Save the date:
14th IRE Conference of European Regions and Cities
30.09. – 02.10.2018
at Salzburg Congress, Austria

Smart Cities Conference
in Salzburg, Austria

Sustainable mobility for European cities and regions

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Challenges and Solutions for future Mobility in European Cities

For the seventh time, the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE) organized on the 27th of March 2018 a conference on sustainable mobility „Smart Cities“. In cooperation with the City of Salzburg and the Land Salzburg, the session was held in the Salzburg Congress. This conference highlighted the great challenge of sustainable mobility for all European cities, but above all for the regions.

Smart Cities are urban agglomerations, which use modern information and communication strategies, sustainable technology and socio-scientific methods in order to pave the way into a post-fossil society. A vital element for a smart urban development is therefore coordination in the areas of mobility, energy and governance. In smart cities, individual mobility is predominantly public and eco-friendly.

Salzburg rides on the “green” wave

Smart urban development and transport concepts are central elements that must take into account the increasing mobility needs of the urban and rural population and at the same time its environmentally friendly effects. In order to reduce commuter traffic and pollution, the involvement of the regions is particularly important. An environmentally friendly, sustainable planning for traffic relief and increased quality of life calls for the surrounding communities. Examples from Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Switzerland show how to increase mobility can improve traffic conditions and reduce pollution”, said IRE Chairman Franz Schausberger. The former Governor (Landeshauptmann) of Salzburg also addressed the aspects of population growth and the consequences of rural depopulation. Above all, „solutions go beyond the city into the regions, since many conditions and processes of smart cities are regionally interwoven“, explained Schausberger. Smart spatial development can thus contribute equally to securing living conditions and to sustain metropolitan development.

The Master Plan for Mobility of the Regions and Cities of Europe, which also has an impact on the citizens of Salzburg, offers particular potential. „Medium and long-term planning concepts in urban development, sustainability and the careful use of resources - the city of Salzburg has been paying close attention to these important issues of the future for decades“, emphasized Mayor Harald Preunier in his welcoming address. „The master plan 2025 ‘Smart City Salzburg - Energy solutions for the future’, which was launched in 2012, also fits into this guideline. This is an example of the claim of the City of Salzburg, as a regional capital to take on a pioneering role, when it comes to carefully and actively dealing with their own future“, said Preunier.

From left: Josef Schöchl (President of the Regional Parliament/ Landtagspräsident of Salzburg), Cristian Macedonschi (City Councillor of Brașov/Kronstadt), Brigitta Pallauf (State Councillor/ Landesrätin for Transport, Infrastructure and Housing), Harald Preunier (Mayor of Salzburg) and Franz Schausberger (IRE-Chairman)

For the conference, an International IRE - Expert Conference “Cultural Heritage - added value for the Regions” on 27th April 2018.

If history, geographic and demographic features, economy, culture and, of course, character of political institutions and processes, are themselves a sufficient condition to define a territorial unit as a region, in the case of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, it is almost the interrelated and, possibly, cumulative effects of all these mentioned features. According to all its characteristics, Vojvodina is a European project and possesses all the specifics of a European multicultural region.

AP Vojvodina Assembly participates in EU association and accession process by implementing the following group of activities: 1) Implementation of activities identified in the Action Plan for Chapter 23 “Sudetic and Fundamental Rights”; 2) Implementation of activities specified in the so-called Minority Action Plan (section PG 23); 3) Development of interregional and parliamentary cross-border cooperation, ensuring the participation of AP Vojvodina in various IPA cross border cooperation programmes (INTERREG-IPA). 4) Promotion of the improvement of cross-border cooperation between territorial communities or authorities (involvement of Vojvodina local self-government in the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation); 3) Support to the strengthening of European regional policies and improvement of balanced regional development (at its 5th session held on 15th September 2016, AP Vojvodina Assembly adopted the Declarati on 7th A strong renewed regional policy for all regions after 2020, and thus, supported the commitment of European regions and local entities to adapt European regional policies to new economic and political circumstances, and in order to work jointly, after 2020, and promote balanced regional development); 4) Active participation in the European regional forums and macro-regional strategies - member of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) since 2002, AP Vojvodina is a member of the Council of Danube Cities and Regions (2009) and the President of AP Vojvodina Assembly is the Vice-President of the Council; 5) AP Vojvodina Assembly accredits the proposal for one member and one deputy of the Serbian delegation in the Council of Regions at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe; AP Vojvodina Assembly is active in the implementation of the activities of the Danube Strategy (since 2010).

Appreciating the importance the European Union is giving to preservation of the cultural heritage, here I would like to remind you that already Article 3, paragraph 1 of the Treaty on European Union states that: “The Union shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and shall ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.” The Assembly of the AP Vojvodina is taking part, according to its capacities, in marking 2018, the year the European Commission proclaimed the European Year of Cultural Heritage, and as part of the year endeavours the Assembly of the AP Vojvodina was a host of the 2nd International IRE - Expert Conference “Cultural Heritage - added value for the Regions” on 27th April 2018.

