COUNCIL OF EUROPE

HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

DROITS DE L'HOMME, DÉMOCRATIE ET ÉTAT DE DROIT

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

POLICY ADVICE

ON STRENGTHENING THE STATUS OF CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES IN SLOVAKIA

Cezary Trutkowski

Good Governance

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Field and purpose of analysis

- The main purpose of the Peer Review conducted in Bratislava between 14 and 17 June 2022 was to develop recommendations for the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic with respect to: ***strengthening the status of cities and municipalities in Slovakia, diversification of functions for separate types of local government units (cities and municipalities i.e. villages)*.**

- some of the issues relating to the administrative divisi of Slovakia, the size of local government units, the effectiveness local government administration, and possible reforms of the

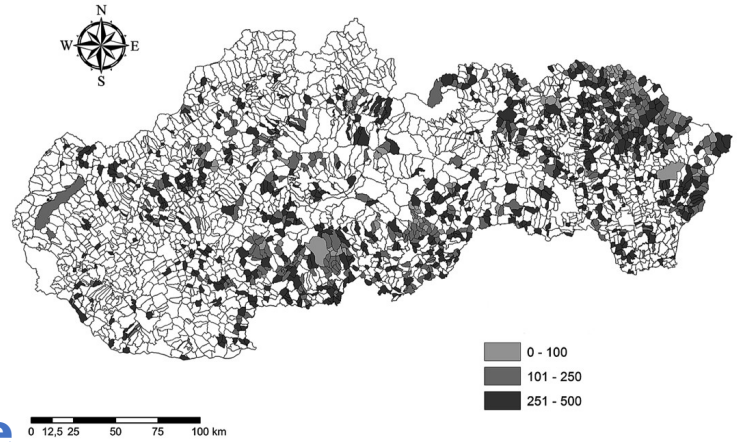
Good Governance

The diagnosis:

- **There are too many units, they are too small and therefore have limited possibilities for operation.** Their development potential is insufficient. Many of them are unable to provide the required and / or satisfactory level of public services.

- **The fragmentation severely limits the country's development opportunities**, does not allow for optimal use of resources, does not contribute to improving the quality of life of the

Figure 2. Spatial distribution of the micro-municipalities (up to 500 inhabitants) on the Slovak territory
Source: Klimovský 2014: 108.



Possible solutions:

- **A possible (and recommended) direction of change is to combine local government units into larger organisms, which should lead to an increase in their resources and capacities, their potential for the implementation of public tasks over an appropriate geographical area as well as their ability to attract competent and skilled workforce.**
- However, there would be **significant challenges** to the implementation of this recommended solution. They mainly relate to **social issues** (which include a strong influence of elements of social identity determined by the place of residence) and, on the other hand, **political constraints**.
- Therefore, the Peers proposed **to consider alternative scenarios** of local government reforms - their main guiding principles should be: **an effective decentralisation of public authority** and the **principle of**

Possible solutions:

- **Further decentralisation**: authority over public tasks and **autonomy** in the manner of their implementation should be delegated to the maximum possible extent to self-government bodies acting on their own territory on behalf of the residents of that territory.

- At the same time, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, **the scope of tasks should be** adapted to the capabilities **of municipal administration**.

Recommendations:

- The Peers proposed **to reorganize the structure of local government** in such a way that, while preserving the cultural and historical heritage of the basic level units (*obec*), would allow for **the creation of democratically appointed governance structures at the supra-municipal level**.

- In many countries, such structures exist in the form of a second tier of local government - such as Polish *poviats*, UK Counties, French Départements, Italian and Spanish Provinces, or German Landkreise.

- Such **new units would operate over a larger area**,

Recommendations:

- **Second-level units** (between municipalities and regions) **would have an additional, broader set of competences that they would exercise in relation to the entire territory they cover.** This could include competences brought up from the lower tier, and competences brought down from the regional tier.

- Such **a two-tier division of competences** and the resulting allocation of responsibility for the implementation of public services would allow for the transparency of the local government administration system, **contributing to more efficient delivery of public services and unlocking the hitherto unused development potentials**.

Recommendations:

- One of the reasons for the impasse in local government reform efforts is **the lack of dialogue between the interested parties**. The dialogue contributes to mutual trust, better understanding of others' interest, and discussion about common goals.

