



CSMP Serbia – Poland

A study visit of civil servants from Serbia: experience of cross-border co-operation

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The Visegrad Group's initiative Civil Servants Mobility Program (CSMP) is a co-operation instrument financed by the International Visegrad Fund. Previously, visits of civil servants and local government officials from countries covered by Eastern Partnership (mainly Ukraine) used to be organised, while at the present stage study visits for civil servants from Serbia are also organised for the first time. We would like to express our profound gratitude to all individuals and institutions who supported OSW in the process of implementation of this programme.

Narrative report

Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) in co-operation with the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) and in consultation with the Polish MFA prepared a weekly programme of the visit oriented towards exchanging experience in the area of cross-border co-operation. The visit was paid by experts from the Serbian Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government: Dušanka Jovanović and Vera Veljanovski as well as Marija Ašković Matić, the head of the Project Management Centre at the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The guests from Serbia focused their attention on the functioning of the model Euroregions on the Polish-Czech frontier and other institutional forms of co-operation, legal issues and issues linked to supporting entrepreneurship. A number of instruments, mechanisms and good practices were presented the knowledge of which might prove useful in developing cross-border co-operation between Serbia and EU member states and between Western Balkan countries. Another topic of discussions were the perspectives of development of Polish-Serbian interregional co-operation.

In Warsaw, in addition to meetings at OSW and the Polish Institute of International Affairs, the guests from Serbia visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration and the Ministry of Investment and Economic Development. In Katowice, the visit's programme included meetings devoted to Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak cross-border co-operation at the Marshal's Office of Silesian Province and at the Regional Chamber of Commerce. In Racibórz, they took part in discussions at the City Hall and the office of the Polish part of Euroregion Silesia (Association of Municipalities of the Upper Oder Basin). The programme of the visit in Cieszyn and Český Těšín covered meetings with representatives of the government of Cieszyn, the District Job Centre (the topic of the meetings was the Polish-Czech-Slovak partnership EURES-T Beskydy) and meetings with the leaders of the Polish and Czech section of Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia.

The guests also visited the Joint Secretariat of Interreg V-A Czech Republic – Poland in Olomouc and the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Ostrava. The meetings were in the form of workshops (presentations, discussions, Q & A sessions).

In the focus of interest were: models of cooperation between institutions at the national and regional levels, between local governments, local government corporations, the competences and financing of local governments, their participation in particular types of taxes, and the development of cooperation with foreign entities. These problems were particularly interesting for the Serbian participants also due to the ongoing preparations for administrative reform in Serbia. Many questions concerned the process of decentralisation in Poland and the relations which the central authorities have with local governments at various levels. The experience from the pre-accession period to the EU was especially interesting. The visit showed that the potential to transfer experience exists regarding the use of pre-accession funds, the creation and management of European projects, as well as training civil servants. An interesting experience was the activity of Euroregions, which are little known in Serbia. The role of the Polish minority in the Czech Republic and its role in the development of good-neighbourly cooperation between Poland and the Czech Republic and between the bordering regions was also presented.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, closely cooperating with the chambers from other Western Balkan countries as one of the leaders of the Chamber Investment Forum (CIF), can play a significant role in the development of cooperation with V4 partners. In the future, as part of the CSMP, it is worth considering the visits of representatives of CIF members from different Balkan countries, prepared jointly by the Think Visegrad partners from two V4 countries on the bordering areas. There is also an interest in analysis and recommendations for Serbian and regional entities (e.g. the CIF Secretariat) in the area of promoting the investment potentials of the WB6 as a unique economic area, based on the V4 experience. It is also worth looking for ways to transfer experiences in order to start activity on the creation of Euroregions, to develop cooperation in the field of training civil servants and strengthening the inter-regional cooperation between Serbian entities and regions from the V4 countries.

The visit showed that the V4 has unique potential for cross-border cooperation, especially in the area of developing entrepreneurship and eliminating barriers for business. The support and transfer of experiences from this dimension of integration may be an important added value of the Berlin process and the Central European contribution to the promotion of European integration in the Western Balkans region.