By means of this Conference, almost two decade long continuity of cooperation between the Assembly of the AP Vojvodina and the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE) has only been confirmed: to put it in one sentence, this cooperation places in the focus of the joint activities the needs of the citizens, importance of informing and engaging citizens in the implementation of the EU regional policies, as well as strengthening the role of the regional parliaments (which mediate between the needs of the citizens on one hand, and the governments and administration which implement the EU regional policies, on the other). To the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the Danube and the Tisa are the main roads in Europe and all of us who live in Serbia, Croatia, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary. Today, know that when we look at the world from the shores of the two rivers, everything seems to be possible and the other shore is just within our grasp.

Yes, the other shore is within our grasp thanks to, among other things, IRE: the linking tie - which has been working on strengthening the European regional policies and advancing inter-regional cooperation, developing the values of the Europe for citizens, regions and minorities. We should not, and not even for a moment, forget that without developing the values of the Europe for citizens, regions and minorities, there is no peace, good neighbourly ties. We should not, and not even for a moment, forget that without developing the values of the Europe for citizens, regions and minorities, there is no peace, good neighbourly ties. We should not, and not even for a moment, forget that without developing the values of the Europe for citizens, regions and minorities, there is no peace, good neighbourly ties. We should not, and not even for a moment, forget that without developing the values of the Europe for citizens, regions and minorities, there is no peace, good neighbourly ties. We should not, and not even for a moment, forget that without developing the values of the Europe for citizens, regions and minorities, there is no peace, good neighbourly ties.
An optimal connection of the individual traffic with the public traffic as well as the foot and bicycle traffic are the cornerstones of a functioning smart city, which should become a meeting zone. State Councilor (Landesrat) for Transport, Infrastructure and Housing, Brigitta Pallauf, emphasized at the opening: “We have to think in terms of mobility in a multifaceted and modal way. Necessary framework conditions are even better. New technologies support us. The aim of the state mobility concept is to improve the accessibility of all central facilities of the state capital, the district headquarters and the municipalities. Mobility must be possible for all citizens to make the choice between modes of transport, especially in rural areas.” Modern technologies and solutions such as car-sharing, car-pooling and bike-sharing should play a role alongside the main means of transport.

Smart Cities – a political challenge

The keynote speakers on the panel “Smart Cities - a political challenge” addressed different topics related to a sustainable and green city. The Director of the INZIN Institute, Scientific Director of the Congress IONICA and former Advisor to the German government on environmental issues, Prof. Martin Faulstich, put climate protection at the center as a crucial framework for mobility. “Climate change will fundamentally change the transport sector. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change has signed virtually by all the countries of the world, giving it a strong global footprint for urban mobility worldwide. A key role is played by electric mobility. Renewable power supply, nationwide charging infrastructure, autonomous driving, networked supply and disposal structures will have a lasting impact on cities and regions”, expressed Faulstich. However, this does not only require an energy turnaround, but also a turnaround in heat and transport. The first step should be traffic avoidance; to achieve this, more mobility with less traffic is necessary.

The EU member state Slovenia has recognized not only smart cities but also sustainable mobility as two of the key elements of its strategy for smart specialization, which go far beyond the borders of a city. Martin Pečar, Managing Director and Founder of OmniOpti Blockchain Think Tank Slovenia, Coordinator for Smart Cities and Logistics as well as Watify Ambassador explains: “The concepts of smart communities and villages are very important for Slovenia. Another important topic is the exchange of knowledge, cooperation and best practice across regions.” A further best-practice example was presented by Cristiano Macedonochi, City Councilor of Bravu/Kronstadt in Romania. He referred to the importance of tourism in Romanian cities, which have “no attractiveness without mobility. One must develop into tourist regions, well networked bicycle paths.” The city council sees the way to mobility through the infrastructure.

To provide an environmentally friendly traffic in a functioning urban area, could only work, if the view beyond the cities is given to create intelligent development, followed the former Senate Councilor of the City of Vienna Otto Schwetz.

Public urban and rural transport concepts in the European context

Better and usable spatial planning as well as developed logistics was in the center of the podium “Public urban and rural transport concepts in the European context” of the conference. „Each agglomeration has its own structures and challenges. Nevertheless, it is important to find common denominators and learn from best practices. The applicability of the measures reflects the political will, but must also take into account the relative position compared to others and enabling a better choice of strategies for improvement”, commented Karl Ernst Ambrosch, former ERA Chair Holder, in his keynote address. He referred above all to KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), which not only offer very good comparability opportunities, but also serve as a first step in formulating goals and reporting progress”, he said. As a result, smart technologies and systems support the development of a good quality of life.

