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## **Engagement of the Chancellery of the National Council of the Slovak Republic within the development & technical assistance**

After a refreshing break, we are returning to our working place for the final session of our Meeting - Engagement of parliamentary administrations in processes of development assistance and support.

The topic is chosen to cover parliamentary engagement and experience towards parliaments of third/candidate/partner countries mainly within the framework of sharing know-how related to the European/Euro-Atlantic integration, political and economic transformation, enhancing administrative/research capacities of parliaments, improving of legislative procedures, developing interactions with public, etc.

Focal aim of this session is to share lessons learnt and best practices as well as to serve, among other obvious aims, as a catalyst of identifying common opportunities in the field.

In our discussion, we would like to increase the visibility of the parliamentary development assistance and to help some of us to get “plugged in” the parliamentary development assistance community. I believe that we need to monitor and publicize what we are doing in this field.

Therefore, we would like to hold an exchange on aims, target groups, territorial priorities, and forms and methods of the parliamentary development assistance.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

please allow me to start this session with Jean Monnet's famous idea: “Make men work together, show them that beyond their differences and geographical boundaries there lies a common interest” which captures the spirit of the development assistance. The cornerstones of our common interest are the values of the European Union – human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The development assistance is not a one-way street. On contrary, it is about sharing, not taking. Last year marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of TAIEX [tajeks] (*Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission*), which was the occasion not only to celebrate its great success, but also to focus on its future perspective. Besides, with regard to

contemporary tendencies to reform the Twinning instrument we believe that this forum could be a right place to discuss also possible ways of refreshing these tools.

Dear colleagues,

Focal aim of this session is to share lessons learnt and best practices in the area of engagement of parliamentary administrations within the official development assistance. In order to etch in the topic, let me start with a brief description of the Slovak case.

Slovak Republic, including the National Council, builds on the specific story of a country, which went through a challenging and successful process of transition to democracy. At the parliamentary level, the development assistance dates back to 2004, when our experts provided guidance during parliamentary Rules of Procedure drafting in Republic of Montenegro. Since then our parliamentary administration has cooperated with US nonprofit organization National Democratic Institute, which helped to expand the assistance throughout the region to all Western Balkan countries.

I am proud to say, that during these 13 years of our active involvement in parliamentary development assistance we managed to co-organize more than 40 events for nearly 500 Members of Parliaments and parliamentary staff.

All mentioned activities have been ultimately based on first-hand know-how transfer with emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of the Parliament in the process of transition and consolidation of democracy and integration to the European Union. In practice, we have oriented our activities on building capacities of research services, legislative services and parliamentary committees.

Without overestimating, I may say that the Slovak experience is widely accepted, valued and applied in several countries, especially in Western Balkan. For instance, our model of research services methodology has inspired the functioning of research services in the Assembly of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In 2015, we even elaborated a joint comparative study focused on electoral systems in six countries, which our experts presented in Skopje with great success.

Dear colleagues,

If we look on our parliamentary development assistance through a geographical lens, we can see that our territorial priorities are not only Western Balkan countries. Thank to our exceptional cooperation with the Czech colleagues, our experts take part in building capacities in the Lebanese Parliament. To add the

mosaic, in 2013 our research analysts in cooperation with NDI provided expertise in Iraq.

Our Research Centre called the Parliamentary Institute have developed a carefully formulated concept enabling us to provide assessment missions, study visits, fellowships, interactive workshops, multilateral seminars, peer-to-peer reviews and simulation exercises, which all are tailor-made to the needs of the beneficiary country.

Finally yet importantly, I would like to say few words about financial resources utilized for our parliamentary development assistance. As mentioned several times here, we cooperate with NDI and its Western Balkan Legislative Strengthening Initiative. Furthermore, the program of our Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs called CETIR [cetir] (*Centre for Experience Transfer from Integration and Reforms*) covers some of our activities.

Unfortunately, we have never been selected for the Twinning, although we applied for it several times. Nevertheless, our experts successfully took part in several Twinning projects.

Dear colleagues,

let me conclude with final words on key challenges in relation to the parliamentary development assistance. From my perspective, the focal internal challenge is the motivation. We need to charge systematically the motivational engine of our parliamentary administrations and we need to find ways how to attract our employees to participate.

When it comes to the external challenges, I believe, that one of the greatest is insufficient visibility of the parliamentary development assistance. National Parliaments shall become equally recognized actors as the national Governments.

With regard to the process of reform of the Twinning instrument, there are several points to ponder. Firstly, it is essential to discuss new possible communication channels for sending the calls and new communication channels between the National Parliaments. When the only communication channel is within the executive branch, it may happen that some Parliaments are not aware about the call and then only narrow range of Parliaments apply. When there is no communication channel between the National Parliaments, it disables search for partners for potential Consortium.

Secondly, in order to transfer the integration experience successfully, it is inevitable to ensure that the Twinning project does not duplicate activities already done through another project, either multilateral or bilateral. One of the ways to avoid such overlapping is to share information. We all know that we have a great

platform IPEX that could possibly in the future enable us to share information also about parliamentary development assistance.

Thirdly, some Member States that in the past could not have previous project management experience in implementation of Twinning projects with parliaments are discriminated. To be frank, this was our case for three times in a row. Such an institutional criterion is in contradiction with the meaning of Twinning – to provide the project, which suits best to the needs of the Beneficiary, not to provide an organization that was previously satisfactory. If this unwritten condition will be the decisive one, this situation will continue to repeat and will exclude many Twinning partners from EU Member States.

Fourthly, the Twinning Manual does not include any remedy. The same authority that issues the decision, judges the complaint and appeal and this does not comply with the rule of law principle.

Finally yet importantly, we need to ensure meaningful and lasting impacts of the Twinning projects, therefore, it is necessary to evaluate systematically the impact of these projects and to do it also after a specific period from finishing the project.

I am aware that it will be difficult to pursue these ambitions, but I believe that this forum is one of the best places to share our visions. I look forward to outcome of the discussion in this session and I hope that we will generate some ideas.

Thank you for your attention.