



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union

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Skopje, 26 April 2012

**Conference
on the occasion of
the 40th Anniversary of ZELS**

Speaking points
Ambassador Aivo Orav
Head of the EU Delegation

**Dear Prime Minister Gruevski,
Dear Minister Bejta,
Dear President of ZELS, Mr. Trajanovski,
Dear Excellencies, Dear Mayors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure to be here today at the 40th anniversary of ZELS.

At the beginning of my address, I would like to emphasise the importance of ZELS.

ZELS stands for a sole representative of the interests of the municipalities in the country. It is of utmost importance to preserve and enhance the role and effectiveness of ZELS as the key interlocutor and key advocate of the needs and concerns of the municipalities. ZELS has set an excellent example during the different phases of the decentralization process, adopting the vast majority of its decisions by consensus. ZELS stands for dialogue. The dialogue of the municipalities with the central government and the dialogue between the different municipalities within ZELS itself - smaller and bigger, urban and rural.

ZELS is also a service provider – and needs to keep up its good work in this respect. It is important that the municipalities feel that ZELS caters to their needs, not only as the advocate of

their interests towards the central institutions but also in practical terms such as dissemination of information or organisation of trainings for municipal staff.

It is of utmost importance to preserve the impartiality and unity in ZELS, as well as its financial and political independence. The EU will continue to support ZELS in the future as we did in the past.

Financial assistance

Let me assure you of the EU's clear commitment to **continue its support for the decentralisation process** in very tangible ways and through **EU financial assistance**. Support is provided to the Government, on both central and municipal level, specialised bodies and civil society to strengthen capacities to implement the decentralisation agenda.

Total EU assistance in this sector amounts to nearly € 70 million.

Conclusions

The ultimate beneficiaries of a successful decentralisation process are all the citizens of this country. In the final phase of the decentralisation process, it will be necessary for the Government to devote significant efforts and resources to make decentralization fully operational. Constructive communication and co-operation between the Government and the

municipalities will continue to be of essence.

The EU will continue to actively support the decentralisation process and we are looking forward to continue our intensive cooperation with all of you: the government, the municipalities and their representative **ZELS**.

I wish you success today and in the important joint endeavour of strengthening democracy at the level closest to the citizen!

Thank you for your attention.