



STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND CITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA FOR THE PERIOD 2015-2019.



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ASSOCIATION
OF MUNICIPALITIES AND CITIES
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

Bijeljina, 2015.

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I – INTRODUCTION

The current Strategic Plan of the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Republic of Srpska (SOGRS), covering the period from 2012 to 2015, was adopted at the XI General Assembly of the Association held on February 28th, 2013 in Bijeljina. Defined in accordance with recognized interests and expectations of membership at that time, the Strategic Plan has laid the basis for the functioning of the Association in a complex and dynamic social and political context in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has just passed its first steps on the path of integration into the European Union, on the way to decentralization and the creation of favorable environment for the development of local self-government.

The results achieved in the period of implementation of the current Strategic Plan have contributed to a more visible impact on the overall SOGRS's operation, and changes in areas of importance for local self-government in the Republic of Srpska and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Association, with its active engagement, is increasingly becoming recognized by the higher levels of government, international actors and institutions as an essential factor in the reform processes and further improvement of local self-government in all its dimensions, as well as a link between local and higher levels of government. This is primarily the result of the support and participation of members - municipalities and cities in the work of the Association, which gives to the Association the power and legitimacy of action in representing the interests of local self-governments. Continuous interaction with members, higher levels of government, national and international institutions and donors, opens the possibility for the Association to identify and clearly articulate the needs of its members for various forms of support to strengthen the capacities of local self-government, in order to work efficiently and provide better services to citizens and businesses.

With growing importance and role of the Association in social and political events that influence local self-government, and especially the raised expectations of the membership, as well as with the higher levels of government and international partners, have made it necessary for SOGRS to develop new Strategic Plan for the period 2015.-2019. By defining priority areas and key objectives for the next five-year period, the Association will establish a basis for coordinated action in further development of local self-government, as a part of the overall effort to contribute to further democratization, establishment of institutions, general prosperity and improvement of the quality of life of citizens.

The work on developing the draft of the Strategic Document of the Association for the period 2015-2019 was realized within the framework of the Project "Strategic Framework for Future Development of the Associations of Local Self-Governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina", through which the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) supports the development of strategic plans of both associations of local self-governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina - the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Republic of Srpska and the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina,. The aim of this Project is to create a strategic framework for effective support, based on clearly defined priorities for the development of local self-government in Bosnia and Herzegovina – in the Republic of Srpska and in the Federation.

During the development of this document relevant elements of the social, economic and political realities were taken into account, in parallel with interests and expectations of membership, as well as the activities aimed at the development of local self-government that are already under way or have already been set out in the relevant documents of higher levels of government and the Association itself

I.1. PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT AND ADOPTION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Since the aim of the Strategic Plan (2015-2019) is to reflect the key priorities for the development of local self-government, and to provide a realistic framework for the functioning of the Association in it was necessary to base the development of the draft document on assessment of:

- the current level of development of local self-government and the identified trends, prospects and obstacles on the way to further development
- the existing legal framework for the functioning of local self-government in RS, and plans of the higher levels of government related to further improvement
- relevant national strategies, policies and legislative agendas of higher levels of government in the various areas of importance and their impact on local self-government
- the current and developmental needs of the SOGRS membership - municipalities and cities
- the expected impact of the process of Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union on local level, and, in particular,
- the institutional capacity and financial ability of the Association to respond to the increasing responsibilities and expectations in the upcoming period.

An important precondition for accurate assessment of the above mentioned aspects, and the subsequent implementation of the Strategic Plan, is full interaction with members - municipalities and cities as well as other stakeholders in the field of local self-government. Also, to appropriately define priority areas and activities it was necessary to conduct analysis of the situation and developmental goals in areas of importance and impact on local self government.

In this sense, ***the process of development of the draft Strategic Plan*** of the Association for the period 2015 - 2019 included:

- a desk-top analysis of the strategic and policy documents of higher levels of government related to the field of competence of local self-governments and of the relevant legal framework by the management and employees of the Association
- the analysis of the situation and problems on local level in different areas, based on the previous results of the work of the Association and its bodies (the Assembly, the Presidency and the relevant committees/boards)
- a survey among local government officials', to establish their expectations and requirements related to future activities of the Association, based on a detailed questionnaire submitted to all members, and the analysis of responses to the questionnaire
- three two-day workshops, devoted to defining Vision and Mission and guiding principles of the Association, the SWOT analysis, priority areas and key objectives within these areas, necessary human resource development of the Association in order to achieve these objectives, as well as further developmental goals of the Association and way for developing higher level of financial sustainability.. The First Workshop, where strategic framework and foundations for future operations of the Association were developed, was organized in a participatory manner, including active participation of member representatives; The Second Workshop was dedicated to the detailed elaboration of the elements of the Strategic Plan, primarily by leadership and experts of the Association, while during the Third Workshop the first draft of the Strategic Plan was presented to representatives of the Presidency of the Association, to the representatives of higher level authority and to the representatives of international donors active in the support to local self-governments. This provided additional guidance and suggestions for the improvement of the Strategic Document, as well as the guidance for the development of annual Action Plans that need to be developed on the basis of the Strategic Plan.

- regional consultative meetings with representatives of local authorities dedicated to the presentation of the Draft Strategic Plan and its additional improvements, according to the interests and needs of the membership base.
- In the course of the development of the Draft Strategic plan a document was prepared related to the impact of the EU-integration process on local governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as on the Association itself, in order to set a framework for all those elements of the Strategic within which impact of the EU integration can be expected

It is of importance to note that the whole process of development of the Draft Strategic Plan was going in parallel with the same process in the Association of Municipalities and Towns of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with some joint sessions and continuous mutual consultations. This co-operation has shown that both associations share similar views related to the processes of strengthening of local self-government systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and value mutual co-operation and coordination in reaching goals set by their respective strategic plans.

The process of adoption of the Strategic Plan of the Association for the period 2015-2019 includes:

- the review of individual program/thematic sections of the Draft Strategic Plan by relevant committees of the Association
- the review of the Draft Strategic Plan by the Presidency of the Association and endorsement of the Draft by the Presidency, to be submitted for final adoption to the General Assembly of the Association
- the review and adoption of the Draft Strategic Plan by the General Assembly, so that it becomes a binding document that defines the strategic direction and operating modes of the Association in the next five years, and provides the framework for SOGRS as an institution that gathers, represents, and supports cities and municipalities in the Republic of Srpska in achieving their common goal - to improve their functioning, and contribute to a higher quality of life for citizens in local communities. Upon adoption of the Strategic Plan, the Action Plan for 2015 will be submitted to the General Assembly for adoption, as well as the tentative action plans for the remaining four years of the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

I.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN, MONITORING AND REPORTING

At the beginning of each year a detailed annual Action Plan of the Association will be prepared, and submitted to the Presidency for approval. Adopted Action Plan will be implemented by the statutory bodies and/or by the Secretariat of the Association. At the end of each year, the Secretariat will assess and record the results of the implementation of the Action Plan for that year and prepare Report on implementation of the Action Plan. Report will be submitted to the Presidency and the General Assembly, and if needed, proposals for the amendments to the Strategic Plan. in order to adjust document based on current needs of members, new developments at higher levels of government, and overall political and social environment. Special attention will be paid to the development of new activities, projects and programs, based on the Strategic Plan, and their proper integration into the operation of the Association.

I.3. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CONTENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic Plan of the Association for the period 2015-2019 defines the priority objectives and ways of their achievement in the following key segments:

1) ***Programmatic/thematic areas, based on the main competences of local self-governments.***

Having in mind the situation and obstacles in the field of local self-government in the Republic of Srpska and in BiH, the Strategic Plan defines the priorities of the Association in wide range local self-government competences in order to achieve improvements throughout the local self-government sector. Section VI contains the main objectives within the "programming areas", i.e. the areas in which local authorities have, or should have, the highest authority. These goals are set in a way to indicate the course of action in order to:

- **Improve legal framework** that has impact on functioning of local authorities through activities focused on (a) changes in legislature adopted by the higher levels of government, and (b) municipal regulations in order to enable efficient implementation of responsibilities of local authorities.
- **Contribute to a higher quality performance of local authorities in executing the tasks within their responsibilities** - in the implementation of regulations, in provision of services to citizens and businesses, in the preparation and implementation of developmental projects, and in adapting to the new circumstances and requirements that will be placed before the local authorities in the context of the process of accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Union.
- **Contribute to improvement of basic operations of the local authorities, in accordance with the principles and practices of good governance and European standards** (openness and transparency, citizen participation in decision-making processes, developmental projects based on strategic and sector plans, responsible resource management, principles of gender equality in all policies and in the implementation of these policies, Code of Ethics, active fight against corruption, etc.).

The Program priorities defined in such way will be accomplished through: (1) regular operation of the Association, and (2) donor supported programs and projects. Special attention will be paid to coordination with other stakeholders, and especially with higher levels of government in the implementation of segments of existing national strategies that have impact on local authorities. In addition, specific attention will be paid to further develop cooperation and coordination with the donor community in BiH, in order to match donor support with the main goals of the Strategic Plan.

2) ***Further development of core functions of the Association, in order to meet the objectives set out within this Strategic Plan***

The strategic planning process has identified the following core functions of the Association:

- Representing the joint interests of the membership,
- Provision of services and support to members in developing their capacities
- Providing information exchange, communication and cooperation among local authorities and with other stakeholders
- Support to local authorities in international cooperation and in the process of accession of BiH to the European Union

The Strategic Plan in Section VII describes key objectives and main activities focused on the development of core functions of the Association, as the basis for the achievement of programming/thematic priorities in the field of local self-government.

3) ***Further development of the institutional capacities of the Association***

To ensure achievement of the ambitiously set goals in the period covered by this Strategic Plan it is necessary to further build the institutional capacities of the Association and its Secretariat. The Section VIII describes the basic steps for:

- Improving the legal and administrative framework for functioning of the working bodies of the Association and their professional capacities
- Improving the internal organization and management of the Secretariat
- Strengthening the Secretariat in terms of human resources and the improvement of human resource management
- Development of the expert base and knowledge base of the Association
- Further improvement of the system of responsible and transparent management of resources and financial management
- Improvement of technical and material requirements for the functioning of the Secretariat and of the Association as a whole

4) Financial stability and long-term sustainability of the Association

Having in mind the necessity to ensure appropriate financial, material and human resources for the realization of the main program and development objectives, the Section IX contains projections related to:

- Provision of the material/financial basis for the achievement of strategic objectives of the Association for the period 2015-2019
- Creating the conditions for a longer-term institutional and financial sustainability of the Association.

* * *

Within these defined areas, the Strategic Plan includes a review of the basic objectives, key activities that should contribute to achieving objectives, and indicators of success in achieving them. Preliminary determination of the dynamics of each objective will be defined by the annual Action Plans, in line with the overall circumstances and activities of other relevant actors in the field of local self-government.

II - ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND CITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska, with its seat in Bijeljina (hereinafter: the Association) was founded in 1998. The Association is an independent, non-party, national association of public interest to which towns and municipalities willingly join in order to achieve mutual cooperation, exchange experience and act together, having the aim to fulfill common interests determined by the Statute of the Association, laws and other acts. The Association represents the interests of its members before higher levels of authority and other bodies and organizations, both in Republic of Srpska and abroad.

Membership in the Association is voluntary and its members are all units of local self-government in Republic of Srpska. Pursuant to a Decision of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of Republic of Srpska, the Association is an association of public interest since its activities and work program exceed the interests of its members. The Association is dedicated to public interest in accordance with the law and pursuant to Articles 8 and 9 of the Association Statute.

Legal basis for the establishment of the Association is the Law on Local Self-Government of Republic of Srpska, which regulates the following issue – the units of local self-government have the right to join the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska in order to promote and protect their mutual interests. Also, the Association has the right to join international associations of local authorities and

cooperate with associations of local authorities in Federation of BiH and abroad, in accordance with the law. Amendments to the Law on local self-government from 2013 gave the Association the jurisdiction which initially it did not have. That is: *"In the process of making laws and other general acts, Republic government bodies are obliged to present all the drafts, bills and other general acts which regulate the position, rights and obligations of local self-government to the Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska and other bodies of local self-government units for consideration."*

The cooperation of the Association and higher levels of authority in Republic of Srpska reflects in cooperation with the Government of Republic of Srpska. The Association has signed a Memorandum on Cooperation with the Government of Republic of Srpska and its Ministries, National Assembly of RS and its boards, as well as with other Republic bodies, organizations and institutions. The Association has signed memorandums / agreements with Tax Administration Office of RS, Chamber of Commerce of RS, Fund for Environmental Protection of RS and Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Republic of Serbia. The Association has a close and continuous cooperation with the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of BiH. Lastly, the Association is a member of acknowledged international organizations, such as Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS).

