Transparency and Anticorruption Reform Agenda of the Municipality of 2022-2027

I.   Introduction

Vulnerabilities to corruption, manifested in shortcomings in effective transparency, as well as in the ineffective use of integrity mechanisms, and low levels of civic engagement are perils to local democracy and citizens' trust in municipal institutions.

Building upon:

-       the principled commitment to work for more transparency, accessibility, anticorruption measures, and citizen engagement as stipulated in the Municipal Pact for Anticorruption, signed by the Deputy Mayor Ms. Vesna Baltina on behalf of the Mayor of the Municipality of Burgas, Mr. Dimitar Nikolov on 19 July 2022 at the IRI National Conference "Combatting Vulnerabilities to Corruption at the Municipal Level", which took place in Sofia, Bulgaria;

and

-       the findings and recommendations in the report "Assessing Municipal Vulnerabilities to Corruption in Bulgaria: An Examination of Ten Bulgarian Municipalities", published by IRI in July 2022;

this Transparency and Anticorruption Reform Agenda has been designed and adopted with consensus by the Working Group in the Municipality of Burgas, which brings together representatives of the municipal administration, the municipal council, and civil society.

This is a strategic document that suggests pragmatic short-term and longer-term reforms aimed at increasing effective transparency and citizen participation so as to address vulnerabilities to corruption. Each reform includes an overview of its rationale, objective, timeframe, and implementation process.

This Reform Agenda seeks to inform and stimulate a process of change through reform implementation in the Municipality of Burgas that will ultimately improve the lives of citizens.

II.   Short-term reforms [1]

Reform 1: Establishing a Mechanism for communication between the municipal authorities and civil society organizations

Rationale for the suggested reform:
The interaction between the municipality and civil society representatives in the Municipality of Burgas should be facilitated and improved with more elements of regularity, predictability, and sustainability. There is the perception that information about upcoming public consultations does not always reach civil society organizations. Also, the municipality does not fully benefit from the expertise of civil society organizations. In general, there is the perception that there is no regular and direct comunication and targeted provision of information and outreach to civil society organizations in the processes of creating policies and procedures.

Objective:
More effective and regular communication between the administration and civil society organizations with a view to their involvement in the processes of consulting and drafting of municipal policies and activities.

The mechanism for communication with civil society organizations should include the following components:

- Regular communication with NGOs, including communication channels, priority information to be shared through these channels, and frequency of communication with deadlines for sharing specific categories of information, for example, providing regular information to civil society organizations through a newsletter, as well as the information that this newsletter includes.
- Proactive provision of information to civil society organizations in particular about the upcoming public consultations.
- Updating and maintaining an NGO mailing list including information/database on the field of activity and expertise of individuals and organisations.
- Informing and involving civil society organizations in the processes of developing documentation and funding rules for municipal policies, projects and programs.
- Annual meeting, organized by the administration, for monitoring and updating of the current program, with the participation of representatives of the administration, the Municipal Council, and civil society organizations. The first meeting should be organised in 2024. A report on the results of each meeting should be submitted to the Municipal Council for information within one month after the meeting takes place.

Process:
- Municipal administration and civil society organizations in cooperation should initiate and hold consultative meetings in order to generate proposals under the above elements of the mechanism for communication with civil society organizations.
- Based on the collected information on the needs and preferences of civil society organizations relevant to the mechanism, the administration and the civil sector organisations should jointly prepare a draft of the mechanism to be subjected to initial

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[1] With a performance horizon of one year.

discussion in a working format with an extended circle of civil society representatives, so that the project is revised and/or validated by them.

- After finalizing the mechanism, the municipal administration is to commit to its implementation. The finalized mechanism can be submitted by the Mayor for information (and adoption by) the Municipal Council of Burgas Municipality.

Resources:
- Human resources and time of municipal employees and representatives of civil society organizations.
- Meeting rooms for the consultation meetings on planning and drafting the mechanism.

Roles and responsibilities:
- The administration initiates the process.
- Civil society organizations participate in the developement of the mechanism.

Reform 2: Conducting awareness-raising campaigns on corruption and its prevention

Rationale for the suggested reform:
Citizens are not aware of the existing mechanisms and structures for preventing and countering corruption at the municipal level. This means that whatever efforts the municipality makes in this direction, they will have a limited effect, as due to this lack of awareness civil society could not fulfil its important role to report cases of corruption pressure/practices and conflicts of interest, as well as to monitor and control the integrity of the processes and activities related to the implementation of municipal policies and projects.

Objective:
Raising citizen awareness on how to prevent and combat corruption.

The reform should achieve the following results:
- Citizens become more aware on how to prevent and report corruption;
- Citizens have greater confidence in the ability and willingness of municipal leaders to combat corruption;
- Citizens become more aware about the procedure for obtaining information under the Access to Public Information Act.