Using the example of the Green Capital 2017, Essen in Germany, City Director Hans-Jürgen Best referred to smart technologies such as car sharing and bike sharing. “The traffic turn takes place in the head. This does not happen overnight; it does not immediately get into the minds of the people that there are such possibilities.” On the question of the moderator Stefan Veigl, why Essen has rejected Berlin’s offer to free public transport for two years, he answered as follows: “If you want to offer free public transport from one day to the next, then you need rails and buses to be extended for the future.” The regional president (Zupan) of the region of Istria, Vlasta Flego, agreed with this statement and explained the problem of his city: “5000 to 10,000 people live in the city, of which 2000 go to work every day. This is why the problem is very complex.” He pointed to the “City toll” as a strategy which should be considered hence it leads to a massive decrease of traffic jams. Subsequent- ly, this would give the city more income, which in turn would be invested in improving mobility. Franz Humer, Smart City Salzburg Coordinator in Austria, added that „the future of urban mobility is perceived as more demand-oriented service. The private vehicle ownership is replaced by a mix of walking, cycling, public transport and additional rental vehicles. New information technologies and systems contribute to promote consumer acceptance and ease of use“ due to Salzburg’s topographical character. Citizens are not only restricted in terms of housing, but also in their mobility. Therefore, according to Hum- ber, it is necessary to adapt the mobility needs to what is possible in the city.

The podium discussion made it clear that mobility is not sufficient, but the change of values towards multimodality should be considered as a meaningful offer.

Climate change will fundamentally change the transport sector. A key role is played by electro mobility.

Martin Faulstich, Director of the INZIN Institute, Scientific Director of the Congress IONICA and former Advisor to the German government
Innovative traffic control systems for urban traffic – best practice examples from Europe

The demand for sustainable and integrated solutions for urban mobility is growing. According to Dieter Pejrimovsky, Solution Manager in the regions Europe, Middle East and North Africa at Kapsch TrafficCom Vienna, “mobility contributes to the quality of life in cities and is not only a prerequisite for economic growth and trade, but also for creativity and well-being”. In his keynote address in the podi- um, “Innovative traffic control systems - best practice examples from Europe”, he stated that “the global trend of rapid urbanization is accompanied by rising traffic levels, crowds and air pollution, as well as in- creasing urban resource and energy consumption”. Kapsch BusinessCom, a Kapsch Group, offers holistic mobility solutions and fully integrated software solutions for the future of interzonal transport. Smart Urban Development is the key to Mega Trends Urbanization. However, in order to implement the Infrastructure Program, fixed budgets are needed, Pejrimovsky pointed out.

In order to optimize the public traffic flow between cities and regions, there are three starting points for Salzburger Verkehrsverbund Director Allegra Fromm, to be considered. Firstly, people from the region should get as far as possible into the city and thus to their destination, without having to change. Secondly, it is precisely in regional traffic with half-hourly or hourly intervals for punctuality and reliabil- ity. Thirdly, it is about providing the best possible cus- tomer information - both analogue and digital - so that passengers are guided quickly, easily and clearly to their public transport offer. Buses and trains will be ideally “guided” into the city. Furthermore, she referred to practical solutions such as guided private transport, which does not hinder public transport as well as on their own bus lanes and tracks. Subse- quently, the free choice of means of transport is in the foreground, followed by coordinated space and traffic planning.

Another point that became apparent when talking about traffic and mobility in and around cities is, according to Georg-Friedrich Koppen, Head of the Department of Mobility, Urban Development Planning Department of the City of Munich in Germany, “environmentally friendly traffic efficient parking space management. The basic requirement is attrac- tive public transport. Munich has managed to reduce traffic in the city, although the number of inhabitants has increased”, said Koppen. In order to be able to still cope with the growth in the population in the fu- ture, the associated traffic flows have to be handled in an environmentally sound manner, in particular in the city, thus saving space, low emissions, energy sa- ving and safe for traffic. This requires an orientation of settlement development towards an efficient and reliable public transport system, complemented by attractive and safe conditions for pedestrians and cy- clists”. The unavailable vehicle traffic must therefore be managed in an environmentally sound way, and new possibilities for digitization in transport could make a significant contribution. The development of rapid-transit railways, mobility stations as well as car-sharing and bike-sharing systems sees Koppen as promising, which is already well received and used in Munich.

Cities face many challenges such as noise, road sa- fety hazards, congestion, and poor air quality due to growing cities and increased mobilization demand that does not stop at the city border. According to Rainer Müller, Senior Expert for Future Cities at the Urban Innovation Vienna (UIV) in the City of Vien- na, lies the solution in the concept of a productive city” and referred to the project ‘Vital Nodes’ which aims “an efficient and sustainable transport of goods through the TEN-T nodes (urban areas), bringing together existing European, national and regional networks. The project provides evidence-based re- commendations for the effective and sustainable integration of the nodes in the TEN-T corridors with a focus on the multi- and inter zone linkage of long distance and last mile freight logistics. In addition, it also supports deployment in urban hubs and at the same time establishes a sustainable network of Euro- pean experts,” explained the panellist, who presen- ted the city of Vienna as a best practice example of functioning public transport. The capital of Austria is actively involved in the Commission’s EU Framework Strategy.

