

**Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee
Europe for Citizens 2007-20013**

Seminar for Local Councils & NGOs

Twinning Agreements

Introduction

The concept of Twinning Agreements was conceived about 50 years ago when the peoples of Europe started to feel the need of inter relating with each other. The very first contacts concerned the exchange of experiences regarding local life. Today, twinning has grown to such an extent that a vast network exists between the various towns and villages of many European countries.

In Malta, the idea of twinning was introduced with the setting up of Local Councils in 1993. In fact, Article 79 of the Local Councils Act (Cap 363) states that:

79. A Local Council shall have the right to make twinning arrangements with any city, town, village or other locality in any other country:

Provided that any twinning between a city, town or village and another locality in any other country shall require the approval of the Minister which shall be given after the Association has given the Minister its opinion on such proposed twinning:

Provided also that in establishing the twinning of localities, consideration shall be given to the status of the localities in the other country with which twinning is being proposed, such that the capital or a former capital city of Malta shall as far as possible only be twinned with a capital or a former capital of another country, and a city shall, as far as possible, only be twinned with another city.

The main aims of a twinning agreement should be:

- to encourage co-operation in a variety of areas between two or more localities;
- and
- to promote further the understanding between the citizens of these localities.

A Twinning Agreement should be based on several factors, which include:

- the voluntary participation of committed citizens with the collaboration of local authorities and associations which would lead to a very active participation;
- the encouragement of exchanges of experiences on different issues of common interest; and

- the provision of unique opportunities for citizens to learn about the everyday life of citizens of other localities.

In Malta (47 out of 68 Councils (that's 69%) have one or more twinning agreements. The majority of these are twinned with European cities. Of these a very high percentage are twinned with neighboring Sicily and mainland Italy.

In Malta we also have a form of twinning (a co-operation agreement) such as that between the localities of Bormla and Naxxar.

The New Policy

Till very recently, applications for twinning agreements were quite straightforward. After receiving a written proposal from a Council, the Department for Local Government would forward such request to the Local Councils Association. Once this proposal is cleared by the Association, the Department would then seek the clearance from a political point of view of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When this has been received, the Department would then recommend to the Minister responsible for Local Government that approval be given.

After an experience of fifteen years of local government during which many Local Councils entered into various twinning agreements and since this matter was never regulated, it was felt that now was the time to introduce a clear policy which would serve as a guide to all Local Councils as well as to ensure uniformity in twinning applications. It also aims to ensure that a twinning agreement is made as part of a long-term plan and not just as a one-off experience.

The new policy was discussed with the Local Councils Association and was launched in June of this year. It is intended to regulate the procedure which a Council must make use of when proposing a twinning agreement.

Councils are encouraged to make twinning agreements with localities in the European Union so as to enjoy the benefits of European Union Membership;

In fact one has to say here that around 58% of those Councils which have a twinning agreement have received funds from the European Union Programme called Town Twinning.

Procedure

When a Council submits a proposal for a twinning agreement it must submit a written report to the Director (Local Government) and the Local Councils Association:

This Report should include the following:

- a) the reasons and aims of the proposed twinning;
- b) an estimate of the expenses related with the proposed twinning covering all activities relating to the signing of the twinning agreement. This expense must not exceed the amount voted for the financial year which should feature in the Council's budget. The amount voted must not be more than € 3,500 or 0.5% of the financial allocation, whichever is the larger;
- c) the name of the Councillor responsible for twinning;
- d) a declaration by the Executive Secretary that this Report was discussed and approved by the Council; and
- e) a Twinning Work Plan which would show the expected results and benefits as well as a financial analysis of the expenditure connected to the twinning.

The Director (Local Government) in consultation with the Local Councils Association will evaluate such a report and not later than eight weeks from its receipt, inform the Council in writing whether the twinning proposal has been approved or not.

In analyzing the proposed twinning and before it makes its recommendations to the Minister, the Department evaluates the Council's financial position and ascertains itself that this expenditure will not affect adversely the financial operations of that Council.

The Department also obtains the clearance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from a political point of view. .

Finally, the Department makes its recommendations to the Minister and seeks his approval for the proposed twinning.

If the proposed twinning has not been approved, the Council must be given the reason for such refusal in writing.

A twinning agreement may be signed either in one or in both of the localities and the signing must be made by the two Mayors.

The Twinning document should be as specified in the Department's circular to all Councils.

For the signing ceremony overseas, only the Mayor, Councillors and Executive Secretary should attend.

Financial obligations

At the end of the financial year, the Executive Secretary and the Councillor responsible for twinning, must prepare a report for the Local Council. This report which should then be sent to the Department for Local Government should include:

- a) the achievements of the twinning for that year and any benefits which the locality has achieved; and
- b) a statement of expenditure related to the twinning.

As I have said earlier, a Council which is proposing to make a twinning agreement or one which already has a twinning, should allocate a sum of money in its budget which must not be greater than € 3,500 or 0.5% of its financial allocation, whichever is the larger.

The Council must discuss and approve any twinning proposal after the Executive Secretary has confirmed that funds are available.

Traveling expenses as well as expenses connected with hospitality to foreign delegations must be kept to a minimum.

Procurement of any goods or services connected to twinning must be done in accordance with the Local Councils Financial Regulations regarding the purchasing of works, goods and services. All air tickets should be purchased as Economy or tourist class.

The Council must also meet expenses in connection with travel insurance

Conclusion

It is the intention that following a period of time during which this policy is put into action, it will be regulated by the publication of a Legal Notice and this as part of the Local Government reform process.

Silvio Frendo
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