due to various factors. Nevertheless, it remains very difficult for

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the most EU countries to find a balance between respect for differences, tolerance and social representation. The lack of communication, the lack of logistical, financial and moral support for minority organizations, the lack of skills and knowledge of minority members, limited experience of collective actions, the history of being ignored, the feeling of helplessness and lack of time are only the few of many obstacles inhibiting minorities in successful integration in their local communities.

According to the problem addressed one of the main objectives of the project was to encourage the relevant stakeholders to debate on the future role of minorities in the EU, to exchange different examples of good practices and to encourage minorities to become more active in their local communities. The self-organization of citizens in minority organizations, members of different ethnic minorities, will in the future be the key to their existence and for successful cultural integration into the majority society. In the future, these organizations will carry an even greater share of responsibility for a culturally diverse European society that enriches and unites based on understanding, tolerance and cooperation between different European cultures.

Besides the MAIN RESULT of the project, which was the organisation of the international conference and increased international cooperation and new intercultural links and exchanges, the OTHER OUTCOMES of the project were to initiate, give suggestions and practical solutions to the relevant decision makers on a local, national and European level about current and future opportunities and challenges for minorities.

The work programme of the conference was designed in order to encourage participants to actively participate at the conference, namely work meetings, open discussions, Europe café, plenary sessions with Q&A, cultural programme and other joined activities as lunches and dinners. Especially important part of the project was the interactions between minorities and decision makers on local, national and European level.

THE PROGRAM OF THE FIRST DAY (16.03.2018 in the meeting room of the Administrative Unit of the Municipality Škofja Loka on Poljanska cesta 2) has started with the presentation of the partner organizations of the project, their local communities and countries. At the working meeting, partners' delegations compared experiences and practices in the field of the integration of minorities into social, cultural and political life in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia. At the Europe café workshop, the participants has, together with the Mayor of Škofja Loka and the MEP, Mr. Igor Šoltes and two members of the Slovenian National Assembly (Dr. Matej Tašner Vatovec and Miha Kordiš) discussed the role of minority organizations in local communities, exchanged experiences on how to encourage minority organizations to join the local community, their role in the integration of minority members in the new environment and the establishment of adequate and effective communication between local representatives and members of minorities. In a broader sense, the intention of the workshop was the exchange of good practices, the formulation of proposals and the search for solutions in the field of minority issues. The large part of the discussion was aimed to strengthen the trust in European institutions.

The first day of the conference has been concluded with a cultural program, a festival of ethnic music with a dinner (at the Croatian Cultural Association Komušina on Partizanska cesta 1), where the participants had the opportunity to get to know each other and informal discussion

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The program of the second day (March 17, 2018) and the central event of the conference took place at the Sokolski dom (cultural center) Škofja Loka on Mestni trg 17.

THE PROGRAM OF THE SECOND DAY of the conference took place in the context of lectures and discussions, following the next thematic subjects: 1) What are the obstacles for the integration of minorities into local communities 2) Identification of relevant stakeholders for successful integration of minorities in the local community 3) Establishment of communication between minority communities and representatives of local communities 4) The importance of a minority culture for the future of the EU. The participants also discussed the future role of minorities in the EU, the successful integration of minorities into cultural and social life, and brought proposals on how minority organizations can help reduce discrimination and prejudice. The program ended with an exhibition of minority arts and cultural programme - a festival of minority folklore and a joint dinner. The cultural programme was intended to stimulate talks on the importance of developing intercultural dialogue and promoting talent and creativity of members of minorities. In the first part, various speakers presented various programs and perspectives for members of minority organizations. In the second part, representatives of various partner organizations from different countries presented their views on solving common barriers. In the cultural context, the members of minority has presented their genuine hand made products. Five minority folklore groups have followed the cultural programme. After that, the members of all folklore groups has danced together in the lobby of the Sokolski Dom conference hall.

The second day of the conference has been concluded with a joint dinner and informal meetings at the Croatian Cultural Association Komušina on Partizanska cesta 1 in Škofja Loka.

Among the speakers of the central event were akademik PhD Boštjan Žekš, adviser to the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr. Borut Pahor, PhD Zoran Stančič, Head of the European Commission Representation in the Republic of Slovenia, PhD Dragan Matić, Head of the Culture Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, PhD. Sašo Gazdić, Head of the Department for Cultural Diversity and Human Rights at the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, PhD Miran Komac, Scientific Adviser of the Institute for Ethnic Studies, Mr. Miha Ješe, Mayor of Municipality Škofja Loka, Mr. Borut Sajovic, Mayor of the Municipality Tržič, Mrs. Dubravka Severinski from the Croatian State Office for Croats abroad, Mr. Matej Maček from the Public Fund for Cultural Activities of the Republic of Slovenia, Mrs. Darja Sekula Krstič from the Center for Mobility and European Education and Training Programs (CMEPIUS), Mrs. Saša Banjanac Lubej, editor of the minority program 'NaGlas' on RTV Slovenia, representatives of partner organizations of the project, other minority organizations in the Republic of Slovenia, representatives of embassies and others.

THE PROGRAMME OF THE THIRD DAY (18.03.2018 in the meeting room of the Administrative Unit of the Municipality Škofja Loka on Poljanska cesta 2) started with the final phase of the project, which included signing final note on the efforts of partner organizations for the active inclusion of minorities in local communities, taking into account recognizing their needs, knowledge and skills. Delegates of partner organizations have presented their concluding thoughts - the future cooperation between the newly established contacts of various stakeholders, the establishment of a platform for the successful integration of minorities into new environments, the creation of channels of communication between the local community and

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minority communities and the establishment of activities and mechanisms for the active integration of minorities, through minority organizations, into the social, social, cultural and political environment.

The implementation of the project, in particular the conference resulted in media coverage (newspaper, radio and TV) on a local and national level, most important: Gorenjski Glas, RTV Slo (oddaja Na glas in Sami naši), HRT Preko Granice.

In the future applicant will continue to raise awareness about the issue addressed by a project and contribute to the increased international cooperation and cultural links between participating organisations.

Damir Hauptman, Project Manager

Pejo Mijatović, President of the *Croatian Cultural Association Komušina Škofja Loka*

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