In the neighbouring state Switzerland, however, the mobility problem of the cities is different. It is very often a “utilization problem and the avoidance of shuttle traffic became a new trend”, says Smart City Switzerland’s Project Leader Benjamin Szemkus. „Here it is important to find solutions with suitable simple measures: Carpooling, new ways of working and working hours of consistently promoting slow traffic can achieve a great deal. It is important to in- volve local people. Prescribed top-down approaches are not the tool of choice“. According to the expert, there are no smart cities but only “smart citizens” who already live a strong environmental awareness in Switzerland on a daily basis. Consequently, the citi- zens are in the focus. Businesses and Industries are important partners and play an instrument, among other things, to prevent the rural exodus. According to IRE Chairman Dieter Schauburger, the rural depopulati- on is linked to the traffic in the city. “This is similar to the refugee problem: you have to start where the people come from”, concluded the Chairman the conference. The main objective of the conference was to bring together the regional partners, to analyze innovative transport programs and technical solutions, and to use best practice examples to stimulate the deve- lopment of livable cities. In previous years, the IRE expert conferences took place in cooperation with the cities of Trieste (IT), Ljubljana (SLO) and Banja Luka (BiH).
The Bosnian municipalities Berkovići, Teslić and Ugljevik join the IRE network

The IRE network continuously grows in 2018 with the accession of three Bosnian communities. On 13th of December 2017, Franz Schausberger personally welcomed the Mayor of Ugljevik, Vasilije Perić, Teslić’s Mayor Milan Milčević and the President of the Assembly of Berkovići, Stefan Muratović (representing Mayor Nenad Abramović). The delegation was accompanied by IRE Advisory Board member Jugoslav Jovicić.

"Today’s signing of the delegation to co-operate with the IRE will enable the Institute to support these communities and connect them with other IRE network members," emphasized Schausberger.

Municipality of Ugljevik

The Municipality of Ugljevik is located in the north-eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The name Ugljevik was first mentioned in written documents in the Turkish census in 1535. The name was obtained by surface coal, whose organized exploitation began in 1899, under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The area of the municipality is 164 km², with 16,528 inhabitants in 25 settlements. The geostatic position of the Municipality of Ugljevik is very favorable. The municipality is located 165 km from Sarajevo, 160 km from Belgrade, at a distance of about 50 km from Ugljevik, it is connected to the pan-European corridor 10. Closest international airport is Tuzla, just 50 km away. Ugljevik belongs to a group of developed municipalities. The holder of the economic development is the Coal Mine and Power Plant Ugljevik, with an annual production of 1,600 GWh of electricity, and exploitation of 1,900,000 tons of coal per year. Total geological reserves of coal in the Ugljevik-Prčanj basin range to 430 million tons. Ugljevik has significant reserves of limestone, clay and marl as the basic raw materials for the potential production of cement. The area of the Ugljevik municipality belongs to the well-known agricultural region, especially in fruit production. In the structure of the fruit, plum is dominated by total production of 70%, followed by apple, pear etc. plums are ripe 10 days earlier than in other municipalities in the region, due to specific micro-climate conditions. Municipality of Ugljevik

Municipality of Teslić

Teslić municipality is located in the central part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Republic of Srpska entity, and represents one of the largest municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. About 42,000 residents live in the Teslić municipality area, while 12,000 people reside in the urban area of Teslić. The distances between Teslić and large European cities: 650km from Vienna, 900km from Munich, 300km from Belgrade, etc. Teslić is a relatively young town. It was established at the end of the 19th century near two factories for wood processing when the Austro-Hungarian Empire came to Bosnia and Herzegovina. These factories still exist and work. Teslić municipality is rich with forest and thermo-mineral water potential. The wood processing industry became the dominant sector and thermal springs enabled development of tourism in Teslić, especially spa- and congress tourism. This has made Teslić the largest spa-center in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Beside the mentioned, the most important economy sectors are the metal processing sector, textile and leather processing industries, and chemical industry. The companies in Teslić are mainly export-oriented and cooperate with numerous international brands. During the last few years, business activities have been steadily growing and that reflects in export increases, growth of the number of the employees, etc. Municipal government proactively tends to follow the needs of its residents and fulfill the requirements of economic entities via investing in the infrastructure and giving support to the companies, but also with active promotion of Teslić as an investment location. As a result, the ranking of the BEAR area, consisting of Teslić and neighboring municipalities Zepce and Tseanj, among ten top destinations for investing in Europe in the category of cost-effectiveness for the investors in 2014/15. The ranking is announced in the FDŽ Magazine, which is the part of the Financial Times group. Beside business opportunities, Teslić offers good conditions for sport and recreation activities to its residents, as well as to the tourists who visit this municipality in growing numbers.