The organizational structure of the Association consists of General Assembly, Presidency, President of the Association, Supervisory Board, Department Committees, Secretary General and Professional Service of the Association.

General Assembly is the highest body of the Association. It consists of the representatives of the Association members. General Assembly makes the most important decisions on the Association work.

Presidency is the executive body of the Association which coordinates work and performs tasks between two Assembly sessions. Presidency has 19 members elected by General Assembly. Presidency has its President and 3 Vice Presidents. Their mandate, as well as the Presidency mandate, lasts for 4 years. The Association has **President** and **three Vice Presidents of the General Assembly**. The Association President is also the President of Presidency and he is elected from General Assembly. President represents the Association in domestic and international affairs. **Supervisory Board**, as a body of General Assembly, has been founded in order to control the work of Association and its financial operations. Supervisory Board has 3 members: President and 2 members, having the mandate of 2 years. **Association Committees** are permanent forms of the Association, whose purpose is to discuss certain issues from social life which are of interest to Association members. Committees are formed by the Assembly and the number of its members and structure is determined by Presidency. Currently, Association has 9 committees: Committee for Local self-government and Human Resources, Committee for Finance and Economic Affairs, Committee for International Cooperation and European Integration, Committee for Constitutional and Legislative issues, Committee for Urbanism, Public Utility activities and Environmental Protection, Committee for Energy Efficiency, Committee for Social policy, Committee for Economic Development and Committee for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

Secretary General is appointed by Assembly for the first mandate which lasts for 5 years. The next one lasts for 4 years. Operational responsibilities of Secretary General include direct implementation of Association decisions, reporting to Presidency and Assembly on Association work, representing the Association as a legal entity and managing work of Secretariat, that is, Professional service of Association. **Professional Service or Association Secretariat** is obliged to perform expert, technical and other tasks for the needs of the Association. Organization and work of Professional Service is regulated by a special act, which is passed by Secretary General with the approval of Presidency.

The Association work is financed from membership fees and funds based on the status of associations of public interest (the Association receives funds from the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government) and donor funds obtained through projects in which the Association participates or those which it implements. Apart from the above mentioned, the Association source of funding can also be various services it could perform (such as: income from sold magazines and publications, consulting services, organizing training and other professional services) In recent years, the Association has made a significant improvement in its work, both in terms of organization and staff and in terms of promoting its role and image in public. The Association bought business premises and opened an office in Banja Luka. Apart from that, a new office was opened in Trebinje. The Association capacities have been strengthened by offering new services for its members (legal and financial consulting). Great progress has been made by establishing the European Integration Unit and Unit for Training. Cooperation with members has been improved and there have been improvements in the area of representation and advocacy, which are achieved through cooperation with National Assembly of RS and RS Government. All the above mentioned things have led to the improved image of the Association in public, especially because of accepting the Association as an unavoidable factor and partner of higher level authorities when it comes to representing its members. The Association is committed to further improvement of its work since its members expect to have a strong, professional and reliable Association, which will lead them in fulfilling their mutual interests. On the other hand, higher levels of authority expect the Association to be reliable and equal partner and professional representative of public opinions and interests of local self-government units.

III - SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND CITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

Strenghts	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status of the Association as an association of public interest • Acceptance of the Association by its members (all municipalities in Republic of Srpska are members of the Association) • Established relationship with the members • Continuous work of the main bodies of the Association (regularly held assemblies of Presidency) • Partnership of the Association with RS Government and cooperation with National Assembly of RS • Association as an acknowledged instrument for starting initiatives to change regulations and participate in their making • Association significant role in the process of decentralisation / transfer jurisdiction from republic to local level and defining the assets of local self-government units • Acknowledged by donor as a partner in providing support to local self-government development • Membership in international associations and partnership with similar associations in the region and Europe • Motivated and professional staff • Cooperation with Association of Local Authorities of Federation BiH and associations of local governments in the region (bilateral and through NALAS) • Establishment and functioning of legal and financial consulting as a new service, which is well accepted and well evaluated by the members • Established Training Unit within the Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstable and insufficient sources of funding • Unsatisfactory human resources and financial and technical capacities to meet numerous needs of members in the field of advocacy and capacity building • Lack of training in the field of advocacy and representing • Insufficient involvement and activity of relevant committees of the Association • Insufficient operational activity and network of experts • Inability to implement training for the employees of local self-government units (exclusive jurisdiction of the Ministry for Public Administration and Local Self-Government) • Unsatisfactory level of communication / exchange of information at all levels (Association - municipalities - central bodies of authority) • Insufficient communication and cooperation with certain ministries • Insufficient visibility of the Association towards members • Certain acts / internal procedures of the Association should be improved, completed and updated
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of Association in implementation of functional and fiscal decentralisation • Predicted active and significant role of the Association in the implementation of adopted strategic documents - Strategy of development of local self-government, Strategy for training of the employees in units of local self- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfavourable financial situation in units of local self-government • Uneven development of units of local self-government • Frequent changes of authorities at all levels • Ignoring the initiatives, suggestions and proposals of the Association by individual

<p>government and other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing professional support to units of local self-government in adapting the acts and capacities to the needs of efficient realisation of adopted strategies and expected new legal solutions (environment protection, energy efficiency, etc.) • The role of Association in the EU integration process • Increased interest of donors / international organizations to create and carry out projects related to local self-government in partnership with the Association • Creating a new training strategy for employees in units of local self-government • Distinct interest of donors to support the strengthening of the Association and its members • Active cooperation with civil society organizations in the promotion of citizen participation in decision-making processes and development • Active cooperation and memoranda with specialized public institutions and organizations in the implementation of policies and the development and provision of services to units of local self-governments • The increasing needs for standardization and harmonization of the application of information and communication technologies in the work of local self-governments units 	<p>ministries, the Government and other institutions of higher levels of authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency of the institutions at higher levels of authority in the implementation of what has been agreed - the issues that have been advocated are not carried out in practice due to politicization (policy before arguments) • Continuing the practice of transferring jurisdiction to units of local self-government without the appropriate transfer of resources (functional decentralization without fiscal decentralization) • Insufficient activity of members in work • Inadequate coordination of donor assistance to local self-government in Republic of Srpska and BiH
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IV -VISION AND MISSION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND CITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

VISION

The Vision of the SOGRS is the professional and efficient local self-government, responsive to the needs of local community, in accordance with European values.

MISSION

The Mission of the SOGRS, as a legitimate representative of local governments, is to advocate their interests and provide services to them, as well as to be partner to the higher levels of government, with an aim to develop and upgrade the local self – government, through joint action of the membership, and following the European values.

V – PRINCIPLES OF THE ASSOCIATION

As a basis for the development of its Strategic Plan for the period 2015-2019, and as the key guidelines for the process of implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Association acknowledges and adopts the following principles:

EQUALITY AND SOLIDARITY OF MEMBERS

The principles of equality and solidarity derive from the very nature of the Association as an association of cities and municipalities: all members have equal rights and equal degree of influence on the work of the Association, regardless of size or economic strength.

In accordance with the principle of solidarity, larger and more developed cities and municipalities should assist and support those less developed with their actions through Association - as in the case of concrete joint participation in the negotiations relating to the financing of local self-government units, and also in terms of knowledge transfer and practical experiences. Finally, the principle of solidarity is reflected in the willingness of members of the Association to help each other in times of crisis and emergency situations –by delivering humanitarian aid, sending experts, sending equipment and machinery, etc.

PRINCIPLE OF SUSTAINABLE DECENTRALIZATION

Local self-government is the level of government closest to the citizens and in a best position to recognize and respond to their needs and interests. Therefore, the principle of subsidiarity is embedded in the very foundations of European democracy, i.e. the principle that public affairs should be performed, first of all, by the level of government closest to citizens, except where the nature of those activities or resources demand performance by higher levels of government. At the same time, the transfer of competencies to the local level cannot and will not give the full effect without a corresponding transfer of financial resources to perform those functions. This is the basis of sustainable decentralization, identified under the European Charter on Local Self-Government, the political document of the utmost importance for local democracy in all member states of the Council of Europe. The purpose of decentralization is that the decision-making process and control over the implementation of decisions are made available to a wider circle of social subjects, as well as to make institutions of government open and closer to citizens and to all service users.

Decentralization means adequate division of responsibilities between different levels of government in the planning and implementation of public affairs. The essential component of decentralization must be financial (fiscal) decentralization because the local authorities cannot perform their duties independently without access to the necessary financial resources and without the capacity to independently make financial decisions. Without strengthening financial, material, technical, human resources capacities, and resources of local authorities it is not possible to achieve the required level of financial and managerial autonomy in order to truly implement and sustain decentralization.

PRINCIPLE OF GOOD MANAGEMENT

Local self-government exists for the citizens and should be understood primarily as a service to the citizens and not as an authority over them. The key principles of good governance that should be followed by all public office holders - the decision-makers and officials in local self-government units, are derived from this setting. These are primarily:

- compliance with laws and high ethical standards,
- accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness of work,
- responsible financial management,
- openness and transparency,
- respect for human and minority rights,
- strengthening the competence and capacities of local authorities to perform activities within their jurisdiction, and
- sustainability and long-term stability.

DEPOLITIZATION AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The Association will be effective and successful in its work only if all its members, regardless of the political affiliation of their management structures find in it their interest and recognize the benefits of joint action. Therefore, it is of key importance to seek and define common interests in the work of the Association, and to reduce influence of political differences to a minimum. The basis for this lies in the fact that local authorities are primarily responsible for the improvement of the living conditions of citizens, and when it comes to communal, social, economic, environmental, and other issues there is much more room for joint action than for political disputes. In this, actually, lies the power and influence of the Association.

The Association in its action should - as much as possible - influence that relationship between the higher and lower levels of government are without political influence of the current ruling majority, in order to avoid favoring some at the expense of other local self-governments. This principle is the requirement for equal treatment of all cities and municipalities by higher levels of government, which is especially important when it comes to financing competences of local self-governments or the implementation of projects and programs that are of interest to them. Likewise, the political affiliation of the leadership of some units of local self-governments should not be an obstacle to the achievement of inter-municipal cooperation in the fields in which cities and municipalities need and can find common interests.

The principle of depoliticization means elimination of political parties' influence on the management of local public affairs, and, thus, the maximum professionalization. The work of elected officials and other employees in local self-governments and public utilities should be valued according to their abilities and merits, and not according to personal political orientation, and they, as professionals, should be protected from political interference.

MODERNIZATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

One of the important principles in the future operation of the Association relates to encouraging the willingness of local leadership and staff for changes and innovations in order to modernize their operations and reach the highest standards in performing their competences and providing services to citizens and businesses. The aim is - to achieve the optimum relationship between the quality of performed tasks and services, and costs associated with them. Modernization will serve to simplify procedures and their transparency, as well as to the greater availability of local self-government services to citizens and businesses. In an effort to improve their work through the implementation of new models, methods and management systems by the introduction of e-governance, local self-governments can and should be open to transfer of knowledge and experiences from best practices of other cities and municipalities, from the country, region and other European countries.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Association will advocate for active involvement of citizens in the work of local self-government, and cooperation of local self-government with key community stakeholders, particularly with associations of citizens and businesses. Strengthening the position and participation of citizens in defining policies and public affairs at the local level creates the conditions for greater citizen interest and willingness to cooperate, which creates a favorable climate for adoption and implementation of strategic and other important decisions in the community. Such decisions will be based on a broad base of technical and other skills, and will have large citizen support; therefore, more likely will be achieved. Local authorities, as closest to citizens, must develop and nurture participative political culture and mechanisms that promote citizen participation and promote awareness of the need for civic activism in local self-government's activities.

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

The Association strongly supports cooperation and coordinated action of all levels of government in defining strategies, policies, and legal frameworks, which has impact or is of interest to local self-governments. Namely, the complexity of modern society necessitates the existence of constant interaction and dialogue of different levels of government, in order to ensure coherence in the design and implementation of public policy. The Association believes that significantly greater participation of cities and municipalities is necessary in the definition and adoption of public policies and regulations that affect them and that they should apply, especially in the process of adjustment to EU standards.

Also, the Association strongly supports and promotes mutual cooperation of cities and municipalities. The obstacles that local self governments face require that local authorities join their resources for better and cheaper services to citizens and businesses. Therefore the Association will advocate for development of different financial and non-financial incentives from higher levels of government aiding in the development of inter-municipal cooperation.

