

Citizens' Participations in the Republic Of Macedonia

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Abstract: Each central government strives to create a responsible, transparent and effective local government, which will offer quality services to citizens, while the law defines citizen participation at different levels in the decision making process. In our country inactivity of the citizens at the local level is still present. Citizens are still restrained when it comes to lack or poor quality of public services. We still perceive the holders of state functions as powerful people hard-to-communicate with. On the other hand, public institutions do not involve citizens in policy-making processes, and some state officials even see themselves as owners of the public functions they hold. One would say, despite the legal framework that gives the main directions of citizen participation, there is still a need for developing and organizing capacity for self-organization in the communities in order to encourage and implement initiatives related to the well being of the majority of the citizens.

Keywords: Units of local self-government, Municipality, the City of Skopje, Decision-making process.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the essential provisions of democracy is a partnership between citizens and elected officials to whom they have given their trust. A democratic society is a society in which the trust is based on responsibility, honesty and transparency in the work of those voted by the citizens in free elections, as well as enabling participation of citizens in decision making processes.

A true partnership between the people and their elected representatives depends primarily on whether citizens have access to information that affect their lives, and whether they have the opportunity to participate and influence the creation of the way the state will be managed. On the other hand, the authorities should be informed about the way citizens come to certain public services, and whether and how satisfied the citizens are from the same services provided by the local government.

II. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Local government in the Republic of Macedonia in the period from the Second World War until today has experienced major changes, moving from a high level of centralization to a high level of decentralization. Modern Local Government of the Republic of Macedonia is based on the fundamental premise of a democratic local self-government. Constitution of 1991 includes the local self-government in the fundamental values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Macedonia. Citizens are guaranteed the right to local self-government, which confirms the democratic character of the local self-government in our country. In the fifth part of the Constitution entitled "Local Government" it is generally defined its constitutional position in the political system of the Republic of Macedonia (Constitution, Articles 114-117). Constitution establishes single tiered local government, whose units are municipalities, with an exemption that is reflected in the position of the City of Skopje as a separate unit of the local government. The municipality is a local government unit, as a community of people in a certain area, defined by law, which through their bodies and administration and organized public services, allows performing responsibilities prescribed by law. The municipality has its own area and name, which are also defined by law, while the symbols of the municipality, the coat of arms and the flag are regulated by its Statute (Article 9 of the Law on Local Self-Government 2002). Statute is the basic legal act of the municipalities and

the City of Skopje as a separate unit of the local government. The statutes regulate: the organization and work of the municipality; the composition, the selection and operation of the bodies of the Council; the way of informing the citizens; the procedure for filing complaints and suggestions; the implementation of surveys and organizing debates, etc. The bodies of the municipality, according to the Law on Local Self-Government: The Mayor and the Council (Article 31 of the Law on Local Self-Government). The Council is a representative body of citizens composed of 9 to 33 members depending on the number of inhabitants in the municipality. Council members are elected at general, direct and free elections by secret ballot. They represent the citizens, decide on their own beliefs and can not be recalled (free mandate). The Council is in charge of all important issues for the development of the municipality: the adoption of the statute, the budget, the financial statement and other regulations: for determining the amount of its own funds in the statutory framework; the establishment of public services and the supervision of their work, as well as supervision of their annual accounts; choosing the head of the local unit of the Ministry of Interior.

The Council establishes permanent and temporary committees of its composition, working in sessions. Decisions are made by a relative majority, unless otherwise provided by law or by statute. As a rule, the voting is public. The mandate of the Council members and the mayor last for four years.

III. DECISION MAKING IN LOCAL SELF – GOVERNMENT UNITS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

In the Republic of Macedonia there is a multiparty system with democratic elections which does not mean direct adoption of policies that will be without conflict, easier decision making processes and better functioning of governments. Multiparty elections, certainly brings more parties in decision-making processes in local municipal assemblies. In terms of state the local government is an important segment. The development of local government has significant advantages in terms of reducing the monopoly of the state in the management of social affairs. Furthermore, the local government provides large presence of people in the process of policy making at the local level, and thus the central authorities have time to deal with their development strategies. Everyone asks themselves the question when making decisions, even from everyday life, which is that so-called "correct" decision in a given situation? It is a problem of ethics. Rarely there is a single answer to this question. Perfect answers can be formulated only in the world of dreams. Sociologist Max Weber makes distinction between "ethics of ultimate goals" and "ethics of responsibility" (HH, Gerth, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, New York, 1946, p. 228-235). In the ethics of ultimate goals, motives determine what is right. A person must act in a right way regardless of the consequences. The ethics of responsibility, on the other hand, decides on the correct behavior even after the consequences of any procedure are considered. However, no individual can do anything more than what Aristotle recommended long ago: ethical decision is finding the middle ground between the extremes. Consider the consequences and select a middle way. It is wrong to individually analyze decision making processes at a local level. In other words it is wrong to find a solution for making decisions at a local level, which would be fine for one municipality only. The same example goes for a person, i.e. if one solution is fine for some people it does not mean that it will be fine for others. Therefore it is necessary to generalize certain procedure. But these two main points, however, cannot be fully separated, because the individual decision-making in a department of a local government is shaped by the mission, responsibilities, resources and organizational environment in that service.