Romanian cities receive additional EU funding

The buildings of the county museums Arges and the Rudolf Schäffler Cumpăna Art Gallery in the southern Romanian City of Pitesti (IRE-Member City) will be refurbished with EU funds totaling more than eight million Euros. Both buildings are architectural monuments and their renovation is carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Culture over a period of 44 months (3.6 years). The Arges County Museum is being refurbished in a 4.5 million Euro project, largely through non-refundable funding. Source: romanian-insider.com

Ukrainian regions as pioneers

Construction volume of Ivano-Frankivsk was almost 62 million Euros

In 2017, the volume of construction works in the IRE member region Ivano-Frankivsk amounted almost 2 billion UAH (about 62 million euros). The construction industry plays an important role, last year, the total volume of construction work amounted to 1.9 billion UAH, the largest share of the distribution of production volumes - that is, 68 percent - of new construction, reconstruction and technical conversion of buildings. The general overhaul accounted for 23 percent and housing repair for nine percent, said the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Administration reported on the 28th of March 2018. Source: menofi.com

Region of Šibenik-Knin

Renovation of coves, beaches and promenades

The region of Šibenik-Knin finances the rehabilitation of maritime property in three cities and six municipalities with a fund of 1.5 million kuna (about 2 million euros). The prefect of Šibenik-Knin County, Goran Pauk, signed joint finance agreements on the 21st of March 2018 with representatives of the municipalities of Šibenik, Vodice and Skradin and representatives of the municipalities of Bilice, Pirovac, Tribušn, Primosten and Murter-Kornati the rehabilitation of maritime property. The coastal roads, bays, beaches and promenades in the entire Šibenik-Knin region are sanctioned, said the prefect Goran Pauk. Source: iskra.hr
CoR opinion for Bulgarian EU Council Presidency

Western Balkans: Decentralisation and regional cooperation are crucial for a credible enlargement perspective

On 5th of February the European Commission adopted A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans; the European Committee of the Regions held a debate on how to better include local and regional authorities from Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the EU’s existing macro-regional, cross-border and other transnational cooperation initiatives during a meeting of its Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX). Following a request to draw up an opinion from the Bulgarian Presidency, the CoR will propose that decentralisation must be a strong pillar for democratic reform. Ope-

ring the debate on his opinion as the rapporteur general, Franz Schausberger, underlined the European Commission has presented ‘a very ambitious and credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkan Countries Combined with the year 2025 and the very clear statement that the Western Balkan countries cannot join the EU in the condition they are in today and they have to meet all the membership cri-
tera without any exceptions’. Under these preconditions and with strong political will, he noted, that Serbia and Montene-

gro could potentially be ready for mem-

bership by 2025. Accession negotiations could be opened with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the basis of totally fulfilled conditions.

Franz Schausberger discussed on the 15th of January 2018 his statement on the Western Balkans with Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neigh-

bourhood Policy Johannes Hahn. With sustained effort and engagement, Bosnia and Herzegovina could become a candidate-State and Kosovo could advan-

cese on its European path. Summarising his position, the rapporteur stressed: ‘Decentralisation is a pillar of the demo-
cratic reform process in the Western Bal-

cans. Regional and local governments in Western Balkan should be an integral part of the regular negotiations in the frame of the EU accession process’. In addition to the lessons learned from existing macro-

regional strategies, the CoR points out that people-to-people and small-scale projects in cross-border cooperation programmes could play a significant role in reconcilia-

tion along the problematic borders in the Western Balkans. ‘It is in the cross-border interactions of people and in working to-

gether with your neighbours where the be-

nefit of European integration is most stron-
gly felt. These projects supported by the EU can help regenerate enthusiasm about Europe and set the Western Balkans on the right path’ Franz Schausberger added. Despite the long term planning presented by the European Commission, the urgency of adoption of this opinion was generated by the EU-Western Balkans Summit on the 17th of May 2018, in Sofia, organised by the Bulgarian Presidency and where the CoR has been invited to make a strong input. The opinion, drawn up by Franz Schaus-

berger, was adopted in the CoR Plenary session on 22nd of March.

Statement from the CoR members of the Subsidiarity Task Force following the appointment of its members

“We welcome the appointment of the Task Force on Subsidi-

arity and Proportionality members, which marks the launch of its work. The Task Force should particularly consider ways to strengthen the involvement of local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of European policies. Subsidiarity should be seen as a means of designing a Europe that works better and which pursues a commitment to Europe shared by all levels of governance, as stressed by the Rome Declaration in March 2017. The reflection on subsidiarity cannot, however, endorse Europe’s disengagement in the field of regional deve-

lopment, as envisaged in Scenario 4 of the Commission’s White Paper on the Future of Europe. We advocate a Europe that is closer to its citizens and that is able to provide itself with the means to match its ambitions. It is with this in mind that we will contribute to the work of the Task-Force.”

Source: European Committee of the Regions (CoR)

Medimurje region as one of the top 10 regions for investment in Europe

Award for investment

On the 14th of March 2018, the FDI magazine, a division of the Fi-
nancial Times Ltd., has named the Medimurje region as one of the Top 10 small regions of the Future 2018/2019 in terms of attrac-
tiveness of investments in Europe. The award was presented to County Prefect Matija Posavec in Cannes, France. Medimurje has been presented as an attractive business destination that brings European values and business practices to Croatia, providing good education, prosperity as well as innovation.

Posavec noted that this was a further acknowledgement that the region was doing a good job, which has been recognized in Euro-

pean business circles. „We now have the responsibility to continue delivering positive economic results and further improving them,” said Posavec, who also had a working meeting with Andrej Fista-

vec, Mayor of Maribor (IRE member city) and Vitali Kitschko, the Mayor of Kiev. They agreed to continue the long-term cooperation of their regions.

