Transparency and Anticorruption Reform Agenda
of the Municipality of Razgrad
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 Mr. Miroslav Grancharov on behalf of the Mayor Mr. Dencho Boyadzhiev of the Municipality of Razgrad on 19 July 2022 at the IRI National Conference "Combatting Vulnerabilities to Corruption at the Municipal Level", which took place in Sofia, Bulgaria;

<div align="center">and</div>

- 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 Karzdhali, 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 Kardzhali that will ultimately improve the lives of citizens.

II.   Short-term reforms [1]

Reform 1: Updating the municipal website from a user experience perspective

Rationale for the suggested reform:

The municipal website is hard to navigate, sometimes information is not available or provided selectively. This creates a feeling among citizens of lacking transparency, even in cases when the relevant information is available on the municipal website but citizens cannot find it.

Objective:

The objective of this reform is to carry out an analysis of citizen use of the municipal website and revamping it in order to maximize accessibility, relevance, and ease of use.

This will improve the accessibility of information and the citizen perception about the openness and responsiveness of the municipality.

The following results will be achieved:

- The municipal website is seen as more user-friendly and accessible by citizens.
- Ease of use of the website leads to a decrease in queries submitted to municipal officials by phone or in-person.

Process:

- Design a usability analysis methodology with the relevant tools (for example: survey, focus groups, usability testing).
- Roll out the usability tools and complete evidence.
- Analyze the results from the user experience tools.
- Design updates to the website in line with the analysis, the following elements should be included in the updates:
    - Improving the structure of the municipal website;
    - Updating the mobile application of the website;
    - Regularly removing outdated information from the website;
    - Telephones and contacts for submission of citizen reports should be provided on the website.
- Launch the updated website.

Resources:

- User experience methods.
- Web development skills.
- IT infrastructure and software suites.

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[1] With a performance horizon of one year.

Roles and responsibilities:

- **Municipality:** Public relations/communications experts will lead the user experience analysis and generate recommendations. IT staff will be responsible for overseeing the update and rollout.
- **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.

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

Reform 2: Developing an institutional communication strategy

Rationale for the suggested reform:

The citizens of Razgrad perceive the municipality as inaccessible and find the dialogue with it difficult. The perception of the municipality as remote and unresponsive raises doubts about lacking transparency, as well as directs citizens to informal channels of communication.

Objective:

The objective is to establish clear priorities and guidelines for municipal officials on communication content, channels, and audiences they should work with.

This will improve the availability and accessibility of information.

The reform will achieve the following results:

- Citizens develop a better understanding of what the municipality does and why.
- Municipal communication products appear more regularly and are more accessible.
- Municipal officials have a more interactive relationship with the media.

Process:

- Analyze the municipality's communication needs, based on a review of current media and social media presence, branding and image, messaging, and audiences.
- Develop a strategy including messages, content, channels (e.g., website, Facebook, press conferences, interviews, etc.), audiences, and an action plan.
  This strategy should include a much wider range of different communication channels, including video addresses, as well as applications such as Tik-tok to disseminate important information for citizens and a more active presence of municipal administration in social networks.
  The municipality should also continue its ongoing initiative to provide information to citizens about the services that it offers through information materials in accessible language, such as brochures and others.
- Formally adopt the strategy.
- Train municipal staff on the strategy, and secure additional resources as needed.

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

- Begin implementing the strategy.

Resources:

- Communications expertise, including media relations, social media management.
- IT support.

Roles and responsibilities:

- **Municipality:** PR/communication officials will lead the technical side of the reform, with the mayor formally endorsing the strategy and senior public officials (e.g. deputy mayor) overseeing implementation. If the working group decides that the strategy should encompass the council, upon endorsement by the mayor the document should be submitted for adoption by the council.
- **Civil society:** Members of the media should be consulted throughout the process, as they will be the primary intermediaries in the communication strategy; community members could be part of the analysis of communication needs, providing insight into how citizens receive messages from the municipality; media-focused NGOs or businesses could provide technical advice.

Reform 3: Establishing the function of a public mediator in the Municipality of Razgrad

Rationale for the suggested reform:

Citizens are not aware of some of the existing opportunities for participation, and official channels of communication with the municipality are considered ineffective and practically insignificant. Many citizens find it difficult to use digital technologies to contact the municipality, as well as to submit written signals. In smaller towns, such as Razgrad, people prefer the in-person contact with an individual they trust. When there is particular individual and ensured access to him/her, more signals for resolution will also appear.

Objective:

The aim of the reform is to introduce the function of a public mediator to become a coordination center for citizens' concerns and complaints about the municipal government and services, who will summarise and communicate these concerns to the relevant authorities and ensure subsequent monitoring for the actions taken.

This will increase civic trust and engagement, will provide an effective channel for signals and complaints, as well as will increase citizens' perception for openness and responsiveness by the administration and the Municipal Council.

The reform should achieve the following results:

- Citizens can identify a clear recipient for their concerns.
- Citizens feel safe in raising issues without fear of being singled out by the authorities.
- The municipality has a more efficient mechanism for receiving and organizing complaints.

Process:

- Discuss the legal basis for establishing the intermediary role.
- Develop an institutional proposal, including selection criteria and funding for the intermediary role.
- Consult citizens on the proposed approach.
- Formally adopt the esbalishment of the new position.
- Disseminate information about the new position in local media.

Resources:

- Budget for a new position.
- Possible use of municipal premises.

Roles and responsibilities:

- **Municipality:** Legal experts within the municipality can develop the initial proposal, with the mayor and council having the responsibility of consulting citizens and then adopting and ensuring funding for the reform.
- **Civil society:** Community members can be consulted as part of the process of developing the institutional proposal; absent a formal ombudsman, a community-based organization could be selected as the intermediary through an open consultative process.

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