GENDER EQUALITY AND PREVENTION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Respecting principles of gender equality by public office holders in the units of local self-government is of great importance having in mind that this levels of government deals with the practical challenges

that citizens face in their everyday lives. The Association emphasizes the importance of respect and implementation of the European Charter on Gender Equality on local level, adopted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). Activities and public policies of local self-government and the limited resources at their disposal should be planned and implemented so as to take into account the different needs of certain groups of the population, while providing the same level of access and quality for all. It is also necessary that in the provision of public services and protection of the citizens' rights there is an understanding and taking into account of different starting positions in the society for women and men; and both of them should be allowed equal participation in political decision-making at the local level. The Association is committed to support suppression of any other individual, institutional, or systemic discrimination at the local level. The Association supports the prevention and combating discrimination on religious and ethnic basis, discrimination against people with disabilities, the elderly and children, or any other form of discrimination of citizens or special communities and groups.

In pursuit of its own plans and policies, the Association shall, in every aspect of its operations, pay special attention to gender issues in an effort to raise awareness of its membership on the necessity that the principles of gender equality in the daily life of local communities contribute to the essential equality of all citizens.

VI - PROGRAM (THEMATIC) AREAS AND STRATEGIC AIMS

In the following five-year period from 2015 - 2019, the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall try to fulfill strategic aims which are grouped in seven program areas, established in this Strategic plan. Program areas (PA) and strategic aims are defined on the basis of the needs of local self-government and they have been determined in the preparation of Strategic plan and other documents of the Association. The program areas and strategic aims established here shall be amended during the lasting period of this Strategic plan by newly-established needs of the local self-government, especially by those that arise from the need of further adjustment to the process of Bosnia and Herzegovina integration to the EU.

VI.1. SYSTEM ISSUES, LOCAL BODIES AND GOVERNMENT

The Association priority shall be **to improve legal framework for the work and functioning of local self-government**. This will be realized through advocating and direct participation of the Association representatives in the process of making system legal regulations. This is primarily related to the promotion of the existing laws on local self-government or passing new high-quality laws. Also, it is related to the status of officials of local self-government units (LSGU), international cooperation and other system laws which will be suitable for the needs of all local self-government units and which will take into consideration social and political changes which will take place in the meantime, as well as any changes related to obligations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of Srpska in the process of EU integration.

Through dialogues and negotiations with higher levels of authority, the Association shall represent the interests of local self-government units in **defining further decentralization of jurisdiction**. The Association shall especially represent those that would fulfill or make the existing jurisdiction / business of local self-government more efficient, if organized at a local level, and not the entity one; such as: certain jurisdiction of Tax Administration Office (collecting income from tax on real estate at a local

level), property and legal affairs and affairs related to cadastre, etc. In order for all the local self-government units to perform their own tasks and assigned tasks efficiently, it is necessary to establish a more rational and efficient system of local self-government organization. In that manner, the Association shall **advocate, promote and support a multi-type local self-government**. In particular, this means passing regulations that will represent legal ground for the organization and legal differentiation of local self-government units, having the appropriate and different scope of jurisdiction and possibilities of functional connection to local self-government units, which would be a supporting factor for their development at the same time.

Since local communities are one of the ways of citizens' direct participation in decision-making processes at a local level, the Association shall pay special attention to further **improvement of local communities' role and their functioning**, as well. By doing so, the participation of citizens in authorities at a local level will be increased. In that manner, the Association shall support passing and establishing the legal ground, which will provide better efficiency of local communities work and their influence to local parliaments.

The Association shall strive to give its contribution to the **development of a modern and efficient public administration and reforms in the areas of local self-government organization and optimization**. The local self-government will be fully capable to adopt the values promoted by European Charter of Local Self-Government and take over the obligations and tasks set to it in the EU integration process. Having this aim, the Association shall represent, promote and support general regulatory reforms, improvement of the work quality of local self-government and the application of clear, efficient and more economical procedures for offering service to citizens. This aim will get the local self-government closer to citizens, by support given to establishing and promoting electronic management and services, and organizing centers and offices for services to citizens, placing the offices geographically closer to citizens and their interests.

In order to improve and modernize local government, the Association shall support **implementation and development of the function of human resources management in local governments**. The Association shall actively represent, support and promote the implementation, development and improvement of a new legal framework which will organize labor and material position of the employees in local self-government. The Association shall continuously work to increase the network and exchange knowledge and experience, build capacities of local government and its officials for the development of function of human resources management.

Also, in the period to come, the Association shall continue to support and actively participate in **further development and maintenance of system for professional training and building capacity of the chosen representatives and officials of local self-government units**, in accordance with the realization of Strategy for employee education in local self-government units and the needs and requests of local self-government units. In that manner, the Association shall develop and adjust its organization and expert capacities to the needs in order to perform this function more efficiently.

Finally, in all working aspects and functioning of local government, a very significant issue is the issue of fight against corruption. The Association shall join and **encourage all forms of anti-corruption actions of local self-government units**, starting from setting a legal framework to introducing an anti-corruptive practice in all aspects of local government functioning, then providing professional assistance to municipalities, promoting good examples from practice, etc. In that sense, the Association shall develop and offer to the members an Ethical code of conduct of local self-government representatives and it shall offer professional assistance to the members and promote good examples from practice. The Association shall **support and promote the prevention of all forms of**

discrimination and in that sense it shall participate in activities of all institutions, organizations and local self-government units which deal with legal framework by introducing such activity into practice.

Basic program aims:

- Improving the legal framework for the work and functioning of local self-government;
- Further decentralization of jurisdiction and the introduction of multi-type local self-government;
- Improving the position and functioning of local communities;
- Development of a modern and efficient local administration and reform of the organization and optimization of local government;
- The introduction and development of the function of human resources management in local governments;
- Further development and maintenance of the system for professional training and capacity building of elected representatives and officials of local self-government units;
- Improving the relevant legal framework and anti-corruption practice in all aspects of functioning of local self-government;
- Support and promotion of prevention of all forms of discrimination.

VI.2. FINANCES AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT ASSETS

Frequent changes and instability of certain municipal income and inadequate funds distribution system between higher and lower levels of authority demand that the system of financing of local self-government units is clearly defined. Therefore, the Association shall advocate for **fiscal decentralization and clear legal regulation of financing of local self-government** (passing the laws on financing of local self-government units). Financial and material resources need to be provided to local self-government units which they will independently manage and use in proportion to the activities they perform. Local self-government units currently have very modest income and in the total income the following dominates – mutual income and income which is under control of higher levels of authority. Local authority bodies should actively participate in decision-making on mutual income and their distribution together with higher levels of authority. This means significant decrease of financial independence of local authorities from higher levels in hierarchy, increase in financial dependence and provision of stable financing of local units in accordance with the current and perspective jurisdiction.

Increasing the participation of local communities in the distribution of public income assumes certain changes in the system of financing of local self-government. The first of such changes is the reform of system and criteria for the distribution of VAT (improving the Law on budget system with the aim of fiscal decentralization). It is necessary to do a review of criteria for the distribution of income achieved through VAT and establish new parameters for the distribution of income from indirect taxation, in accordance with the current state in local self-government in Republic of Srpska. The development of a new model of VAT distribution should be in accordance with the model of functional decentralization (it includes both vertical and horizontal distribution). By balancing the income, this new concept of distribution of assets should enable development of local communities, which are developing slowly by introducing solutions which will stimulate them to reach a higher level of development more quickly. The second change is to increase the amount of grants for undeveloped municipalities. Due to the difference of local communities (different fiscal capacities, caused by different levels of industrial activities and many other factors) and the lack of a harmonized system of distribution (vertical fiscal equalization), a sufficient amount of funds for performing basic functions of

all local communities is not currently provided nor there is insurance of their development to a certain level. Increasing the grants for undeveloped and extremely undeveloped municipalities will provide an allocation of funds, which will then enable financing of all the basic functions in jurisdiction of local communities and their development, as well.

Reforms in the area of financing of local self-government mean **strengthening jurisdiction of local authorities for collecting public income**. Current system of collection of income is organized in such a way that municipalities cannot take more responsibility and influence on increasing the efficiency. Municipalities and cities do not have the data on the amount of established obligations for all income. These are determined by other competent bodies, which makes the payment of original income significantly difficult. Therefore, the Association will advocate and support the improvement of the way in which local units' income is organized. This would provide higher income of local communities, mainly by increasing the level of their own income. Also, local authorities should independently and responsibly manage their own income and assets. Therefore, the Association shall advocate the necessary changes in amendments to the Law on taxation on real estate. It shall also advocate transferring jurisdiction of administering / collecting taxation on real estate to local self-government units. This would be the main source of income to municipalities and cities, as seen from the experience from the neighboring countries.

It is necessary to **improve capacities of local self-government units for responsible managing of public finances**. Capable and responsible financial management in local units should provide an efficient usage of funds and enable a successful and high-quality work of local units and their sustainable development, in accordance with jurisdictions and citizens' needs. The work of organization units, which perform financial tasks, depends on employees' knowledge and experience, and the efficiency in usage and the quality in assets management depend on to what extent is the top management familiar with this issue. The Association will support the improvement of functions of financial management and system of multi-year financial planning. Having in mind the significance and the amount of investments, the Association shall support legal regulation of obligation of making a public investment program by local self-government units, since this issue should be approached in an organized way. Multi-year financial planning is an assumption of development and the basis for the realization of priority major projects and consistent implementation of multi-year development strategy. Finally, the Association shall support strengthening development and affirmation of internal capacities for control, evaluation and audit. In order to develop the function of internal audit in local self-government units, it is necessary to adopt by-laws in the area of internal audit in order to provide assumptions for further development and strengthening the internal audit function in local self-government units.

Lastly, the Association shall support local self-government units in the processes of **registration, evaluation and management of public assets**. It is necessary to make any additional updated changes to the list of assets and perform the analysis of assets, usage and condition of public assets entirely. Local self-government units have to analyze the assets owned by them and implement procedures for their registration. Municipalities have to know which property is controlled by them and where it is; they have to know its size, legal status and value. Financial analysis needs to be done and a subject of analysis should be done for every type of assets, together with the assistance of real estate experts. Creating a precise database and a list of assets is a prerequisite for efficient system of assets management at a local level.

Basic program aims:

- Fiscal decentralization and clear legal regulation of local government financing;
- Increasing the participation of local self-government units in the distribution of public income;

- Strengthening the jurisdiction of local self-government units for the collection of public income;
- Improvement of local self-government units capacities for responsible management of public finances;
- Support to local self-government units in registration, evaluation and management of public assets.

VI.3. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT¹,

The current distribution of competences and fiscal and other instruments makes it difficult for municipalities to carry out the activities to attract investments and the activities of local economic development. That is why the Association is committed to **improving the legal framework for the local economic development**, especially through changes to legislation that would give municipalities greater authority in creating a favourable business climate for investors. This would create an adequate institutional and legal framework as a prerequisite for creating a favourable business environment.

In addition to increasing the responsibility of local authorities, it is necessary to continue to **build the capacities** of local self-governments and local development agencies **for management of local economic development**. One particularly important element, which affects the decision of investors to invest in a municipality, largely refers to the infrastructure equipment of industrial zones, construction land and the locations of their intended investment. Therefore, it is necessary to work on building the capacities of local self-governments and local development agencies for planning and development of economic infrastructure in order to create a favourable business environment. Also, local authorities need to be **supported in the implementation of the process and measures of strategic planning** in order to provide "coverage" of the priority areas of life harmonized by strategic and other development documents. This will provide the conditions for coordinated, responsible and effective performance of the jurisdiction of local self-government. The Association shall establish a service line (Help Desk) which shall have a role to promote, improve and deliver new information related to strategic planning and management. MiPRO methodology shall be promoted through this service line, as an instrument for proactive and responsible local development planning, promotion of successful Strategies for development of LSGUs from the Republic of Srpska, created according to MiPRO methodology, and the delivery of information regarding the available trainings related to local strategic planning. One of the important activities of the Association is the mapping of available financial resources that shall be allocated to fund various developmental priorities at the local level by the government institutions at all levels in the years to come. This shall be a continuous activity of the Association, and all information about the available funds shall be published on the website.

Finally, LSGUs should establish databases of economic and social indicators of local units (with an inventory of assets and local resources). In addition, the municipalities must have internal databases (data on issued construction permits, data on applications for the issuance of construction permits for the previous year..).For this purpose, capacities for the realization of this function are required, as well as the cooperation with all relevant institutions to exchange the necessary data. Municipalities and cities shall be provided with the support for building capacities and strengthening the knowledge and skills for the preparation and management of local development projects, especially in the context of the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). Finally, the process of decentralization and stimulation of local economic development is important for local authorities, so that all activities are performed well, efficiently and in the best interests of citizens. The Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall support the necessary modernization of the administration, the establishment

¹ Local economic development, rural development, strategic planning, management of natural resources, PPPs, etc.

of service centres (one-stop-shop) which enable the investors to acquire all the necessary permits and all other documents required in order to start their business as soon as possible.