Source: total-croatia-news.com

Conference covers Poland’s experience with EU funds

Greater participation of Croatian županijas in financial negotiations process

„For the next financial period, we need to set the strategic prio-

rities of the Republic of Croatia in the coming years. In order to achieve this, it is important to involve citizens, but also representa-
vates of universities, representatives of regional and local govern-

ment as well as civil society organizations” stated Goran Pauk, Croatian County Association President, at a conference on 22nd of February 2018 in Zagreb.

The conference „Experiences of Poland in the Negotiation Pro-
cesses and the Importance of Regional Operational Programs for the Development of Regions” was organized by the Croatian County Association and the Ministry of Regional Development and Funds. Following the initiative of greater participation of the Croatian counties (županija) in the negotiations and the recogniti-
on of the importance of the operational programs for regional de-

velopment in cohesion policy, the Croatian regions have brought two Polish specialists to Zagreb thanks to the good cooperation with the Polish Democratic Alliance.

Source: vase hv
BiH’s electoral law and EU-Enlargement Strategy

At a meeting in the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo on 8th of February 2018, Franz Schausberger discussed with the Vice-President, Mladen Bosic, and the President of the Srpska Demokratska Stranka (SDS), Vukota Govedarica, the electoral law of the state and the new EU strategy for the Western Balkans.

Schausberger emphasized that the pace of BiH’s accession to the EU depends primarily on domestic institutions and political representatives, and is determined by BiH itself. The European Union continues to support BiH on its way to joining the EU, but all the conditions necessary for BiH to become a candidate country must be met.

Kosovo ratifies border agreement with Montenegro

On the 21st of March 2018, after many years of attempts, the Kosovar Parliament succeeded in ratifying a border agreement between Kosovo and neighboring Montenegro. 80 of the 120 MPs – and thus the required two-thirds majority – voted in favor of the agreement. The vote for the border agreement was one of the most important prerequisites for the Kosovo state, for the EU and NATO perspectives of the country as well as for a visa-free entry into the EU, said the IRE Board Member Lukas Mandl, a member of the European Parliament. “I congratulate the Kosovar population on this milestone. (...) Of course, the visa-free regime is also crucial for the economic rise of Kosovo.”

At the same time, Mandl, who is also a member of the Bosnian-Kosovo delegation of the EU Parliament, emphasized that the agreement is also crucial for the economic rise of Kosovo. “The entire Western Balkans region is surrounded by EU member states. Under no circumstances, explained Schausberger, should we allow forces from outside Europe – like Russia, Turkey, reactionary Islamic states or China – to take the place of the EU.”

“It is well-known that not all EU member states are in favor of enlargement by the Western Balkan states. However, they all must finally agree to the accession of new EU Member States and therefore need to be prepared for enlargement and convinced that the enlargement strategy not only offers a great historical opportunity for the countries of the Western Balkans, but also for the EU itself,” Schausberger closed his speech.

13th NALAS General Assembly in Slovenia

On the 18th of April 2018, IRE Chairman Franz Schausberger, representing the President of the European Committee of the Regions, Karl Heinz Lambertz and Special Adviser to Commissioner Johannes Hahn, attended the 13th General Assembly of NALAS in Brdo, Slovenia.

In his keynote speech Schausberger underlined that NALAS is a very important network of associations of local authorities of South East Europe as well as an important strategic partner for the European Union, especially for the Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission. Furthermore, he referred to the fruitful partnership and tight cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions and subsequently proposed that NALAS should be integrated and promoted to a greater extent at European level.

Schausberger pointed to the 6th of February 2018, where the European Commission presented a comprehensive Western Balkans strategy, which intends to give the six countries a perspective towards 2025. However, the Chairman sees the year 2025 neither as a fixed accession date nor a target, but only as a possible time horizon. The countries of the Western Balkans must therefore achieve reconciliation and solve open issues together, ahead of the accession.

The seven million Croatian Kuna contract, for which an 85 percent subsidy has been granted from EU funds, will allow the development of a regional Transport Strategy Paper (Master Plan) to strengthen the region’s development potential.

Sisak-Moslavina wants to become the Croatian center of the computer games industry

Sisak-Moslavina would like to become the Croatian center of the computer games industry, prefect Žinić emphasized at the presentation of the incubator PISMO - Novska, the first Croatian incubator for games industry, on the 26th of January 2018. It is an investment of 25 million kuna, which includes two buildings renovated in Novska, which provide premises for 16 companies. The project will be realized within the framework of “Business Infrastructure Development”, initiated by the Croatian Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Trade and implemented by the development agency SIMORA and is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

Delegation of the Virovitica-Podravina region on a working visit to the Sisak-Moslavina region

Sisak-Moslavina’s Prefect Ivo Žinić, welcomed together with his deputies Roman Rosavec and Ivan Celačak, on 30th of January 2018, the prefect of the Virovitica-Podravina region, Igor Andreović, with his deputies Marijo Klement and Darko Žužak, who came to Sisak-Moslavina for a return visit. The Virovitica-Podravina region is also a member of the IRE.

