

**International Conference**  
**The challenges and perspectives in regional and local development**  
**-Decentralization and EU Accession-**

**26-27 November, 2015**  
**Skopje, Republic of Macedonia**

## **Background**

Development of decentralization has been on the agenda and still is high priority of the political agendas of the countries on the Western Balkan especially during the last decade.

Local authorities in the entire region of Western Balkans have been facing different challenges, which have different influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of their work. On the one side this is up to the capacity of each country, and depending on the specific development potentials in the sense of human, physical and natural capital, knowledge and institutions. On the other side, it is the challenged set by the level and nature of implemented decentralization (in all of its dimensions) which provides the space for action to the municipalities, ability to act on local level, their role vis-à-vis other national actors and resources available. In the end, there are great societal challenges facing Macedonia and wider region, EU and above all the global economic crisis, demographic changes and migration, degradation of the environment, climate changes and energy usage.

Challenges facing the local and regional authorities, with all of their complexity, have imposed themselves high on the political agenda. It is necessary to create fast and concrete national strategies which would be dynamic and answer to all ongoing challenges. The governments are facing the challenge to adapt the national policies to all specific conditions, as well as to synchronize the various sub-programmes in order to improve the efficiency of the public policies in decentralized context.

In this context, it is of especial importance to have policies to encourage sustainable local and regional development. They are to timely mobilize all resources in the direction of economic development and quality of life of all citizens through creation of collective goods on local and regional level and support the cooperation among all stakeholders on all levels (public and private sector on local level, and national institutions).

The Republic of Macedonia has implemented several steps in the direction of establishment of sustainable decentralized system, whereas municipalities with the support of the financial instruments and pre-accession assistance have enhanced their capacities for promotion of the sustainable local and regional development. At the same time the country has enabled creation of conditions for positive changes on local level by establishing the policy for balanced regional development i.e. better conditions for social and culture life, better infrastructure, education as well as improvement of other aspects of the quality of life.

Today, having in mind the fact that policy for balanced regional development in the Republic of Macedonia has been implemented for eight years, it is clear that there is need for looking back at the achievements and challenges in the past period definition of strategic perspectives for further development, as well as exchange of ideas with the neighboring countries.

Hence, we have the right to ask the following questions: What type of changes are necessary regarding the conceptual thinking, policies, resources, and capacities for implementation, in order to ensure that the local self-government has the power, capacity and authority to provide effective role in the reaction of the local needs and priorities, thus contributing to delivery of national plans for development and achievement of the national priorities and objectives and in fulfillment of the standards to EU access? In which way can the local and regional authorities of

Western Balkan answer to the challenges on a more efficient manner through joint cooperation? In which way could the governments adjust all state policies to their specific situation and to synchronize the various sub-strategies and programmes in order to improve the efficiency of the public policies in decentralized context? What is the role of the local self-government in achieving the foreseen objectives for promotion of sustainable growth and development, as well as establishment of efficient, responsible and inclusive institutions on local level?

## **Objectives**

This International Conference is meant to serve as a platform for dialogue and exchange of experiences on local and regional policy in Macedonia and Western Balkans. This Conference will enable the participants to get familiar with experiences of other countries, candidate-countries, countries which have recently joined the European Union, and others who have already a long experience in the process of implementation of the European local and regional economic development policy, in light of EU integration processes. The conference particularly aims at:

- Drawing lessons learned from the process of implementation of local and regional development policy;
- Exchanging experience on development policy in Western Balkans;
- Defining joint future priorities and future measures;
- Better coordination between the institutions and countries responsible for regional policy from local, regional and national level;
- Strengthening and intensifying networks between politicians and practitioners in order to improve the exchange of experiences, know-how transfer and cooperation on policy, development and governance.

Firstly, the Conference will link the presentation of the achievements of the current activities in local and regional development in Macedonia – directly involved actors into the development process. The conference will open the floor for discussion on how to sustain the future activities that are to be implemented in the following period and what are the opportunities that must not be neglected. The thematic stakeholders from all governance levels in Western Balkans will be invited to provide feedback on the intended actions on the new Program based on what they have learned in the past period. This kind of discussion, the possibility to learn from each other, is considered to be the most effective way to find out how to facilitate the present difficulties and to harmonise the future local and regional policy processes.

With the view to ensure further improvement of the regional policy in Western Balkans, the international speakers and participants will have an important role i.e. to present the experiences from their countries, discussing the main challenges faced (financial and other), sharing their knowledge and ideas about the measures and mechanisms of regional policy etc.

The presence of the representatives from the academic society will give participants the possibility of getting to know better the current scientific researches, their outcomes and the latest aspects of regional policy in Western Balkans.

The different authorities' representatives and above all the ones from the operational level will contribute by presenting the innovative approaches used in different countries of provenience that can be used in future by the Macedonian operational body.

In addition, the participating regions and other institutions will have the possibility to make better networking though added value activity to be happening in parallel to the Conference i.e. Expo. The setting up of creative and innovative display corners of the Expo in the free space by the Conference room during the Conference is a great opportunity for the participants to better promote and present themselves in front of the others, also a platform for exchange of ideas and experiences informally and directly. This approach is considered as very beneficial to all participants at the Conference also contributing to achievement of the set objectives of the Conference.

## **Expected results**

- Defined new challenges and perspectives for future local and regional policy in Macedonia;
- Experience exchanged and best practices on local and regional policy disseminated with participation of leading experts, foreign authority officials etc. in Western Balkans;
- Enhanced links between different levels representatives within each participating country and between countries;
- Proposals and contributions for further improvement of the regional policy in Western Balkans;
- Action plan for establishment of regional development network in Western Balkans;

## **Financial sources**

The main financial source of the Conference is the Ministry for local self-government, with contribution from the GIZ, SDC and UNDP.

## **Organizers**

The Conference will be organized by the Ministry of Local Self Government and the Bureau for regional development and supported by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and UNDP Country office in Macedonia.

## **Venue**

The conference will be held in Skopje, Macedonia on the 26 and 27 of November 2015, Hotel Kontinental.

**Number of expected participants:**200

## **Target group**

The conference is designed for high-level executives and decision makers, academia as well as for practitioners from ministries and other governmental structures, regional institutions and civil society organizations working on decentralisation, local and regional development.

## **Languages**

English, Macedonian, Albanian (interpretation will be provided)