Local authorities require **greater powers for the management of natural resources**. Local units, formally and practically, have no influence on the exploitation of most of the resources that are located on their territory, so they do not generate revenues related to these, and they cannot use them to solve development problems. On the contrary, very often they suffer direct losses caused by the exploitation of these resources. The development of a new model of exploitation and management of natural resources would ensure the key participation of local units in the usage of local resources. It is necessary to identify all the natural resources of the local communities which are given for exploitation and to ensure a key participation of local units in the exploitation and management of natural resources located on their territory.

The Association shall strive for the **development of policies and instruments for achieving balanced regional development**. Business entities development, small and medium enterprises, energy stability and quality, research and exploitation of natural resources, and encouraging the development of production activities should be supported, taking into account rural and regional balance. Existing categorization of LSUs according to the level of development may be of importance for the more balanced local and regional development of the Republic of Srpska (various benefits for programs of less developed areas..). For the planning and implementation of the program of balanced regional development, additional elements are necessary. These elements determine the level of development, rurality and affiliation to the regions. For this purpose, it is necessary to carry out additional research. Their results would be used for the differentiation of the economic policy. Finally, the creation of standardized databases on economic and social indicators of local units, with financial ranking and comparison (benchmarking) will create a basis for analyses that would support the development of policies and instruments for achieving balanced regional development.

The Association shall provide support for the **development of capacities of municipalities and cities for planning and implementing instruments of rural development**. The Association shall provide support to municipalities and cities in the preparation of sector strategies relevant to their local economic development, such as the strategy for rural development / agricultural development. Also, it is necessary to provide support to municipalities in capacity building for planning in this area. Particularly important is the special support to LSGUs in the further development of tourism as part of integrated rural development because this resource remains very unexploited due to a lack of awareness of the importance and opportunities of the tourism industry, weak human resources base and insufficient recognizability of products.

In order to enhance local development, it is necessary to **improve the cooperation and dialogue between the local self-government and the economy**. Existing entrepreneurs, as well as potential investors, should receive services and information in a manner that facilitates their business. That is why the Association shall support local authorities in achieving dialogue with the economy, in order to get the guidelines about what should be developed and how to adapt the activities of local authorities to the needs of the local economy. The Association shall be particularly dedicated to **improving the legislative framework for the implementation of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and shall support the implementation of PPP in practice**, in order to establish transparent and effective mechanisms of cooperation of the public with the private sector in providing public services. The development of PPPs should lead to new solutions in providing public services at the local level and to provide the conditions for cheaper and better public services in some areas.

The basic program aims:

- Improving the legal framework for local economic development

- Supporting the LSUs in implementing the measures of the strategic planning
- Building local capacities for the management of local economic development
- Increasing the powers of local authorities regarding the management of natural resources
- The development of policies and instruments for achieving balanced regional development
- Developing the capacities of LSGUs in planning and implementing the instruments of rural development
- Improving the cooperation and dialogue between the local self-government and the economy
- Improving the legislative framework for the implementation of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and supporting the implementation of PPP in practice

VI.4. SOCIAL AFFAIRS²

Health and social protection

The Association shall provide support to its members with the **preparation of prescribed standards**, and especially with the exchange of information, good practice and innovative measures **in the area of social protection**. In this regard, special attention shall be given to the methodology for reviewing the rights of social protection beneficiaries (placement in an institution and the right to financial protection, participation of relatives in providing for the social protection beneficiaries, the right to a day care, etc.). Also, it is particularly important for the Association to improve the status of socially vulnerable categories of population, to improve the quality of family functioning with an emphasis on particularly vulnerable priority groups of citizens, to strengthen the capacity of social protection providers, through the development of programs under various models of day care. Finally, the Association shall promote **networking of all agents of social protection** in RS and a multi-sector approach to these issues, particularly in the area of public-private partnerships, as well as the development of information technologies in the system of social protection.

The Association shall provide support to the local communities in the improvement of social protection measures in order to realize measures and activities to realize the protective function of the family, the conditions for independent life and work of persons who are in the state of social need.

The Association shall provide support to its members with the application of prescribed standards and exchange of information, good practice and innovative measures in the area of social protection.

The Association shall provide **support to local communities in improving and monitoring of health care facilities at the primary health care level**; family medicine; and with ensuring the conditions for multi-sector cooperation, in accordance with applicable regulations.

Education

The Association **shall represent the interests of local authorities in the areas of improvement of both preschool education and primary education**. The Association shall give special attention to support local authorities in improving and optimizing the network of primary schools, as well as preschool institutions, as well as the greater influence of local authorities in the enrolment policy and defining the educational profiles of secondary schools with the aim of increasing influence of local

² Education, culture, youth and sports and social and health protection and social care for children, old people and veterans

communities on school enrolment policies and defining the educational profiles in accordance with the needs for labour in the territory of the LSGUs.

The Association shall **provide support to local communities in the area of preschool education, care and protection of children of preschool age**, in order to ensure equal conditions and opportunities in realizing children's rights to education, depending on the program, needs and interests of children of preschool age. Special attention shall be directed to support the institutions that care for disabled children, children without parental care and children who are victims of violence.

Culture and sport

The Association shall support the **development of institutional and regulatory framework in the area of culture at the local level**. The Association shall support the strategic approach to regulating the local cultural policy and the development of tools for its efficient management. The Association shall strive to create a culture strategy based on evidence, which would be to raise the quality of culture management, the implementation of local cultural vitality and cultural activities in a clear and sustainable manner, as well as the activation of economic potentials. The Association shall support the development and protection of cultural heritage in order to make it attractive and affordable to all population categories and ages. The Association shall try to support the local authorities by available financial means in the exchange of knowledge and information about the best models of work of cultural institutions. The Association shall promote international, especially cross-border inter-municipal cooperation in the area of culture as well as the potential local economic development.

The Association shall seek to provide **support to its members to approach their competencies in the area of local sports in a strategic manner** and to define the key directions of its development on the basis of clear and reliable criteria and needs. The Association shall give special attention to advocate the necessity of its members' strong support for the development of school sport and expanding the availability of sport by building the capacity for recreational sports and investing in sports infrastructure that meets the requirements of persons with disabilities.

The basic program aims:

- Supporting the LSGUs in the implementation of the prescribed standards in the area of social protection and networking of all agents of social protection
- Supporting the LSGUs in monitoring the primary health care system
- Representing the interests of local authorities and support LSGUs in the improvement of preschool and primary education.
- Development of institutional and regulatory framework in the area of culture at the local level
- Supporting the strategic approach to the development of competence of LSGUs in the area of local sports

VI.5. URBAN PLANNING, SPATIAL PLANNING AND UTILITIES

The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall provide support to local communities in strengthening capacities in urban planning and spatial planning activities, especially in relation to the reduction of administrative procedures and transparency in the work, introduction of e-registry for issuing construction and other documents and the like. Also in order to improve local capacities, it is especially important for the Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska to establish a unified information system on the territory of the Republic of Srpska with the purpose of planning, land use and spatial protection.

The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall provide support to the local communities in the **harmonization of legislation which regulates the activities of spatial planning** with the regulations in other areas (nature protection, water protection, traffic protection, balanced development, environmental protection, etc.) and with EU legislation in this area by organizing various meetings and exchange of good practice.

The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall provide support to local communities in **strengthening capacities in the area of public utility services** (organization and use of construction land, water and heat production and supply, treatment and disposal of waste water, transportation and disposal of municipal solid waste, management of business premises and garages, etc.) and it shall **promote inter-municipal cooperation** and exchange of experiences and good practices in the area of utility services. Also, the Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall provide support in the areas of improvement, monitoring and planning activities in the regime of traffic, especially traffic safety, introduction of energy efficiency measures for the public lighting in order to reduce the costs of public lighting and the like.

The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall provide support to local communities to **improve the legal framework for a more efficient management and functioning of public enterprises** founded by local self-government units, with a special emphasis on the development of methodologies for prices and tariffs and the criteria for the quality of utility services.

The basic program aims:

- Strengthening capacities of urban planning and spatial planning activities
- Harmonization of legislation which regulates activities of spatial planning
- Strengthening capacities in the area of utility services and the promotion of inter-municipal cooperation
- Improving the legal framework for the effective management and functioning of public enterprises

VI.6. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

As in other priority areas for local self-government units in the Republic of Srpska, the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska **supports further harmonization of the legal framework with the legislation of the EU in the energy sector**, seeking to contribute to the achievement of strategic objectives of the Republic of Srpska in this area. Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall continue to support the adoption and

harmonization of the laws on the rational use of energy, and completing the legal framework for addressing energy efficiency at the local level. The support to municipalities in the implementation of the law will be reflected through the development of model legislation, communication with the ministries to improve the laws and by-laws and the like. The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall support and work on **creating regulatory and financial prerequisites for more intensive implementation of energy efficiency projects at the local level**. The Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall promote policies and measures to improve energy efficiency in final consumption in order to achieve sustainable energy development through: reducing the negative impacts on the environment, increasing the security of energy supply, meeting the energy needs of all consumers, reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, encouraging responsible behaviour towards energy, reducing the exploitation of fossil fuels, rationalization of energy consumption, increasing the competitiveness of domestic economy, eliminating energy poverty and fulfilment of obligations under international treaties, agreements and conventions. Finally, the promotion and advocacy of the need to apply measures of energy efficiency, and to introduce energy management and renewable energy sources, to reduce energy dependency, energy intensity and impact on the environment and climate change but also to increase the security of energy supply will all be the focus of many project activities of the Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska in the future. The Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall particularly support initiatives and public participation in the activities aimed at improving energy efficiency as well as inter-municipal exchange of experiences and good practices and at encouraging cooperation of cities and municipalities in the area of energy efficiency.

The Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall advocate the improvement of the legal and institutional framework governing environmental issues in local self-government and harmonizing them with the EU standards. The Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall continuously support the development of the legal framework through transposition of the EU acquis in the area of environmental protection and their implementation at the local level, through the introduction and improvement of the laws and by-laws. The Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall ensure the representation of local self-government units and respect of their views when creating a document in this area. For this purpose the Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska shall use its permanent and temporary authorities and bodies, as well as information channels. The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall provide support to its members in raising awareness and improving the environment. Lack of awareness and insufficient public participation is an obstacle which implies a lack of understanding of the importance of environmental issues, by decision makers at the local level, as well as among the general population. The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall provide support to local self-government units in terms of performance of the obligations which will be imposed on them in the future. This support will be reflected in activities to raise awareness and build capacities to deal with environmental issues, in particular through intensive training on: EU directives in the area of environmental protection; development of plans in the area of environment protection; implementation of projects in the area of environmental protection.

The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall accomplish better application of the laws in the area of environmental protection and increase in administrative capacities at the local level through intensive work with local authorities. The necessary **improvement of application of the law in the area of environmental protection at the local level in the Republic of Srpska** shall be achieved through local capacity building and intensifying the exchange of knowledge, information and materials among the employees in local administrations in charge of environmental issues, through

improvement of collection of environmental data, as well as through propagating good examples and practice in the area of environmental protection at the local level. The Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall focus its activities on the improvement of knowledge in the local self-government units by using their own capacities for training and informing. But also, in this regard, it shall require political consensus at all levels and strive to establish cooperation with the institutions at the state level in order to facilitate law enforcement at the local level, and to enable a positive impact of these joint efforts on the competence of local self-government units in this area.

Finally, the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska shall promote the improvement of inter-municipal cooperation in ensuring effective implementation of projects in the area of environmental protection, such as construction of sanitary landfills, waste water treatment systems and so on.

The basic program aims:

- Supporting the further harmonization of the legal framework with the legislation of the EU in the energy sector
- Creating regulatory and financial prerequisites for more intensive implementation of energy efficiency projects at the local level
- Promoting and advocating the needs of the application of energy efficiency measures and the introduction of energy management
- Improving the legal and institutional framework governing environmental issues in local self-government and harmonizing them with the EU standards
- Supporting the LSGUs in raising public awareness about the improvement of the environment •
- Improving the application of the law in the area of environmental protection at the local level •
- Improving knowledge on environmental protection in local self-government units
- Improving the inter-municipal cooperation in the area of environmental protection

VI.7. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATIONS

Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the European integration process, and the status of potential candidate includes complexity and active participation of all relevant levels of government within a state, their mutual cooperation and partnership. In the upcoming process of EU accession, Bosnia and Herzegovina has an obligation to implement over 60% of the EU legislation at regional and local levels, so it is strategically important for the local self-government units to prepare for these processes as better as possible. In this regard, the Association shall actively work on **awareness raising activities of employees in the local self-government units and citizens about the accession process, as well as about all future obligations of the local self-government units.**

Local authorities are obliged to increase the quality of services to citizens in order to achieve sustainable socio-economic development. It is therefore necessary to take advantage of the opportunities provided by participation in EU programs and funds. Given the importance of respecting the development priorities of local authorities in the programming of EU funds, the Association shall, in cooperation with the Association of Cities and Municipalities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, actively advocate greater **involvement by both Associations and local authorities in the process of programming of EU funds. Also, the Association shall work actively to improve the capacities of local authorities for the efficient use of funds and for the participation in EU programs relevant to local self-government.**

Also, local authorities need to reform its administration to be able to apply the EU standards that have been implemented in the laws and other regulations which transpose the EU acquis. In this regard, the Association shall provide support to the preparation of local authorities for the obligations that await them on the road to European integration through **building and strengthening capacities for implementation of regulations harmonized with the EU regulations**.