News from the IRE member region Sisak-Moslavina (Croatia)

From left: Mico Mitic (former NALAS President), Darko Pras (NALAS President) and Emanuil Manolov (Vice-President)
Regional elections in Belgrade

Vučić wins municipal elections

On the 4th of March 2018, municipal elections were held in the Serbian capital Belgrade, which had more than just local political significance. 1,606,931 people were eligible to vote, who had to choose between 24 lists. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and his Progressive Party (SNS) clearly won Vučić reached 45 as a SNS list leader. His party won 64 of the 110 seats of the Belgrade City Council. Thus, the SNS does not need a coalition partner.

His main contender, former Belgrade mayor and entrepreneur Dragan Šapić, came to 18.9 percent and 26 seats. The former mayor of New Belgrade, Aleksandar Sapić, won 9.0 percent and 12 seats. The Serbian Socialist Party, which is a coalition partner of the SNS at the state level, achieved 6.1 percent and thus holds eight seats in the Municipal Council of Belgrade. All other parties failed at the 5 percent hurdle and missed the entry into the council.

However, Blaž accused his opponent of undemocratic practices and talked about buying votes. The president of the City Electoral Commission, Zoran Lukić, said that there were no major problems with the voting process. Vučić had led the list of his SNS, although the Constitution prohibits. It requires a separation of offices. Nevertheless, his party’s electoral list was officially named “Aleksandar Vučić - be-a Belgrade”.

Local elections in the Netherlands

Successes for right-wing populists, Greens and right-wingers hold positions

12.5 million Dutch were eligible to vote their regional parliaments on the 21st of March 2018. This election in 333 municipalities was a year after the national parliamentary election also a mood test for the parties in The Hague. The voter turnout was 46.7 percent, slightly higher than in 2014 (45.1 percent).

The right-wing populist Freedom Party (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV) led by Geert Wilders succeeded in winning the parliament in several cities, including Rotterdam and Utrecht. The party is represented for the first time in 30 instead of two municipalities (The Hague and Almere).

In Rotterdam, the right-wing Populist Party “Leefbaar Rotterdam” (Liveable Rotterdam) remained the strongest force. In Amsterdam, the extreme right-wing National Forum for Democracy (PVV) by

Election winners demand more autonomy, but no secession

More than 119,107 Corsicans cast their votes in the regional election on 10th of December 2017, in which 63 Assembly Members were elected. The turnout was 52.5 percent, in the first round 52.1 percent.

In the first round of the regional elections, the national alliance list “98 a Corsica” (For Corsica) was clearly in the lead with 45 percent. In the second and decisive round of the election on the French Mediterranean island, the list won clear with 56.5 percent. Thus, the party reached 41 out of 63 seats.

The candidates of the Alliance party, Gilles Simeoni (Femu a Corsica) - Let's create Corsica, under which the list is run and Jean-Guy Talanomì (Corsica Libera) - Free Corsica, celebrated their electoral victory. The nationalist parties are seeking greater autonomy for Corsica, but do not want complete separation from France. Additionally, they demand equal recognition of the Corsican language in addition to French, recognition of a Corsican residence status in the fight against real estate speculation from abroad and amnesty for inmates who they regard as political prisoners.

From left: Gilles Simeoni (Femu a Corsica) and Jean-Guy Talanomì (Corsica Libera)

Election winners demand more autonomy, but no secession

Thierry Baudet achieved a success and will move into the City Hall for the first time. The Far Right Forum for Democracy (PVV) and EU-critical party occupies two of the 45 seats in the city council of Amsterdam.

Strongest party in the two largest cities Amsterdam and Utrecht, became the Green party GroenLinks. The Social Democratic Party of Labor (PvdA) and the social-liberal D66 lost votes in most major cities, while the right-wing VVD of Prime Minister Mark Rutte gained votes in some municipalities.

Landtag election in Lower Austria

ÖVP creates an absolute majority

On Sunday, 28th of January 2018, the regional state of Lower Austria elected its parliament. 66.47 percent of the eligible voters chose their new state parliament (Landtag). After counting the votes, the ÖVP comes to 49.60 percent, thus defending its similar result (50.8 percent) in the 2013 state parliament election.

Subsequently, the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) reaches the absolute majority in the state parliament and comes to 29 seats. The former Minister of the Interior and top candidate Johanna Mikl-Leitner emerged as election winner and remains Landeshauptfrau (governor). The ÖVP is thus clearly ahead of the SPO (23.90 percent) and the FPÖ (14.08 percent). The Greens received 6.40 percent of the votes and are consequently still represented in the state parliament. With 5.20 percent, the NEOS made it with 5.21 percent, respectively two mandates, for the first time in the Tyrole-

Local elections in Corsica

Election winners demand more autonomy, but no secession

Landtag election in Carinthia, Austria

SPÖ won with 47.95 percent

In Austria, the third state election this year took place in province of Carinthia on the 4th of March 2018. The turnout was 68.36 percent, 440,748 people were eligible to vote.