Process:
- Identify and classify anti-corruption actions and mechanisms in use in the municipality.

  The municipal administration and the administration of the Municipal Council should develop jointly an overview document describing the measures and structures introduced in both institutions to prevent and counter corruption, including the prevention and identification of conflicts of interest.

  After developing this overview document, the administration should initiate meetings with local civic associations to discuss the possibility of a joint information campaign.

- Develop an information campaign including an action plan with roles and calendar to raise awareness among citizens of the identified measures and structures.

  The campaign should be developed jointly by the administration and civil society organizations. The municipality could seek external support for planning and implementation of the campaign from non-governmental and expert organizations outside the municipality.

- Define division of labor among municipal officials and civic organizations for carrying out the information campaign activities.

  The campaign should be implemented jointly by the municipality and civil society organizations seeking broad involvement of municipal leaders, local organizations, and the media for optimal promotion.

Resources:
- Communication expertise
- Possible use of municipal premises for in-person activities.
- Additional funding.

Roles and responsibilities:
- **Municipality:** PR/communications officials will lead the technical side of the implementation, with senior public officials and/or council members participating in the campaign activities.
- **Civil society:** Civil society can be partnered for outreach to various groups of citizens or for facilitation of information meetings for citizens.

Reform 3: Update the municipal website from a user experience perspective

Rationale for the suggested reform:
The municipal website provides a lot of information, but users have difficulty finding specific information. It is important to separate the flow of current news from announcements and communication on processes and procedures that are important for citizens.

Objective:
Achieving maximum accessibility, timeliness, relevance, and ease of use of the website.

As a result of the ease of access and use of the website, it is expected that the number of inquiries by phone or in-person queries submitted to municipal officials will decrease.

Process:
- Analysis of the usability of the website.
- Collection of feedback through usability analysis/user experience tools.
- Design of updates to the website in line with the analysis.

- Promotion of the reorganization of the website so that citizens are aware of how their feedback has impacted the organization and prioritization of website content.

Resources:
- Methods for analyzing user experience.
- Web development skills.
- IT infrastructure and software suites.
- Ensuring funding for the process.

Roles and responsibilities:
- **Municipality:** Public relations/communications experts will lead the user experience analysis and generate recommendations based on the collected feedback. IT staff will be responsible for overseeing the website updates and rollout including so that these comply with the requirements of the relevant laws and regulations.
- **Civil society:** Citizens should be the subject of the usability analysis. Community groups or local businesses with a focus on IT could contribute with their skills. In addition, a group of civil society organizations could inspect the web site and make specific suggestions for improving the user experience.

III.   Medium- and long-term reforms[2]

Reform 4: Introduction of a Single Communication Center for Citizens Signals

Rationale for the suggested reform:
The municipality has no problem in to provide quality services to citizens in a timely manner. At the same time, it recognises that the mechanisms for submitting and tracking complaints and signals are insufficiently effective, thereby including signals for corruption. This, in turn, leads to delays in the reaction by the municipality and in undertaking concrete actions.

Objective:
Providing a clear, accessible and effective platform A Single Communication Center for submitting and tracking signals and complaints.

The reform should achieve the following results:
- Greater integration between user experience and the administrative process.
- More efficient response to signals and complaints.
- Citizens feel heard and see the results of their signals/complaints.

Process:
- Review of available software solutions for reporting signals/complaints and tracking of how these are processed by the submitters.
- Inspecting the information flows and reorganizing the related work processes and structures in the administration.
- Development of a technical proposal for the platform, including objectives, funding, and implications for existing administrative processes.
- Secure technical expertise required for developing a tailored platform for the needs of the municipality.

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[2] With a performance horizon of two to five years.

- Design of the administrative process for receiving and responding to signals, which will ensure the functioning of the platform.
- Roll-out of the platform for a test period and introduction of adjustment as needed.
- Development of a media campaign to publicize the platform.
- Conducting periodic analysis of the submitted signals and complaints and ensuring its public release.

Resources:
- IT expertise.
- PR/communications expertise.
- Budget for development, technical and operational maintainance.

Roles and responsibilities:
- **Municipality:** The reform should be led by a senior official (deputy mayor) overseeing a task force on the development of the concept for the introduction of the Single Communication Center.
- **Civil society:** Civil society organizations should be consulted during the process of introducing the Single Communication Center. The media will play an important role in disseminating information about the platform. Building a coalition between the administration, civil society organizations, and the media can significantly support the promotion of the Single Communication Center.

The measures proposed in this program will be developed and implemented with the provision adequate financial resources and in partnership with civil society organizations.

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