Given the fact that the area of international cooperation is important for the local self-governments, the Association shall continue to **provide support to its members in the area of international cooperation**, and it shall accomplish continuous cooperation with international organizations, particularly in the dissemination of good practices and information on the possibilities of cooperation in the region and in the territory of the European Union. The Association shall have particularly active cooperation with international and EU organizations (such as: Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Council of European Municipalities and Regions - CEMR, and other organizations that bring together representatives of local authorities), Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), and with the associations of local authorities in other countries, especially from the closest countries. The Association shall seek to ensure the spreading of good practices and information to local self-government units on the possibilities of cooperation with local self-government units in the region and countries of the European Union and to support greater cooperation between its members with the relevant international and EU organizations and local self-government units from other countries (especially through cross-border cooperation and twinning).

The basic program aims:

- Raising the awareness of employees in local self-government units and citizens about the process of accession of BiH to the EU and the position and responsibilities of the local self-government units
- Involving the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska in the programming of EU funds and improvement of the capacities of local authorities for efficient use of EU funds and programs
- Building and strengthening capacities for the implementation of regulations harmonized with the EU regulations
- Providing support to the members in the area of international cooperation at the bilateral level, within the regional framework and within international organizations.

VII –BUILDING MAIN FUNCTIONS OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR ACHIEVING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

For the achievement of program/thematic objectives it is crucial that the Association perform its functions in an efficient and effective manner, following the interests of its members and in the context of the overall development of local self-government in the Republic of Srpska and BiH. In the process of strategic planning, the following basic functions of the Association were identified:

1. Advocacy and lobbying for common interests of membership,
2. Provision of services and supporting members to develop their capacities,
3. Information exchange, communication and cooperation among local authorities and with other actors
4. Support to the international cooperation of local governments and in the process of accession of BiH to EU

For the purpose of clarity, this section of the Strategic Plan contains, in a reduced form, objectives and activities aimed at enhancing the basic functions of the Association. Annex I of the Strategic Plan contains wider explanations and a detailed rationale for the proposed actions aimed at capacity building of the Association's main functions.

VII.1. ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

In advocating and lobbying for the interests of its members the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska implements one of its most important functions. It is, as such, recognized in the political system of the RS: according to the law, the Central government bodies are obliged to submit the drafts and proposals of legal acts defining the position, rights and obligations of local self governments to the Association for an opinion. Moreover, the Association has signed a Memorandum on Cooperation with the Government of the RS. It has been included in the processes of elaboration of the majority of the acts of relevance for local governments. Through its institutional framework, consisting of the General Assembly, the Presidency and the policy committees, together with the Secretariat, the Association initiates legislative changes before the RS Government.

Local governments of the RS are facing numerous challenges. In some areas of importance for local self –government further reforms are urgently needed. Numerous regulations concerning local level are not in compliance with the needs of local governments, some are still missing. Local governments also lack capacities for a required implementation of the legislation. In parallel with intensified process of EU integration, the legislative activity in the Republic of Srpska will also be intensified, aiming at the harmonizing with the legal system of the EU. A huge number of regulations will necessarily be changed, adopted and implemented. Successful accomplishment of this enormous task very much depends on taking into account also the local realities – institutional, human, financial and technical capacities of the lower levels of government to take over and implement new responsibilities, as well as the realistic time-frame for the introduction of EU standards. It is of utmost importance that the Association articulates and advocates the interests of local governments in this process. In order to strengthen its function of Advocacy and Lobbying, the Association has defined the following strategic goals:

1. Development and use of analytical and programmatic approach in advocacy activities
2. Improved interaction with members of the Association and active participation of members in discussing and defining common interests
3. Improved position and visibility of the Association as a representative of interests of towns and municipalities in the processes of devising public policies and legislation

1. ANALYTICAL AND PROGRAM-BASED APPROACH TO ADVOCACY

The key characteristic of the advocacy activity of the Association in the previous period was the incomplete and not sufficiently comprehensive policy in the areas of importance for local governments. The Association was primarily reacting upon the initiatives of its members; the lack of an agreed – upon programmatic platform prevents the Association from reacting quickly to urgent matters. In many cases it has proven necessary that the Association first defines the common position of its members on certain topics before reacting to a certain move of the Central government. This asks for a development of a framework program document, which would contain the positions of the Association related to the most important issues in the local self – government system, but also of a number of sector - specific platforms that would offer an elaborated framework for the actions of the Association in certain thematic fields. The elaboration of these documents will be preceded by an analysis of the

current situation in different areas of importance for LGs, in order to establish the needs for reforms and to create ground for the future initiatives and positions of the Association. In this respect a special attention will be paid to the analysis of the needs and capacities of LGs for complying with the requirements arising from the EU integration process in different sectors, such as public administration, agriculture and rural development, public procurement and state aid, environment, energy, entrepreneurship and employment etc.

Main activities

1. A base – line study and regular bi-annual surveys of the local self-government system and the local government finance system in RS
2. Development of a framework program document of the Association on priorities for further development of the system of local self-government as a whole
3. Development of thematic program documents - platforms of the Association in important program areas
4. Conducting surveys on the situation in special areas of interest for local self-government and for EU integration

Indicators of success: Association has a framework program document on priorities for the further development of local self-government. A number of specific program/thematic platforms are developed. Three surveys on the state in the system of local self-government and local self-government finance system conducted. Surveys conducted in specific thematic areas of interest for local self-government.

2. IMPROVED INTERACTION WITH MEMBERS IN DEFINING COMMON INTERESTS

In order to achieve a more complete interaction with its members and encourage their participation in advocacy and lobbying, the Association will improve its work on recognizing the needs and issues faced by local governments and upgrade the forms and intensity of joint work with its members. Since the decentralization and the EU integration processes will make the local governments' functioning significantly more complex and difficult, it is necessary that the Association improve the mechanisms of its work, together with members, in observing and reacting to public policies and legislative processes. In this respect, attention will be paid to further strengthening of the role of the policy committees and to forming new networks with municipal professionals, in order to provide ground for the exchanges and discussions related to LG problems and needs deriving from public policies or legal acts adopted by higher levels of government (networks of municipal legal experts, secretaries of municipal assemblies, local finance experts, persons in charge of local economic development, urban planning, etc.). Yearly surveys will be performed in order to provide to the Association a clear picture on the needs and problems of local governments, and gatherings of members will be organized more frequently, in order to address the most important questions and formulate the positions to be advocated and lobbied for.

Main activities

1. Regular meetings of the General Assembly, the Presidency, the policy committees and the networks of the Association and continuous processing of individual initiatives of members, resulting in agreed-upon positions of members
2. Establishment and management of new networks of municipal professionals within the Association

3. Annual surveys on the needs of towns and municipalities within the major program areas and on members' views about the priorities in the advocacy activities of the Association
4. Organizing gatherings (conferences, round tables, focus groups, workshops, etc.) for discussing issues of importance for local self-governments

Indicators of success: the General Assembly, the Presidency and the committees of the Association meet regularly, defining common interest of the members. The Association manages networks of experts in specific thematic areas. New networks of municipal experts are established and operational. Annual surveys on the needs and positions of members are successfully conducted. A number of different conferences and other gatherings, providing for dialogue with members on key issues organized.

3. THE ASSOCIATION BETTER POSITIONED AND RECOGNIZED AS THE LGs' REPRESENTATIVE

In the course of the last several years, the Association has gained acceptance and recognition as a partner of the Government and the Parliament of the Republic of Srpska; its representatives are being included as members in the working groups drafting legal acts, strategies etc. The LGs and the Association are being asked for comments related to new pieces of legislation in all stages of their development and adoption. In order to even further improve its position before the higher levels of government, the Association will focus its activities in the coming years in two directions: (1) Persistently insisting on the principle of obligatory consultations with local governments on the issues of their interest and advocating the need for further reforms of the legal framework for such consultations and of the way they are performed. An analysis of the current process of consultations, together with a comparative study of consultation processes in other European countries, will serve to provide additional arguments to the Association in pursuing this goal. Special attention will be paid to establishing standing forms of Central – local governments' consultations on the most important issues, such as LG financing, regulatory reform, administrative reforms etc. (2) The second course of action will be offering solutions for current problems and difficulties in the system of local self-government, with an aim to position the Association as an active and competent partner, ready not only to criticize the acts and proposals of the higher levels of government, but also to offer modern and easy –to-implement solutions, contributing in this way to the reformed position of its members. To this end, the Association will develop and offer program documents, public policy proposals, model laws and by-laws regulating certain areas of local self-government. In order to improve the level of communication with the representatives of the ministries, the Association will advocate the establishment of regular(periodic) meetings, informative sessions and presentations, at which issues of importance for local governments, but also those of interest for higher levels of government – related to the implementation of their decisions, will be discussed.

Main activities:

1. Active and public advocacy of the need for consultation of local authorities in decision-making processes that affect local self-government
2. An analysis of the current state of the process of consultation with local authorities in the Republic of Srpska
3. Developing and advocating the initiative for the reform of the legal framework and practice of consultation with the Association and local authorities, and the establishment of a permanent body (forum) for such consultations

4. Development of policy documents, public policy proposals and model laws and other regulations of interest to LGs, to be proposed to higher levels of government
5. Initiating, before the Government of the Republic of Srpska, the establishment of regular periodic meetings of representatives of the Association and relevant ministries to review the current and systemic issues of local self-government and to support the implementation of public policies and regulations;

Indicators of success: An analysis of the consultation process with LGs in the Republic of Srpska, with the comparative analysis of consultation processes in other countries, prepared. Developed and advocated proposals for the reform of the legal framework and practice of consultations. The framework for consultations reformed, consultations regularly take place. Policy proposals, model laws and other regulations devised, advocated and implemented. Regular periodic meetings of the Association and the line ministries take place.

VII.2. MEMBER SERVICES

In the continued processes of decentralization and EU integration there is a growing need for the development of sustainable mechanisms of support to local governments to take over new responsibilities and to properly implement the existing ones. It is therefore of exceptional importance that in the forthcoming period the Association establishes and develops different types of services, in order to adequately respond to the increased and diversified needs of its membership. The analysis of the membership needs that preceded the drafting of this strategic document has shown that the members are very much interested in receiving various services from their Association, having prioritized these services as follows: advisory support and organizing various gatherings for the purpose of providing advice related to the implementation of new regulations and for the exchange of best practices examples from the country and from the abroad; receiving information about the possibilities of financing projects; support to intermunicipal cooperation aimed at joint implementation of projects; training services in the areas within the jurisdiction of local self-governments; receiving support in drafting and implementation of projects; provision of models of local regulations and other legal acts; support in the processes of strategic and action planning; providing information on the new legislation, strategies and plans of higher levels of government that are of interest for the local level. Due to the fact that it currently lacks the needed human, organizational and financial capacities for a more intensive provision of services to its members, the Association plans to pay a special attention to strengthening its own capacities for service provision, in parallel with the member needs assessment and development of required services. So, in order to adequately address the growing needs of its members for different types of services, the Association has identified the following strategic objectives:

1. Improvement of existing and establishing new advisory services
2. Improving training provision and introducing advanced forms of capacity building for membership, in accordance with identified needs
3. Establishment and maintenance of a database of municipal acts and regulations and of models
4. Development of mechanisms for continuous support to local self-governments in the process of strategic planning and harmonization of the strategic planning process at all levels
5. Support to members in fundraising and in development and implementation of LG projects

1. IMPROVING THE EXISTING AND ESTABLISHING NEW ADVISORY SERVICES

Due to the diversity of present responsibilities of local self-governments and the expected transfer of the new ones in the process of further decentralization and EU accession, the need for advisory support to membership becomes increasingly apparent. The survey has shown that the members are very much interested in further development of this type of service, especially in the areas such as preparation and implementation of projects, local economic development, the labor law implementation, energy efficiency, administrative rules and procedures, local finances and urban and spatial planning.