The election winner in the Carinthian state parliament is the SPO (Social Democratic Party) with top candidate and governor Peter Kaiser. The party received 47.94 percent of the vote (+1.05 percent points) and gained 18 of the 36 seats. Compared to the last state election in 2013 the SPO won three mandates, reaching half of the seats in the Carinthian state parliament.

In second place follows the FPÖ (Freedom Party) which was able to record 22.96 percent of the votes and is represented in the future with nine instead of six members. The ÖVP (People’s Party) reached 15.45 percent (+1.05) and won a seat. In the future the
Landtag election in Salzburg

Landslide victory for Governor Haslauer

The regional state election in Salzburg took place on the 22nd of April 2018. Over 390,000 votes were used to elect a new regional parliament in Land Salzburg. Voter turnout was 64.9 percent. The ÖVP is the big winner of the state election. The top candidate Wilfried Haslauer made the expected victory. The party achieved a proud 37.8 percent, an increase of 8.8 percentage points to the last election in 2013. Thus, the party provides 15 (+4 seats) of the 36 seats in the state parliament (Landtag). The ÖVP reached the second place with 20 percent. However, the party with leading contender Walter Steidl touched 3.8 percentage points to the previous election in 2013 losses. The party now occupies eight seats (-1) in the Salzburg Parliament. The FPO candidate with candidate Mariene Swaczek came to 18.8 percent. That means an increase of 1.8 percentage points and the third place of the election. The Freedom Party will be represented with seven seats (+1) in the regional parliament. The greatest loss of all parties is recorded by the Greens. They lost 10.9 percentage points after the provisional final result and came to 9.3 percentage points and only 3 (-1) seats. Winners are also the Neos. The top candidate Sepp Schulthess reached 7.3 percent of the vote and is represented with three seats in the state parliament. The remaining lists remained below the necessary 5 percent hurdle. In total, five political groups are represented in the parliament. Source: ORF, APA/Barbara Gindl

Mayoral election in the City of Salzburg

ÖVP candidate won mayor’s chair

On 26th of November 2017, the first round of the mayoral election took place in the City of Salzburg. Exactly 1,545 votes separated the two candidates in the first ballot. Harald Preuner (ÖVP) received 35.01 percent of the votes; Bernhard Auinger (SPÖ) came to 31.88 percent. This resulted in a run-off between these two candidates. Eligible voters in the ballot on 10th of December 2017 were, as in candidates.

Source: orf.at, kurier.at and APA/Gerhard Hothaus

Peter Kaiser, Governor of Carinthia

Harald Preuner, Mayor of Salzburg

EU and Ukrainian local governments establish partnerships to support decentralisation reform

The European Union increased its support for local and regional authorities in Ukraine in the 8th of March, with the launch of five partnerships between Ukrainian and EU regions and cities. Estonian, German, Hungarian, Lithuanian and Polish communities share their experience in areas identified as priorities by their Ukrainian partners - drawing up economic development plans, supporting rural areas, helping small and medium-sized enterprises, boosting tourism, and increasing transparency.

The initiative is part of a broader effort by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to support the decentralisation of power in Ukraine, a process that began in April 2014 and that has seen a consolidation of local governments, an increase in their funding and the transfer of greater powers to them. Financial support comes from the European Commission, with GIZ, the German development agency, providing day-to-day technical support.

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, the President of the CoR, said: „Local and regional governments are working together to encourage decentralisation and increase capacity-building by providing practical support to communities in Ukraine. Strengthening relations and sharing good policy is in the interests of local communities and will ensure a secure, more prosperous European neighbourhood.”

Source: cor.europa.eu

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At a working meeting between the State Secretary in the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, Mag. Karoline Edtstadler and IRE Chairman Dr. Franz Schausberger in Vienna focused on questions of immigration challenges and the refugee issue on the countries of the Western Balkans as well as on the museum complex „Mauthausen Concentration Camp“. Schausberger pointed out that we should not forget that the countries of the Western Balkans played a particularly important role in coping with the refugee problem on the so-called „Balkan route“ and, first and foremost, the cities and towns along the route have taken heavy burdens.

Austria’s Government Program is a positive foundation for a more efficient and citizen-closer EU

“It is extremely positive that the work program of the new Federal Government in Austria has not only made a clear commitment to the European Union, but also concretely places the principle of subsidiarity at the heart of the further development of the EU“, stated Franz Schausberger. This includes the decentralization of responsibilities at national, regional and local levels and as a result clearly against a centralized EU. It is very positive that this will be an important topic of Austria’s EU presidency.

Additionally, Schausberger added that it is particularly pleasing that the new Federal Government will work to ensure that the EU focuses on the essential issues in the future, as proposed in scenario 4 of the White Paper of the Future of Europe (”Less, but more efficient“). Subsequently, it is important to support the organization of a separate EU Convention, which should prepare Austria’s contribution to a European subsidiarity pact which leads to greater proximity to citizens in the EU. For this, the Institute of the Regions of Europe would like to make constructive suggestions, said Schausberger.

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