



Mr. Petre Shilegov
President of ZELS and Mayor of the City of Skopje

To be the mayor of the capital of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, and a President of the Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of Macedonia – ZELS, is a great honor for me, but also a responsibility. The obligations and duties brought by these two functions that I perform, are a challenge, because they give me an opportunity to actively participate in the exchange of ideas and experiences with my colleagues mayors, as well as in the creation of the policies not only in my city, but also in the other municipalities, members of ZELS. This allows me to participate in the decisions that we will make together in order to provide a better quality of life for all our fellow citizens. I consider that Skopje deserves much better living conditions and I will strive and work, together with my administration, on the improvement of the environment, to make the city much more functional and safe both for young people and pensioners. We will work hard and devotedly to make Skopje an open city for the needs of its citizens, a city that will adapt and develop according to their needs, regardless of religion, gender and nationality. As the President of ZELS, I will strive to open the local self-government for all citizens and make sure they receive timely, cheap and quality services every day. ZELS, on the other hand, being the center of coordination of the activities on improvement of the operation of the units of local self-government, is of great importance. Every day numerous activities are being realized on the ground, in order to create better conditions for progress. The operation of ZELS, as well as the continuous progress of the decentralization process that takes place in all 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje, cause interest in many organizations and associations of the local communities from the country and abroad, however also a desire for cooperation in many fields, especially on strengthening of the capacities of the municipal administration. Undoubtedly, ZELS with its activities contributes to the efforts and urges of our country to become a member of the European Union and NATO. I would like to point out that a proof of this are the reports of the Council of Europe where our activities have been indicated as outstandingly important for the development of the decentralization process in the country. At the end of last year, two working meetings between the Government and the mayors were held, the topic of one of the meetings was "Decentralization Again in Focus", where the Government's effort was pointed out, to conduct real reforms and to return decentralization in the focus, that is, for the municipalities to receive more funds, competences, but also responsibilities.

At the other meeting, the three ministers - the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, the Minister of Culture, and the Minister of Education, discussed about the plans on cooperation between the local and the central government, as well as the further joint steps in these three spheres. Let us not forget that the school buildings that the municipalities received under their authority were dilapidated, ruined, and most of them did not offer conditions for quality and modern teaching. Hence, a part of the municipalities performed a number of activities, such as reconstruction of schools and sports halls, that is, they transformed a part of them into energy-efficient buildings, as well as activities to improve the conditions for work and learning in the classrooms and the sanitary facilities. From the experiences on the ground so far, I can say that the path of decentralization of the municipalities, that we must all pass, is very difficult and with many obstacles, because the funds that we have are not sufficient to eliminate the problems that citizens face, and to make their municipalities European. Of course, as the President of ZELS, I will make efforts and I will represent the interests of the units of the local self-government before the central government, and in each meeting with them I will present the views of my colleagues mayors on all important issues and challenges, whereby at the same time we will offer specific initiatives and solutions for the everyday problems of the citizens. We should not forget that every municipality has its specific problems whose resolution is handled by its administration, however also that ZELS offers them solutions of these problems through already acquired experiences both at home and abroad. ZELS is acting intensively at an international level as well, and we are members in many of their organizations where we draw on the experiences of experts in different fields. I hope that we will manage to implement these experiences here, in our Macedonia, and that we will make it a pleasant and a safe place for living, and thereby we will position it high in the world tourist maps. Since it abounds with natural potentials, and we are proud of our mountains, fields, rivers and lakes, which fascinate with their extraordinary beauty, and which offer opportunities for an active holiday, something that is becoming increasingly popular in the world. Our delicious food is widely known, same as our hospitality, and the most noteworthy fact in this regard is that everyone who has visited Macedonia and tasted the delicious traditional dishes and has seen only a part of its beauty, returns to continue or repeat this extraordinary enjoyment and experience. In the end, let us not forget the rich historical, spiritual and cultural heritage that distinguishes Macedonia as one of the few destinations in the world where one can most vividly monitor and study the development of civilizations that existed and developed throughout the centuries in the Balkans as a crossroad in the region and beyond. Hence, the municipalities in Macedonia and the City of Skopje offer extensive perspectives for development of the local self-government, and not only that this represents a national challenge, but it is also a regional challenge that should be utilized as a potential for overall social progress that will make Macedonia a regional leader and a bright example in Europe and worldwide.

Petre Shilegov