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Bringing Europe closer to its citizens

During the few days spent in Brussels the thought that in many discussions came forward was, “we should bring Europe closer to citizen.” I think Europe is closer to us than we would think. Only the acknowledgement falters at times. Usually citizens tend to think about EU as a group of politicians, in well-tailored suits, discussing highly intellectual political issues at the extravagantly enormous EU institution for the whole day. Instead of this vision, EU should be seen as a group in which each citizen of the world can take part in discussions to better the EU as a whole.

The most effective way for bringing Europe closer to its people is to show them that the EU is not just about being in huge buildings in Brussels, but EU is in small cities, countries small and large, and at home in our daily life. Therefore, in the following essay, I am addressing, firstly the citizens of my hometown by pointing out how much of a presence the EU has in our daily life.

The EU assembly of local and regional representatives, the Committee of the Regions, ensure that the interests, concerns and recommendations of the regions, cities, counties or provinces be taken into account by the EU's institutional framework. My country, Romania is represented in the CoR through 15 delegation member. The county of my hometown, Csíkszereda (Harghita county), is represented by the President of Harghita County Council, Borboly Csaba, who takes part in the Environment, Climate Change and Energy and Commission for Education, Youth, Culture and Research CoR Commissions and is member of the EPP Group.

The Committee of the Regions impacts the lives of the citizens of my county mainly through the cooperation between the CoR and the Harghita County Council. The objectives of the Harghita County Council are congruent with the guidelines of EU policies. For instance, through the development policy for business environment, Harghita County Council sets a priority to provide the innovation of the small and medium-sized businesses by creating a favorable environment for enterprises. It promotes the participation of citizens of the county in international cooperation projects, provides opportunities for experience exchanges in entrepreneurship and innovation (for example, the county council is involved in FIDIBE - South East Europe Project) and wish to conduct a better communication to find out the county's business needs.

Hence, a recent initiative of the local authorities sets as objective to launch a program that will enhance the ability of young entrepreneurs to create specific businesses that fits a given resources of the region and to increase the entrepreneurial potential of the rural population by reteaching old, forgotten traditional activities and promoting the local traditions.

Another initiative in agricultural and production sector is the so called Székely Product Program, which promotes the production of local, natural products and embrace the small farmers, producers in agricultural and food production sector. Through this program the traditional local products become easily accessible to consumers. On 25 November 2013 the first Székely products shop opened in Miercurea-Ciuc, which wished to expand the jurisdiction of local, conscious consumption and to promote the tourism of the region. Harghita County Council's and the CoR have an intermediary role in this process by providing communication between the domestic producers and foreign trade networks. Harghita Country participated in Open Doors program in Brussels, where it presented the project, exhibiting some of the products.

Other projects in which Harghita County Council take part are for example the Robinwood project in forestry sector, a project aimed to ensure the economic development of the region and to promote entrepreneurship in rural areas, or the REESEETies project in energy sector, which promotes the efficient energy use.

In the educational sector one of the most important initiatives was the adoption of the draft opinion of the President of Harghita County about the global role of the European higher education. This initiative has a highly importance for our multilingual region. On the one hand this is due to the minority language in higher education that has become present in the past few decades. The proposal emphasizes that students, from less prestigious universities (such as the Sapiențis University), have similar opportunities as students from prestigious western european universities. Thus, the draft opinion, which was preceded by a series of negotiations and regional consultation, reflects clearly the interests of the citizens in this region.

Moreover, since 1993 Harghita Council is member of the Assembly of European Regions and took part in the Eurodyssee program aimed to promote the experience-exchange of young people from Harghita county abroad and the foreign youth in our county. As a result of the work of the AER Agriculture and Rural Development Working Group, in which two member András Zoltánt and dr. Kassay Jánost represent the Székely farmer's interests at EU level was the recently adopted, so called Common Agricultural Policy Proposal.

In the near future, our county intends to become a member of five international organizations (ERRIN, AEM, PURPLE, ACR +, ICLEI) in order to expand the foreign affairs of the Harghita county by common projects and programs.

Although we citizens don't acknowledge daily the daily influence of the EU, all this above-mentioned initiatives and activities highlight the fact, that the EU is present in our region and it has a significant impact on our daily life.