Besides the already established mechanisms for the provision of advisory services, within the website being developed SOGRS section which is to provide answers to the most frequently asked questions from members. Intensive efforts will be put into improving direct communication and exchange of information between professionals/employees in local self-governments, through organizing for them different types of gathering (thematic conferences, seminars, round tables) and through establishing and managing thematic/professional networks of LG experts. In addition to the already existing mechanisms, the Association will establish a modern electronic platform (social-business network) for enabling day-to-day communication between the members in selected areas under jurisdiction of LSGs.

Main activities

1. Further strengthening of the advisory services regarding legal and financial issues and start of provision of advisory services in other priority areas
2. Organizing professional gatherings (conferences, seminars and round tables) for certain categories of LG employees on selected priority topics
3. Establishing direct communication and information exchange among LG professionals through regular semi-annual/annual meetings of the Association's thematic/professional networks and through development and use of a modern electronic platform (Social network)

Indicators of success: The Association regularly provides advisory services in minimum five thematic areas. Professional gatherings for different categories of LG employees organized on selected priority topics. Regular meetings on semi-annual or annual basis organized for thematic/professional networks of different experts from local self-governments. An electronic platform established for direct communication and information exchange among LG professionals.

2. IMPROVING TRAINING PROVISION AND INTRODUCING ADVANCED FORMS OF CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT TO MEMBERS

Regardless of the evident needs, fully sustainable mechanisms for professional development and other mechanisms of capacity building of local governments in Republic of Srpska have still not been established. In order to meet the needs of its members and its own program objectives, the Association plans to actively work towards the development and implementation of various training services, as well as towards the improvement of modern ways of training via Internet (e-training) both for elected officials and for civil servants. In order to adapt the training programs to the needs of LGs, regular annual surveys on training and other capacity building needs of the membership will be conducted. In addition, the so-called "Municipal support packages" will be developed, aimed at provision of a set of tools comprising both training and direct advisory, professional and technical support in selected areas, adjusted to concrete needs of individual towns/municipalities. Work on the development and publication of manuals and other technical publications in priority areas will be intensified and other innovative tools will be developed following the needs of LGs in the process of

decentralization and EU integration, using the best practices in the region and the EU. Efforts will also be put into strengthening the cooperation with different ministries, NGOs, donors and donor-supported projects, in order to improve the coordination of activities of different actors in the area of providing training to LGs.

Main activities

1. Development and implementation of training programs, based on the identified needs of members arising from the process of decentralization and EU integration
2. Further development of the platform for e-training and the development and implementation of e-training on selected topics
3. Improvement of procedures for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the training provision service of the Association and the expansion of the network of experts/trainers
4. Development and implementation of technical support packages to local self-governments in priority areas
5. Development and dissemination of various thematic publications in priority areas
6. Development of innovative tools to build the capacity of local self-governments in accordance with the needs and best practices in the region and the EU
7. Establishing mechanisms for continued cooperation, information exchange and coordination of relevant actors in the field of capacity building of LGs

Indicators of success: Starting from 2016, the Association organizes at least 15 trainings per year on different topics. The e-learning platform of the Association is improved and at least two e-trainings per year are implemented. Procedures for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of trainings are improved. The network of experts/trainers is expanded. By the end of 2017, first packages of technical support to local self-governments are developed and implemented. Thematic publications in priority areas are prepared and distributed. At least one innovative tool for LG capacity building is developed. Mechanisms for continuous cooperation and information exchange among relevant actors in the process of LG capacity building are established.

3. A DATABASE OF LOCAL REGULATIONS AS A MECHANISM FOR IMPROVING ADMINISTRATIVE WORK

Frequent changes of laws and by-laws, due to their adjustment to EU legislation and to the principles of good governance, makes it necessary for local administrations to continuously adjust and improve local procedures, regulations and acts. This asks for an attempt aimed at harmonizing the ways of performance of local administrations and facilitating their legislative activities and the implementation of regulations. In the coming period an electronic platform will be developed, providing access to towns and municipalities to various models of local regulations and acts – those developed by the Association and its partner institutions and projects, but also of current regulations and other legal acts developed and in use by other local self-governments (rulebooks, decisions, acts...). This will allow the decision makers and LG officials to improve and adjust their own procedures and acts by using the recommended models developed by their Association or those already developed and used by other municipalities.

Main activities

1. Regular development of models of local acts, in accordance with changes in legislation and the new competencies of local self-governments
2. Development of an electronic platform - database of existing LG regulations and models of local regulations
3. Continuous collection of local regulations and updating electronic platform/database

Indicators of success: Electronic platform - database of regulations and acts of LGs and model regulations and laws developed and regularly updated. The Association continuously produces the most needed models of local regulations and acts in accordance with changes in legislation and new competencies of LGs and regularly updates the Database. LGs are actively using the Database.

4. SUPPORT TO LGs IN STRATEGIC PLANNING AND HARMONIZATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Methodology for Integrated Development Planning of municipalities – MiPRO, developed within the Integrated Local Development Project, facilitates and provides a uniform approach to the practice of planning and implementing local development plans in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To date, 16 towns and municipalities in RS have developed their plans using MiPRO methodology and the Association has, from the very start, played an important role of supporting its members in this process. In the forthcoming period the Association will further promote and support the use of MiPRO methodology in local development planning, both in cooperation with other institutions and projects, and through trying to secure donor funds for the Association to provide direct technical support to local self-governments in this process. An additional effort will be put into harmonizing the planning process at local level with strategic planning at the central level, as well as on the mechanisms of monitoring the implementation of the strategic objectives, as well as on matching the public finance management policies with the strategic objectives set within the local development strategies.

Main activities

1. Continuous promotion of MiPRO methodological framework
2. Cooperation with partner institutions and programs/projects concerned with planning and implementation of LG plans in RS and harmonizing the process of strategic planning with the same process at central level
3. Direct technical support to towns and municipalities in development and implementation of strategies of integrated local development
4. Conducting quality analyses of strategic planning at local level (once in two years)

Indicators of success: MiPRO methodology is recognized and accepted by LGs and supported by higher levels of government and other partners in the RS. Number of towns and municipalities that have developed and are implementing strategies of integrated local development increased. Periodic analyses of the quality of strategic planning at local level conducted.

5. SUPPORT TO MEMBERS IN FUNDRAISING AND IN DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LG PROJECTS

In the previous period, the Association had established basic mechanisms for informing members of available state and international donors' funds for support to local projects; however, other organizations in RS were also providing this type of service. Therefore, in the future, the Association

will endeavor to improve this service to members, also through cooperation with other organizations. A mechanism will be established within the Association for regular identification of the needs of local self-governments for donor assistance, as well as for adequate involvement of local self-governments in the programming process. In particular, additional support will be provided for the capacity building of LGs for the efficient use of EU funds, especially in terms of training aimed at a more thorough understanding and observance of financial and administrative EU project procedures (PRAG procedures), both for the development and for the implementation of EU funded projects. The Association will also provide support to inter-municipal cooperation aimed at joint development and implementation of projects.

Main activities

1. Regularly informing members on available state and international donor funds for financing local government projects
2. Regular annual identification of the needs of local authorities for donor assistance (as a part of annual members' needs surveys, and through organizing annual workshops for analyzing problems and defining priorities)
3. Preparation of annual reports on the LG needs for donors' assistance and presentation of these reports to national and international actors in the processes of programming of donor assistance
4. Development and implementation of training courses for municipal representatives on preparation and implementation of projects
5. Support to local self-governments in understanding and observing EU project procedures - administrative and financial
6. Support to inter-municipal cooperation (within BiH and across borders) for the implementation of joint projects

Indicators of success: The Association regularly collects information and informs members about available funds. Association conducts regular annual member needs assessments regarding donor assistance. Line ministries and donor organizations are familiar with the needs and priorities of local self-governments for donor assistance. Association conducts at least five regional trainings annually aimed at raising capacity of municipal staff for developing and implementing projects. Mechanism established to provide support to local self-governments to understand and respect EU project procedures. The Association provides support in inter-municipal cooperation aimed at joint implementation of projects.

VII.3 INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND COMMUNICATION

The Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Republic of Srpska regularly informs members on its own activities and of all other matters of interest and it continuously communicates with them on all relevant issues, such as: the laws and by-laws and other regulations of influence to the local level, the project funding opportunities, the best practice examples from the country and from abroad, initiatives and activities of the Association. The standard and the most used channel for providing information to members is through the internet page of the Association. Given the raised expectations of members and the need that the Association and its activities are significantly more visible in public, there are still challenges that the Association needs to respond to, primarily in terms of more efficient use of modern means of communication.

At this point it is particularly necessary that SOGRS achieve greater recognition and visibility of its

policies to the public to be able to carve out for the interests of its members. It can and should contribute to the networking and cooperation with other actors and projects operating in the field of local self-government. Bearing all this in mind, the Association has identified the following strategic goals for developing of this function:

1. Improving information exchange and communication with member towns and municipalities
2. Improving media recognition of the Association, cooperation with the media and informing the general public about the work of the Association and of the importance of local self-government
3. Improving cooperation with other partners active in the field of local self-government

1. IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH MEMBERS

In the forthcoming period the Association intends to play a more important role in providing relevant information to its members, primarily on regulations that affect their work and development; on best LG practices in the country and abroad; about calls for municipal project proposals/ funding opportunities and in particular about the activities and initiatives of the Association itself and of the results of these initiatives. Given that the members see website of the Association as the best instrument of information, the Association will significantly improve the design and contents of its website, aiming at turning it into a web portal with a number of different segments (eg: initiatives in the advocacy area; services; EU integration issues, etc.). Such a web portal will be able to integrate different types of applications and services that Association already has (social networks and e-learning) or those that could be developed in future (search, e-mail service; different bases of documents and information; knowledge base - wiki; etc.). The e-Newsletter of the Association will be improved and modernized; issuing of various informative publications will be intensified, and an additional effort will be put into improving the indirect communication with members (the contact database of the Association and networking with municipal liaison officers in charge of communicating with the Association). Finally, the Association plans to significantly enhance its presence and activity within social networks and expand the circle of users of these instruments of communication and information (individuals; members; partners).

Main activities

- Development of a project to redesign the web site of the Association, preparation and continuous maintenance of the new web site – portal of the Association
- Based on a needs analysis – the development of new Internet services of the Association (databases and documents, knowledge database - wiki; etc.).
- Redesign, modernization and regular publishing of E-newsletter of the Association; publishing different printed publications
- Periodic meetings of the network of municipal liaison officers (member' coordinators for the work with the Association)
- Awareness raising among members of the benefits from communicating via social networks, the opening of a Facebook page and opening accounts of the Association on Twitter and YouTube; use of these accounts for informing members and the general public
- Improvement of direct communication and information exchange between experts/employees in local self-governments through a social business network

Indicators of success: High level of awareness of representatives of local authorities of all matters of importance for local self-government and the activities of the Association. Electronic platform that enables direct communication and exchange of information between professionals/employees in the

LSG is established.

2. COOPERATION WITH THE MEDIA

Successful cooperation with representatives of printed and electronic media is an important precondition for the messages and information from the Association to be quickly and accurately transferred to the widest audience. The Association will intensify its communication with the media through regularly inviting them to report on its activities and through a continued delivery of its positions regarding certain important issues. Periodic briefings of the leadership of the Association for the media will be organized, and closer cooperation with the editors-in-chief of printed and electronic media established. In order to create better connections with the media representatives, the Association will organize annual competitions for best media reports in the area of local self-government (with prizes for winners), together with training for journalists on topics in LG field. In order to support the dissemination of information from the local level, the Association will establish strong relationships with LG officials in charge of public relations and will form a Network of these officers, in order to enhance their work in informing public of LG- and Association – related issues.

Main activities

- Regularly inviting the media to conferences, providing press releases on the activities, positions and initiatives of the Association
- Organizing regular press conferences and other media gatherings
- Organizing meetings and periodic briefings with the editors –in - chief of the most relevant media
- Continuous monitoring of media coverage of the activities of towns and municipalities and of the Association
- Establishing a network of local officials in charge of public relations
- Organizing trainings for journalists from printed and electronic media on topics related to local self-government
- Organizing annual competitions for the best media report on topics of interest to local self-governments.

Indicators of success: The Association is recognized as the reference point for all media for consultation and providing information and positions on certain issues, as well as making statements and appearances in the media when it comes to all matters relating to the operation and functioning of local self-governments.

