



In the framework of the project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the delegation of the Standing Conference of Serbian Towns and Municipalities (SCSTM) paid a visit to Brussels, from 27-31 May 2013. The main purpose of this study visit was to acquaint the Standing Conference with the manner of operation of key EU institutions relevant to regional and local government levels in Serbia, as well as to assess the possibilities and needs for opening a SCSTM office in Brussels.

In addition to representatives of the SCSTM Secretariat, the delegation included Mayors of the Municipalities of Zrenjanin, Vranje, Arandjelovac and Paracin, as well as Deputy Mayor of Novi Sad. During their visit, SCSTM representatives had talks in the Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the EU with K. Milenkovic, Deputy Head of Mission, and D. Stojovic, Counselor at the Mission. K. Milenkovic informed the guests of the Mission's current activities, focusing primarily on the commencement of the EU accession negotiations and the duties to be carried out in the forthcoming period. In the context of modern processes of EU decentralization and regionalization, there are significant possibilities for exchanging experiences to the effect of more actively including Serbian towns and regions in different project-related activities. In addition to immediate positive financial effects, a more active approach of towns and regions will bring about strengthening of economic and cultural ties, administration capacity building in local self-management units, as well as raising the level of general knowledge and the awareness of the importance of the integration processes.

The SCSTM delegation was particularly interested in the essential advantages that opening of an office in Brussels would have for Serbian towns. It was underlined that, in the conditions of a grave financial crisis in Serbia and limited budget perspectives of local self-governments, there was a limited financial framework for opening an office in Brussels. It was further emphasized that the SCSTM had a strong interest to be directly included in the work of groups for negotiating specific chapters of paramount interest on the local and regional levels, and that direct consultations in this area within the Government of RS are pending. This would give the negotiating process a highly important dimension of respecting the immediate needs of local government structures, in line with the best EU practice. There is also a need for better articulation of the direct interests of towns through parliamentary work, primarily through the legislative framework that defines the financial competences of towns and municipalities in Serbia.

During their visit to Brussels, the SCSTM delegation had meetings with the European Commission, EU Regions Committee, Council of European Municipalities and Regions, as well as the representatives of regions and towns with offices in Brussels (Baden Wurttemberg, Austrian Association of Municipalities in the EU, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, Association of Romanian Towns).