



## Japan Local Government Centre, London

### Monthly Report June 2010 (Germany) – Partnership between North-German and Austrian regions to promote town twinning

Under the auspices of the EU, a programme called ‘Europe for Citizens’ has existed since 2004. It aims to ‘bring Europe closer to its citizens and to enable them to participate fully in the European construction. Through this programme, citizens have the opportunity to be involved in transnational exchanges and cooperation activities, contributing to developing a sense of belonging to common European ideals and encouraging the process of European integration.’ It is a funding programme, giving grants to regional and local bodies – and as with so many European programmes, projects which include link-up across Europe have better chances of gaining funding; in many cases such partnerships are a precondition.

The German *Land* Mecklenburg-Pomerania stretching along at the Baltic Sea coast and the mountain-based Austrian *Land* of Styria have now entered such a partnership for the promotion of town-twinning in Europe. Both regions have in common a local government structure of many small municipalities and are neighbours to Eastern European EU accession countries – Poland in the case of Mecklenburg-Pomerania, and Slovenia in the case of Styria, and are also counting a number of existing town twinning relationships which were established before the fall of the iron curtain. Under the title ‘STAMP TO Europe – Styrian and Mecklenburg-Pommeranian training programme for town-twinning in Europe’, three project partners (Land Styria, Styrian Association of Municipalities and Association of Municipalities in Mecklenburg-Pomerania) are aiming to promote the advantages and potentials of transnational cooperation at the local government level and spread relevant information to many municipalities in both regions. A particular focus will be the practice of ‘town-twinning’ or formalised partnerships between local authorities and how they can be developed, invigorated or possibly new ones established with the help of available EU-funding.

The project will run the whole year of 2011; activities and projects will be conducted in both regions. There will be a series of six seminars in each region, which will cover the following topics:

1. The EU programme ‘Europe for Citizens’ and its potential for municipalities – explanation about the aims of the programme, content, application method, financing and implementation
2. Good practice case studies of active and sustainable town twinning

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3. Establishment of legal associations for the purpose of town twinning, as in most cases of successful town twinning these are the organisations doing the practical work

The seminars will be aimed at different audiences, and will also target people who have a multiplier function, e.g. those who work at regional associations.

There will also be support for municipalities with ideas for projects to compile applications with the help of a roving team providing practical advice and support. Applications put together with support provided are meant to be submitted to the EU, and if approved, implemented by the municipalities.

There will also be other activities under this programme; a joint press conference streamed over the internet, held on the 1 March 2011 in Graz, a website for partner cities in Austria and Germany will be set up, and other information material published. Last not least, in both regions a prize is being set up for the most 'EU friendly' municipality, the details of which have yet to be announced.

The whole cost of the project is given as 122,885 Euro for both regions; 80% of which will be covered by grant, so that only 20% or roughly 25,000 Euro have to be provided as own funding.

Under the current funding period of the 'Europe for Citizens' programme which runs from 2007 to 2013, the following four topical areas ('actions') are defined:

1. Active citizens for Europe - involving citizens either through activities linked to town-twinning or through other kinds of citizens' projects
2. Active civil society in Europe - targeted to civil society organisations either through structural support on the basis of their European level work programme or through support to projects
3. Together for Europe - including high visibility events, studies and information tools
4. Active European remembrance - support to projects aiming at preserving the sites and archives associated with deportations as well as the commemorating of victims of Nazism and Stalinism

With the exception of the third action which covers mainly research and opinion polling and some high-profile events organised by the commission, depending on the action and project, local authorities, civil society groups, think tanks and other actors can apply for funding. In most cases the minimum amount awarded is 10,000 Euro, but there is always a requirement for some kind of match funding as well. The total amount of funding available for the four year funding period is 215m Euro.

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