3. IMPROVING COOPERATION WITH OTHER PARTNERS IN THE FIELD OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Connecting, information sharing and cooperation with other stakeholders in the field of local self-government in BiH - donors, donor-supported projects implemented by higher levels of government and/or non-governmental organizations, as well as international organizations, will contribute to a higher quality of the achieved results of the Association and of each of these actors individually. The Association will endeavor to maximize the potential of such cooperation by coordinating activities and avoiding overlap, and aiming at achieving synergies and development of new joint projects. Additionally, through cooperation with the projects that are phasing - out, the arrangements will be made to have the results of these projects transferred to the Association, thus allowing for their long-term sustainability within the Association.

Main activities

- Organizing periodic consultative meetings with representatives of organizations that plan and implement projects of importance for local self-government - collectively or individually; presentations of plans and activities of the Association to partners, donors and others.
- Dissemination of information on the activities of the programs of partners through regular information channels of the Association and enabling partners to provide relevant information about the work of the Association through their own publications and other media,
- Exchange of information, magazines and publications, possibly linking web sites
- Mutual invitations to meetings and conferences
- Inclusion of representatives of the Association in the steering committees of partnering projects, when relevant (and vice versa)

Indicators of success: Established permanent forms of cooperation with partnering programs, consultative meetings held, information on the activities of the Association published through information activities of partners and vice versa, achieved agreements on a possible joint project activities, products of certain projects are transferred to the Association for permanent use.

VII.4. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EU INTEGRATION

One of the basic functions of SOGRS, as well as most other local government associations, is to support municipalities and cities in the field of international cooperation, on multiple levels - the broadest international level, on the level of the European Union and within the region of the Western Balkans and in the field of cross border cooperation.

In the accession process to the European Union, SOGRS needs to position itself as a relevant partner and to develop cooperation with the national authorities in charge of EU integration, stressing the importance of participation of local authorities in the development of policies and regulations harmonized with European standards and in the process of programming EU pre-accession funds.

Due to the fact that, when it comes to European integration, certain actions must be taken in relation to the level of BiH authorities and in relation to the EU, cooperation and joint action with the Association of Cities and Municipalities of Federation BiH is necessary and requires taking joint decisions and joint action which will enhance the position of local government as a whole. Participation in the European integration process BiH is a horizontal issue of the impact on all areas of work SOGRS, including the organizational, programmatic and financial capacities SOGRS.

An important task of SOGRS is also representing the interests of its membership in international organizations, participation in international meetings, the intensification of bilateral cooperation with the associations of local and regional authorities of other countries participating in the work of regional organizations, as well as undertaking activities in support of decentralized cooperation and twinning with cities and municipalities of other countries, as well as cross-border cooperation.

Taking into account these expectations and needs, the Association has identified the following strategic objectives:

1. Positioning the Association as partner at the national and EU levels in the European integration process
2. Supporting municipal cooperation at international and regional levels, as well as in the field of cross-border and decentralized cooperation

1. POSITIONING OF THE ASSOCIATION AT NATIONAL AND EU LEVELS IN THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS

The process of EU integrations has the immense importance for local self government in the Republic of Srpska, It is therefore necessary to strengthen the position of the Association and its role towards the central level of government, as well as towards the EU level, both politically and strategically, as well as to build the capacities of the leadership and the administration for reaching the objectives of the Association in this area. BiH signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement in early 2012. The Republic of Srpska has started the harmonization of its legislation with the EU acquis. It is essential that this process is carried out in consultation with local authorities, because over 60% of EU legislation relates to local and regional level. Also, in programming of IPA funds the funding priorities defined by local authorities must seriously be taken into account. It is therefore necessary that the Association is involved in this very important process. The Association currently lacks analytical and policy documents that will provide guidance for its work in this area: a document which will explain the impact of EU integration on local self-governments and provide a set of recommendations - the roadmap for EU integration, both for the Association and for its members. It is important for the Association to develop mechanisms for the participation of LGs in programming of EU funds. For taking part in these processes, the Association will need to improve its mechanisms for consultations with its members on their priorities for EU funding. It is of key importance that in representing the interests of local authorities in the process of EU integration the Association joins forces with the Association of Towns and Municipalities of the Republic of the Federation of BiH. This will strengthen the positions of both of them in the process of lobbying for better position of local authorities in BiH related to the EU matters, but also in programming of pre-accession funds intended for LGs.

Main activities

- Creation of a concept document on the impact of EU integration process on local self-governments in the RS and on the Association itself, with a roadmap (recommendations) for further action
- Preparation of the political platform for the inclusion of the Association in the national mechanism for EU integration and an initiative for the revision of the Memorandum of understanding with the National direction for EU integrations and for the inclusion of LGs into programming EU funds
- Defining the platform and advocating for the inclusion of the Association in programming of IPA funds
- Preparation of an analysis of cooperation with EU institutions, organizations and networks at EU level relevant to local authorities
- Holding thematic meetings with bodies and members of the Association in order to identify programmatic and other priorities and interests of LGs to be represented and implemented in the process of EU integration, especially in the field of programming EU funds
- Conducting trainings for elected representatives on the topic of EU integration and lobbying in EU, and specific trainings on sector policies and legislation, EU funds and programs

Indicators of success: Strategic policy framework (concept paper) on local authorities and the Association in the EU integration process is developed, as well as a mechanism for better positioning of the Association at national and EU level. The system of defining program and other priorities related to the interests of local authorities in the process of EU integration, especially in programming EU funds is developed and the Association is included in the programming process. Capacities of managing bodies of the Association for the representation of interests in the process of EU integration are strengthened.

2. COOPERATION AT INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS, CROSS-BORDER AND DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION

Providing assistance to member municipalities in multilateral, regional, cross-border and bilateral international cooperation is a function of the Association which promotes the interests of its membership and encourages the exchange of experiences and best practice examples and establishes relationships and partnerships. The Association participates in the work of key international, European and regional associations/networks (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: the Association is authorized to propose LG representatives from the Federation of BiH to the national delegation in the Congress, CEMR - Council of Municipalities and Regions of Europe, NALAS - Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe). The Association has bilateral cooperation with local government associations of other countries and provides assistance to LGs in finding twinning partners. To make this activity produced the maximum effect, it is necessary to create a database that would provide a clear overview of established or initiated the partnerships of local self-government with cities and municipalities of other countries and contained profiles of cities and municipalities for easier identification of potential partners for twinning or other forms of decentralized cooperation. For the promotion of cities and municipalities from the Republic of Srpska at the international level it is planned to put the emphasis on the organization of international conferences in the cities and municipalities of the Republic of Srpska.

Main activities:

1. Monitoring and participation in activities of international and regional organizations in which SOGRS is member, with joint action with SOGFBiH.
2. Preparation of analysis on possible forms of cooperation with other international and regional organizations and initiate the establishment of cooperation with them.
3. Establishing links with local government associations from other countries in order to transfer knowledge and experience sharing, as well as to develop joint initiatives and projects.
4. Establishing a database of forms of international cooperation (twinning, cross-border and decentralized cooperation) of cities and municipalities in the Republic of Srpska and continuous support to the establishment of partnerships with local governments abroad.
5. Initiation of organizing international conferences and meetings of international organizations in the local government units in the Republic of Srpska.

Indicators of success: SOGRS representatives participate in the preparation of documents of international and regional organizations whose members participate in the events and initiatives of these organizations in which to present the interests of local government units from the Republic of Srpska. Membership or observer status in one more number of international and regional organizations of interest to the local government units in the Republic of Srpska. Agreements with local government associations in other countries signed and implemented. An overview of international cooperation of local self-government in the Republic of Srpska prepared. At least three international meetings organized in the cities and municipalities in the Republic of Srpska.

VIII - INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING AND THE BASIS OF FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ASSOCIATION

Given the complex demands that the Association will be facing in the period of implementation of this Strategic Plan, important steps are needed to further develop its institutional capacities, to strengthen the human resources and expert knowledge of the Secretariat and to upgrade its technical equipment, as well as financial stability and future financial sustainability of SOGRS. Having all this in mind, the Association sets the following priority objectives:

1. Improving the internal organization and management of the Secretariat of the Association
2. Strengthening human resources of the Secretariat
3. The expansion of the expert base and knowledge base,
4. Development of a system of responsible and transparent financial management
5. Improving the technical and material aspects of the operations of the Secretariat
6. Financial stability and steps towards long-term sustainability of SOGRS,
7. Improving legal and administrative framework for the bodies of the Association and enhancing their capacities.

1. IMPROVING LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE ASSOCIATION'S BODIES AND ENHANCING THEIR CAPACITIES

Improving the operation of the statutory bodies of the Association is an important prerequisite for achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan and for better and more fundamental positioning of the Association in the socio-political context of the Republic of Srpska. A more detailed definition is needed of the roles and responsibilities of the statutory bodies and of the way they operate – especially in establishing common interests of LGs and launching initiatives. An analysis of the existing system and rules will provide ground for eventual reforms (primarily of the committees of the Association) and for potential establishment of new bodies or other forms of grouping of towns and municipalities interested in specific issues (small and underdeveloped municipalities, rural municipalities, etc.).

In order to improve the capacity of local government representatives in SOGRS bodies, SOGRS planned to hold training for lobbying, negotiation and communication, as well as to develop appropriate manuals. A system for electronic sessions of statutory bodies (primarily the Presidency), will be introduced, in order to provide for quick consultations and timely response in cases when in the short time span an answer is requested from the Association, related to a particular move or an unannounced legislative initiative of higher levels of government, but also in other cases. Finally, the significantly wider scope of activities towards reaching the strategic goals, asks for a more efficient working procedures: forms of documents in the course of preparation and implementation of the outcomes of meetings will be upgraded and a standardized process of preparation of the sessions will greatly facilitate and simplify this aspect of the organization's work.

Main activities

1. Consideration of the need for amendments to the internal regulations.
2. Development analysis of the functioning and scope of the existing committees and their reform and adjustment to the new program goals of SOGRS.

3. Development analysis needs of members to establish new bodies (committees and networks) and assembly members in special forums - depending on their specific interests; the establishment of new bodies and forums.
4. Develop and implement training programs for representatives of local governments to participate in the implementation of activities of advocacy and lobbying.
5. Development of a manual for members for lobbying and advocacy of SOGRS and local governments interests.
6. The introduction of standardized procedures for the preparation and convening the sessions of organs and working bodies.
7. Development and introduction of standard forms of documents for meetings of organs and working bodies.
8. Introduction of the system of electronic session for the purpose of making urgent decisions.

Indicators of success: Adoption and implementation of new rules, procedures by the bodies of the Association, standardized forms of documents related to the bodies work. An analysis of the way of functioning of relevant committees and their adaptation to the new program goals performed. New forms of gathering of members and dealing with specific issues established and operational. Members of the Presidency and of the committees trained for advocacy and lobbying. A manual for lobbying and advocacy produced. Electronic sessions of the Presidency of the Association on urgent matters take place when a quick response is needed.

2. IMPROVING INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

For the purpose of reaching the main objectives of this Strategic Plan an adequate division of work is needed within the Secretariat, indicating the need for an upgrade of the internal organizational structure, so that:

- allow establishing of clear relationships between the main objectives and bearers of responsibility for achieving them. It further entails a determination of positions or jobs within the organizational structure, detailed job descriptions for each position, as well as establishing logical lines of responsibility and communication in the work
- open up space for new employment gradually or fill systematization, in accordance with the anticipated pace of achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan, as well as material and financial possibilities and projected financial sustainability

Within this new organizational setting it is necessary to align the work processes, the document flow, and all internal acts of the Secretariat on which the reformed organizational structure can have an impact. The introduction of the electronic system of internal communication and document management system shall modernize and facilitate work in the new environment.

In particular, managing a more complex and larger organization, with many new responsibilities and tasks implies that the top management acquires new skills, especially management skills. For this purpose an individualized training program for the management of the Association / Secretariat will be developed, using the comparative experiences of other associations of local authorities in the Region and in Europe.

Main activities

1. Development of the organizational structure of the Secretariat aligned with the new Strategic Plan
2. Creating a new "Systematization"(job classification), with detailed descriptions of positions and established lines of responsibility

3. Analysis and establishment of standardized work processes and document flow and archiving of documents
4. Evaluation and harmonization of internal acts of the Association with the new organizational structure and new work setup
5. Introduction of the electronic system of internal communication and the document management system
6. Training program for top management tailor made for managing an association of local governments developed and implemented

Indicators of success: New internal organization and job classification developed and adopted, with defined lines of responsibility. Rules on document flow and archiving of documents (using an electronic document management system) adopted and applied. A guidebook/rule book for the employees related to running the most important work processes adopted and staff trained accordingly. Other rules and instructions harmonized with new setup of the internal functioning. A comprehensive program of training for management in specific management skills in the local self-government association devised and implemented.