People make decisions in any situation that involves choices. Among a set of actions seen as possible at a given point of time, one is selected and implemented, based on the reasoning that it is the best according to certain criteria. It should be borne in mind that the decision makers do not have perfect knowledge or complete information in all categories. However, they have views, which they treat as knowledge and guessing that compensate the missing information, consciously or unconsciously. This is one reason why so many different stories can be sincerely narrated by the witnesses of same events. Making decisions is a steady round in which we first identify the problem, make a plan, take action, evaluate or monitor the situation. We repeat this procedure until a final decision is made. Psychological researches suggest that observations sometimes differ from the reality of predictable ways and that they can be manipulated. For example, people usually believe in luck more than it is objectively justified.

In connection with a problem or need, the individual chooses a course of action regardless of the choices of others. For example, decisions relating to buying clothes or career decisions are made by the individual. However, making decisions of local government usually requires more individuals, groups and so on. The common choice is the one whose outcome depends on others to agree with it. This joint process is not always formal, or fully covered by rules and regulations, but it

often critically depends on individuals to recognize the necessity of a joint decision and the development of ways a choice can be made which suits the needs of those whose cooperation is essential. In every situation the decision-maker adopts his/her preferences, knowledge, skills, and the power that comes from his/her position, special skills, and access to resources. He or she creates their views on issues that they need to handle, as well as the available options, the consequences of the elections, the likelihood of uncertain events, and mainstream decision-making rules. It should be noted that, when it comes to local government, the environment continues to exist and function, regardless of whether the decision-maker makes a choice or not. And when everything else is equal (position in the department, the time, the issue about the debate, etc.), it can be expected that decisions may vary according to the availability of resources such as time, skills, information, which all together are necessary to form judgments about the problems entailed. When making decisions in the local government we need to put aside personal interests and goals, to get the necessary information, and to review the facts and alternatives. In one word we need to provide equal treatment of all possible alternatives, efficiency, effectiveness and transparency.

IV. TECHNIQUES AND METHODS FOR CIVIL PARTICIPATION

Techniques and methods used in civil participation are funds to which the government and citizens have access in order to obtain information, to communicate and to be included (m. Pamphili, Public Participation in Local Sustainable Development, UNDP Skopje, 2006, p.8). As techniques we could highlight the following: Techniques that use existing information, opinion poll, a key informant, nominal group process, Delphi technique, a forum of the local community, Brainstorming, focus group, exhibitions, cooperation with media, information center for citizens, internet, mailbox for proposals from citizens, printed materials, public meetings, public discussion and public debates, etc.

In one word, citizen participation is a process in which the needs, values and demands of citizens are involved in decision making processes in the local administration. Identifiable segments of citizen participation are: constant exchange and flow of information between the citizens and the local government, local government open for cooperation with citizens, efficient government mechanisms for gathering information from its citizens, effective ways of informing citizens about government activities, plans and programs, informed citizens who understand and value the cooperation in the management process as full and equal partners. (M. Topuzovska, E. Serafimovska, capacity Management capacity and human resources in the local government units: Methods and techniques for promoting civil participation, ISPPi, Skopje, 2008, p. 93). Ways in which citizens could help local authorities are the following: they can gather information on various topics or different segments of society, they can help in transferring public opinion, they can provide free technical assistance where required, they can help local governments to get support and trust, they can educate each other, in order to achieve better information.

The participation process goes through four phases: Initiation - stage which raises the need to involve citizens; preparation - a period in which one should think about the process, initial contacts are realized and approval for access is achieved; implementation of participatory activities - a phase in which participatory methods in working with the main parties in the community are used, representing particular interests; and extension - what happens at this stage largely depends on the level of participation, there may be a throwback to the consultation or to another level, creating partner organizations.

The motives for participation of citizens in making decisions can be different, but the most important would be the following: decisions adopted by the local authorities affect the lives of citizens, citizens can offer solutions that would suit them, and thus the trust in institutions would increase, citizens feel respected when they have the opportunity to express themselves, citizens feel less alienated if they participate, even at low levels, in decision making processes of the local authorities.

V. CONCLUSION

Briefly, decentralization implies an appropriate transfer of competencies in the areas of public services from central government to the local authorities. So, citizens and the local authorities should be prepared for such transformation. By decentralizing, public institutions will gain relevant local level of making decisions, in which not only in a written form (with the changes to the Constitution), but practically, it is necessary to incorporate the participation of citizens as users of public services as well as the participation of members of the communities as beneficiaries in the managing of the public institutions. The local participatory democracy will be represented in this way. Civil participation as a process also does

not only involve communicating and connecting citizens with local representatives of the government, but this process involves continuous development, constant investment and introduction of new methods and ways of communicating with each other in order the skills and abilities to be developed. It should be understood that democracy involves rights and responsibilities, learning and development, maximum awareness and participation of citizens in making public policy. In the past citizens didn't have a reputation as active participants in the decision-making processes at the local level. Sufficient knowledge of the opportunities available for such participation does not lead to taking the view that there is a lack of organization and non initiative, which turns them into unhappy and passive observers of the situation. Inactivity of citizens is based on the attitude of some of the respondents that their every attempt would fail.

Despite the legal framework that provides guidelines for citizen participation, efforts made by the national and international projects for capacity building, as well as programs for sustainable development, there is still a need for organizing and developing the capacity for self-organization in the community in order to encourage and implement initiatives that relate to the good of the majority of citizens in the community.

Representatives of local governments in the Republic of Macedonia must be promoters of civic participation. Because citizen participation as a concept, and even more as practice for many people is still a new idea, government officials may be those who should initiate the process.

Mayors and their advisers, along with prominent individuals active in the community, and the media are perhaps the first to found citizen participation as one of the most important activities of daily living in the matrix of our country. After all it is not so important who will start the process, as it is important that the process must begin.

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