- **The government should organise a kind of 'round table' to discuss proposals for the reforms.**

Recommendations:

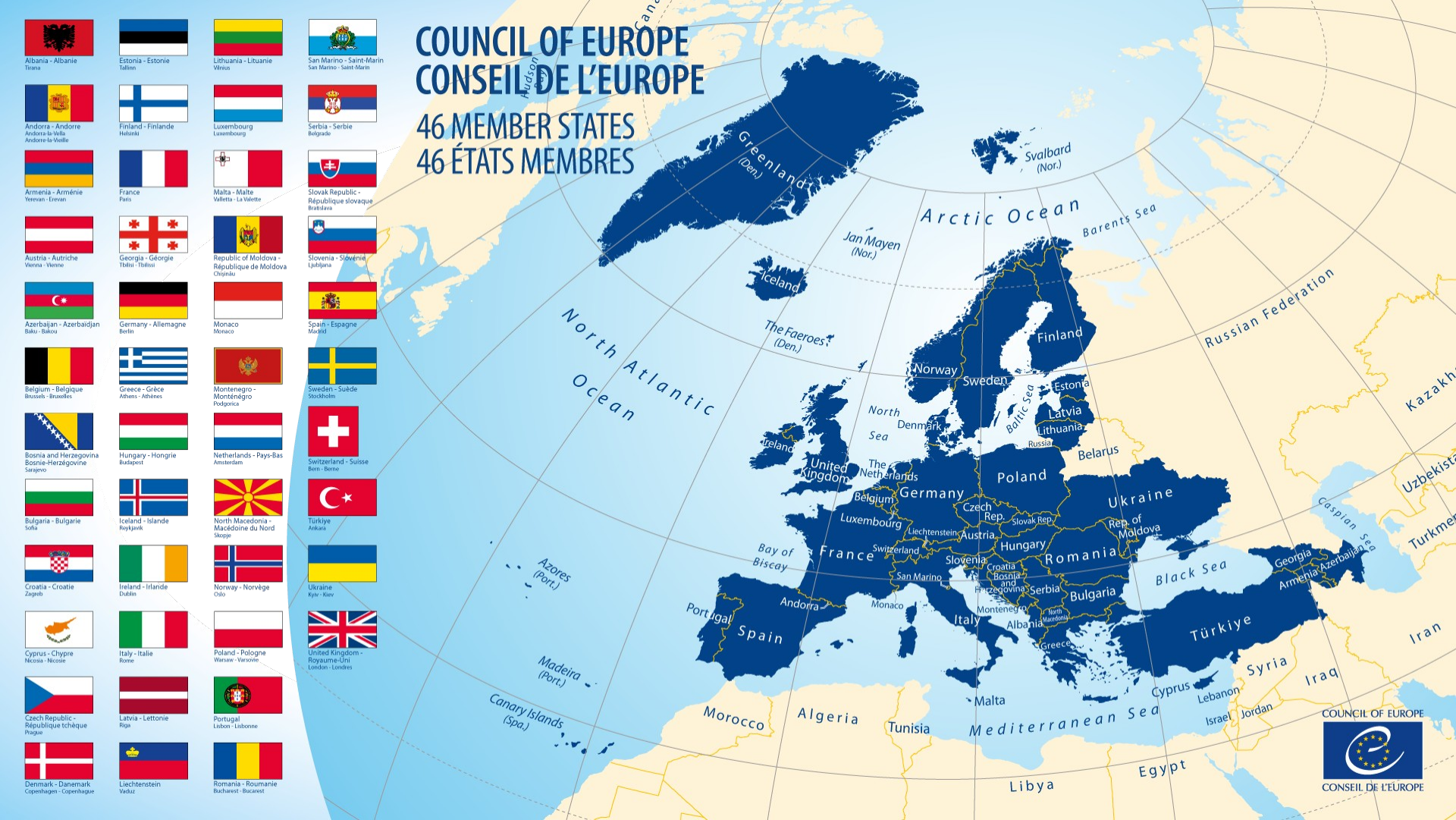
- Improving the performance of public services does not have to be associated with administrative changes only. **It is worth putting more emphasis on the digitisation of management processes and the introduction of e-government services.**

- Financing of public services should be based on a reliable cost-benefits analysis. It is worth considering **introduction of a system for monitoring the implementation of public services**, taking into account, inter alia, analysis of the conditions and local costs of service provision by municipalities. The consequence of introducing such a system should be a review of the principles of financing local government units.

Recommendations:

- There is **a need for greater participation of citizens in the formulation of public policies**. Firstly, in view of the identified problems in the enforcement of effective supervision over the activities of local governments, it is necessary for citizens to increase their interest in public affairs. Secondly, the organisational shortcomings and limited human resources of the local administration could, to some extent, be reduced or partially overcome through greater involvement of citizens in public activities.

- The findings of the Peer Review clearly indicate that **one of the sources of problems faced by local government administration are the limited competences of local government staff**.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

46 MEMBER STATES
46 ÉTATS MEMBRES