New regulations on internal organization and systematization of jobs and lines of responsibility, on flow and archiving of documents (using electronic document management system) adopted and applied, elaborated instruction or regulations for the performance of the most important work processes, adopted other regulations and guidelines that the internal functioning of complying with the new organizational setting. An comprehensive program management training in specific skills of the management of Association developed and implemented.

3. STRENGTHENING HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITIES AND HR MANAGEMENT

This Strategic Plan sets before the Secretariat of the Association a complex professional task, asking for the improvement its human resource capacities and expertise. At the very beginning of the implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Secretariat will need to increase the number of professional staff, primarily those dealing with advocacy and lobbying, with specialized expertise in key program/thematic areas. It will also be necessary to strengthen the staff of the Secretariat in order to further develop the service functions of providing training and other forms of capacity building to local authorities. The EU integration issues, as well as information and communication tasks, will also require appropriate allocation of staff. Given the expected increase in workload of the Secretariat, the human resources management function (regarding new employment, assignment of employees to jobs within the Systematization, the evaluation of the quality of their work and the needs for additional training) should be approached systematically, through the development and implementation of a set of rules that regulate the work of employees, the discipline, remuneration, evaluation and promotion, transparent process of new recruitment etc. It is also necessary to further enhance knowledge and skills of the employees through individualized training programs, tailored to the needs of individual jobs in the Secretariat (especially in the areas of advocacy and lobbying, on the development of policy documents, in communications and public relations, in planning and conducting public awareness campaigns, etc.).

Also, in order to further develop services to members, the employees of the Association will be trained in areas such as: preparation of project proposals, project cycle management, project finances, strategic and action planning, presentation skills, facilitation skills and similar. In the implementation of these training programs the transfer of knowledge from other, more developed associations of local authorities, primarily on a peer-to-peer basis is envisaged.

Main activities

1. Identification of the needs for new employment based on the new job classification, assignment of employees and possibly new employment, based on a careful assessment and projection of growth of the Secretariat
2. Improvement of human resources management system based on the analysis of needs and possibilities
3. Adoption of rules and procedures for employees aligned with the new organizational structure and work processes (rules of work and remuneration, rules of reporting, development of annual plans for employees, rules of annual evaluation of employees, new employment rules etc.).
4. Implementation of general and individualized training programs and training for management and employees of the Association
5. Support to the qualified staff members in acquiring higher academic degrees, for the purpose of strengthening the internal expertise

Indicators of success: Legal acts and other documents provided by the Strategy have been adopted and apply. Specialization on existing employees for work performed in realizing SOGRS functions and objectives of the specific program areas and engaged additional officers for this work. Training for employees planned and held. Some expert workers are supported in acquiring additional academic degrees.

4. EXPANSION OF THE EXPERT BASE AND THE KNOWLEDGE DATABASE

The ambitiously set strategic objectives of the Association require involvement of a large number of experts in various areas of local self-government. It is neither practical, nor feasible for financial reasons, that the Association in a short time span engages a significant number of such experts. The concept of improving the base of experts - national and local, that would be contracted by Association through various short-term projects, and those among them who give the best results - retained in the database, will ensure sustainability of the structure of permanent staff and allow flexibility when it comes to outsourcing.

Defining and implementing a set of rules related to the selection and engagement of external experts should ensure transparency and their fast and easy integration into the activities of the Association. The terms of their engagement shall be such to ensure their commitment to the principles and goals of the Association, their loyalty and standardized quality of provided expert services.

In addition, the involvement of municipal experts and their networking with the Association is envisaged, aiming at producing multiplying effects of their specific expertise and allowing transfer of knowledge and experiences to other municipalities and towns. The development of a quality assurance system (monitoring and evaluation) in the implementation of plans, programs, and projects and the introduction of knowledge management system are foreseen for the later stages of the implementation of the Strategic Plan, in order to form a permanent knowledge basis for the further work of the Association, thus contributing to its sustainability.

Main activities

1. Improving the database of external experts (national level experts)
2. Establishing a base of local experts in various LG – related areas (networks of local experts) and management systems for such networks (*local level experts*)
3. Further development and implementation of quality assurance system (monitoring and evaluation) related to external expert support

4. Development of the (electronic) Knowledge Management System

Indicators of success: Established and maintained Database of external experts and network and database of municipal experts; functional and transparent system (rules and procedures) of outsourcing; products of expert work remain within the Association and are effectively used; high quality of the work of the Secretariat.

5. IMPROVEMENT OF THE SYSTEM OF ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Working on complex projects and programs will lead to the increase of financial resources that the Association will have to manage in conducting its regular and project activities. This requires thorough planning, detailed elaboration and implementation of rules and procedures that will ensure that the funds are managed properly and transparently, as well as the adequate control and monitoring of the use of funds. Through adequate training these rules will be introduced to all employees. In addition, the employees engaged with project management and finances need to pass a training cycle designed exclusively for financial management of projects, in order to attain necessary knowledge and skills for proper management of project funds and financial reporting.

Main activities

1. Improvement of existing and development of additional rules for employees related to proper financial management and management of assets and resources:
 - Rules on accounting and accounting procedures
 - Rules of financial management
 - Rules of internal control and internal control procedures
 - Rules of fixed assets management
 - Rules on the use of official telephones, on remuneration related to travel using the Association's or employees own vehicles and on representation costs
 - Rules of procurement
 - Rules of prevention of conflict of interest and anti-corruption measures
2. Training of employees for the implementation of policies and procedures of financial resources and asset management
3. Training of employees engaged in projects for proper financial management of projects and financial reporting

Indicators of success: Rulebooks developed and approved, employees apply them in their daily work; financial audits of projects show full correctness of managing project funds; necessary trainings for employees implemented

6. TECHNICAL PRECONDITIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Improved technical and overall work conditions are an important prerequisite for the success of the Association in the implementation of foreseen activities and achieving the objectives of the Strategic Plan. Appropriate equipping and modernization of the Secretariat will provide the basis for efficient performance, with no delays and technical problems. Obtaining of at least one additional vehicle will enable easier travel for the management and employees, and their increased presence in the municipalities. The existing premises of the Secretariat are insufficient for the increased scope of operations and a larger number of employees; should the financial conditions allow, the possibility of

obtaining new or additional workspace for the Secretariat need to be considered (or at least - the refurbishment and modernization of the existing ones). The dynamics of the implementation of these plans will depend on the availability of own and, in particular, donor funds for this purpose.

Main activities

1. Provision of the new/renovation of the existing premises of the Association, acquisition of office furniture
2. Provision of technical equipment for the Secretariat for more efficient work (computers, printers, copiers, servers, software, equipment for data storage and data protection, equipment for e-learning, translation equipment and sound equipment, training equipment - flip charts, projectors and projection screens. ..)
3. Procurement of vehicle(s)

Indicators of success: Improved spatial and technical conditions for work, efficient operation of the Secretariat staff, simple and good internal and external communication, more frequent presence of management and employees in municipalities

7. FINANCIAL STABILITY AND STEPS TOWARDS THE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ASSOCIATION

The Association is expected to perform a range of actions in the forthcoming period in order to support the process of decentralization and strengthening of local self-government, as well as the enhancement of LG capacities. Some international donors have expressed their willingness to support the Association in these efforts. Based on this, it is expected that in the period covered by this Strategic Plan the Association will play an increasingly important role in the implementation of donor-supported projects and programs; consequently, the proportion of donor funds will increase in the budget of the Association. On the other hand, the main source of income of the Association is based on membership fees; this is one of the key preconditions for the independence and sustainability of any association of local authorities. The level of fee collection – in terms of percentage - is still relatively low and insufficient both for covering the basic costs of running the Association and for the accomplishment of the strategic objectives. It is necessary to reform the model of determining the levels of membership fees and gradually introduce mechanisms that will ensure that the burden of support to the activities of the Association is, over a prolonged period, taken on by members.

Gradual but consistent achievement of the objective of financial sustainability of the Association is a must, so that after the termination of donor support the Association can continue with its operations and with providing services to its members. It is therefore necessary to develop a comprehensive plan for achieving financial sustainability of the Association, based on: (1) the willingness of members to pay higher membership fees, similar to the levels that are reached by the associations of local authorities in the region; (2) a gradual introduction of a model according to which the Association additionally charges some specific services to individual municipalities; (3) an analysis related to the possibility that the Association generates some income selling its services in the market. Testing some of the options in this respect and starting the implementation at a later stage of the next 5-year period should contribute to the financial sustainability of the Association in the period when donors start to reduce or completely stop support. So, when it comes to the planned schedule for the implementation of these objectives: the analysis of the options for the reform of the system of fee collection would be conducted in the first year; the increase of the membership fee levels and the introduction of charges for some services would be assessed on the basis of a careful projection of revenues from projects. The development of the system of income generating services is planned for the end of the five-year

planning period, so that the "profit-making activities" should not disturb the main activities of the Association.

Main activities:

- 1. Reform of the model of calculating the levels of membership fees and of fee collection:**
 - Comparative analysis of the systems of calculating fees in associations of local governments in the Region and in the European Union
 - The development of a new model and formula for calculating fees and achieving the consent of membership for applying them
 - Phased (in accordance with the members' financial situation) implementation of the plan for fee collection that would support the financial independence of the Association
- 2. Introduction and implementation of the system of charging for specific services to membership:**
 - An analysis of needs of member municipalities for specific services they would be willing to pay in addition to membership fees
 - Development of internal capacities of the Secretariat for provision and charging of such services, consequent changes of internal organization
 - Initial awareness-raising among membership of the real costs of services that are (with donor support) currently provided "for free"
 - Development and phased implementation of the program of provision of services that are charged - for (depending and in accordance with the expressed interests of members)
- 3. Analysis of "business opportunities" for the purpose of achieving financial sustainability and development of a business plan of the Association:**
 - Development of a feasibility study for the start of income (profit) generating activities
 - Development of a "business plan" of the Association
 - Necessary statutory changes and organizational restructuring in order to perform income generating activities
 - Initiating income (profit) generating activities of the Association

Indicators of success: Income from membership fees of the Association in absolute terms increases significantly. A part of the budget for basic activities of the Association comes from funds generated through provision of specific services to membership. Over time, the share of this income in the budget of the Association increases. A part of the income for basic activities of the Association comes from the operations which generate profit

A Cross-cutting issue:

GENDER EQUALITY AT LOCAL LEVEL

One of the key principles, but also an important strategic objective of the Association is to promote gender equality at local level, by insisting on the equal status of men and women and equal opportunities for both sexes to participate in cultural, political, economic and social life of local communities. As an objective of importance *for all thematic areas of concern of the Association, and all of its functions*, the issue of gender equality has been placed as a separate part of the Strategic Plan, with cross-sectorial characteristics. In the attempt to implement the principles of gender equality, the Association will strive to introduce gender policy issues in different aspects of its own activities, but also to promote this issue among local governments, by analyzing the state of gender equality in the

policies of local governments, by promoting European documents related to gender equality, by working in order to strengthen the institutional capacities of local governments for gender equality, and by building its own professional capacities in this respect. The Association will perform activities aimed at sensitizing relevant social actors at local and national levels to support the participation of women in decision-making, particularly in the areas of economy, education, health and reproductive rights.

Main activities

1. Conducting initial and final surveys on the positions of local authorities' leaderships and staff related to issues of gender equality
2. Defining and adopting policies and concrete steps for the purpose of promoting the principle of gender equality at the local level:
 - Initiating the formation of an institutional framework for gender equality in all local governments (for example: local councils for gender equality)
 - Adoption and implementation of the European Charter on Gender Equality at local level
 - Creating a *model action plan for gender equality*, and making it available to municipalities
 - Writing project proposals and implementing projects that address the gender issues at local level
3. Awareness-raising and education of citizens and local self-government employees:
 - Organizing and conducting trainings for representatives of local self-governments on gender equality
 - Organization of round tables, conferences and campaigns on gender equality
 - Informing and educating citizens through national and local printed and electronic media
 - Training of journalists of national and local media on gender sensitive reporting
4. Training of the staff of the Secretariat of the Association on gender equality related topics
5. Analysis of all aspects of work of the Association and introduction of appropriate changes in terms of consistent respect for the principles of gender equality; observing gender equality principles in defining program/thematic and other documents of the Association.

Indicators of success: Final survey among representatives of local self-governments shows significant progress in terms of understanding the significance of introducing the principle of gender equality in all local policies. Councils for gender equality (or other similar bodies) are established and function in a number of LGs, a number of LGs have developed action plans for gender equality, national and local media are active in promoting gender equality topics. Statutory bodies of the Association are formed and function with full respect for the principle of gender equality. Contents of documents that the Association adopts and promotes show a required level of respect for gender equality.



COTPC

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