



REPORT

**for the 8th meeting of “Key for Europe” project, part of the programme
“Network of Cities” No 621894 — CITIZ — 1-220-1 — DE — CITIZ — NT,
funded by the European programme CITIZ — “Europe for Citizens”,
held in Kozloduy, Bulgaria
23-26 June 2022**

This report is based on:

- All documents produced during the reception at Kozloduy Municipality, Republic of Bulgaria
- Completed feedback from the participants in the 8th meeting
- The impressions of the team in Kozloduy Municipality: Ivo Ivanov, Lilyana Rashkova, Anita Opitsova, Zlatina Ivanova, Valeri Valeriev, Galina Rupchanska.

The Bulgarian reception started with an opening meeting where the Mayor of Kozloduy Municipality, Mrs. Marinela Nikolova, welcomed the guests personally. In a short presentation we talked about our community and its specifics. [WELCOME TO KOZLODUY](#)

Before the beginning of the actual part of the meeting the delegates had the opportunity to see in practice what is a Bulgarian community center — this is a unique institution for the whole world, in which the Bulgarian spirit, culture and traditions are preserved. For a short time, the delegates were presented with the activities of the Chitalishte Hristo Botev — 1879 (cultural heritage monument of immense significance), Kozloduy, and the same day after lunch they were able to see in practice one of the preserved Bulgarian customs “Kalush”, which was recreated through the amateurs in the Chitalishte “Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov-1927”, Harlets.

Policy to support minority groups (Roma minority)

Our work programme started on the topic of the largest minority in Bulgaria and in particular what policies the Municipality of Kozloduy uses for successful integration. We chose this topic because Roma are also the largest minority in the municipality, although according to official data they do not recognise themselves as such. We preferred to start by presenting good practices, discussion and then seeing how one of our schools works with Roma children.

The presentation on the topic acquainted our delegates with the main policies (educational, health, cultural, social, residential) that we conduct in the field of integration. The municipality has seven kindergartens, in which about 820 children up to the age of 7 are educated. In six municipal and one public school, about 2,200 students are trained. In every kindergarten and school, Roma children are educated and trained. The hall was attended by educational and health mediators who shared personal impressions of the work with the communities. “Children who are at school are checked daily and those who have no good reason to be absent are searched directly at the places where they live. We go to the neighborhood and look for them to bring them to school”, said Ivanka Stoyanova — a mediator in elementary school. “Parents are the key. We are looking for a daily relationship with them

because their support is important for the change of their children", said Biserka Dimitrova — school principal.

[POLICIES TO SUPPORT MINORITY GROUPS \(ROMA\) IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF KOZLODUY](#)

During the discussion, the experience of Hungary and Germany was discussed. Of course, the main challenge is to educate Roma communities and minorities in general, speak the language of their country of residence, and each country pursues different policies in this direction. One thing is certain — common action at European Union level is not advisable, as each country has specific laws, rules and procedures. And in each country there are specific models and approaches that are applicable to the Roma community there.

In Kozloduy, for example, good results are given by events that unite communities — celebrations of the culture of the Roma, the Bulgarians, the Serbian settlers, the Wallachians are intertwined. Such events Kozloduy Municipality plans and realises year-round, precisely in order to get to know and unite the different communities. Children, parents, teachers often gather during holidays, discussions, round tables, seminars organised by the municipality for this purpose.

The discussion before lunch ended with a presentation of an idea for creating a community, managed and implemented by SERAW (our host for the discussions) in support of an eco-initiative for the Danube. With this clip [1.4 ---- Danube - I'Life.mp4](#) children from Kozloduy won the first prize in one of the three categories of a European competition, among thousands of children from all over Europe. Jointly organised by the Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe (GWP CEE) and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Danube Art Master international competition encourages teenagers to take a closer look at the river and think about the possibilities for its protection by creating original artworks.

Informal talks with the representatives of the Roma community and our delegates continued after the official completion of the first part of the work programme.

“Solidarity in action” — visit to the high school “St. st. Cyril and Methodius”.

The delegates had the opportunity to visit a school in our municipality, which actively implements integration policies.

A short presentation with photos from the school can be found here: [HIGH SCHOOL „ST. ST. CYRIL AND METHODIUS“ BUTAN VILLAGE](#)

Over 30 children, teachers and parents participated in the five workshops, the main goal of which was to demonstrate how together we can achieve common goals. Including people who didn't know each other and had no common activities before that day. We had five joint workshops in the school, the list is enclosed: [Workshop_List.JPG](#)

1. Workshop “Herbalist” — here the participants had the opportunity to get acquainted with the herbs typical for this region of Bulgaria and their healing properties. With the help of students and teachers, delegates from Germany and the Czech Republic knit a wreath of herbs that is placed on the head. They learned about the Bulgarian customs during Enyovden — a holiday that this year was celebrated on 24 June — the date on which the event took place. Gabriela from the Czech Republic, in her feedback, shares her impressions from the herbal workshop: “And of course, our herbal workshop was great and it was also nice to see Bulgarian traditions”.

2. Workshop “Living Library”, in which eighteen children interacted with participants from three different countries. Some of the students and employees of the school spontaneously

provided translation into Greek, Russian & Italian, which further facilitated communication in the school. During the personal conversations in the workshop many interesting experiences and knowledge were shared, which we believe is a treasure for the children, and the delegates were given another point of view at the Roma community.

3. In the “Solidarity in Action” workshop, we could demonstrate our solidarity with small actions. Participants from Germany and Hungary together with children, teachers and the mayor of the village of Butan knit small flags of the participating countries. At the end of the meeting, each delegate received the flag of their own country as a gift.

4. Delegates from Albania and Italy participated in the workshop “Bulgarian Folk Dances”. A teacher showed our participants dances, which they demonstrated to all the other guests of the event. Finally, all together — guests and hosts took part in a common horo — so characteristic of Bulgaria and the Balkan countries. Klea from Albania, says: “Wearing Bulgarian traditional costumes and learning traditional dance is the most impressive thing”.

5. In the workshop “Grandma’s Kitchen” delegates from Italy and Poland had the opportunity to knead and prepare cakes, banitsa, yogurt — traditional snacks in Bulgaria. Some of the prepared dishes were tasted by the rest of the participants during the coffee break.

All workshops were interesting to the participants. Everywhere there was joint work, exchange of knowledge, mood. Proof that we have chosen a suitable method of working with the children in the school is the feedback given in the completed questionnaire from the participants after the end of the 8th meeting of the project. From the polls conducted, 70 % of the participants referred to the experience at the school in Butan as a memory they would retain forever. “I will never forget the visit and workshops at school in Butan,” says Evelina from Poland.

Miklos Marian refers to the “Solidarity in action” — visit to the high school “St. st. Cyril and Methodius”, as well as visit to the village of Harlets — Wallachian customs and traditions — rite “Kalush” as the memory he will keep in his heart.

Wallachian customs and traditions — rite “Kalush”

The village of Harlets, inhabited mainly by Wallachians, is known for the preservation of authentic folklore at national and international level. A great role is played by the local community center, which preserves the specificity and traditions of the locals.

The custom of Kalush is very characteristic of this region of Bulgaria. In the village of Harlets it has been performed for more than 80 years. In 2008 it was recorded as part of the Intangible Heritage of UNESCO. According to popular beliefs, only the Kalushars can cure the bad disease caused by the evil spirit “Kalush”, which roams the fields, villages and forests. Details can be found here: [KALUSHA](#)

Especially for the people in the village, Kozloduy Municipality organises once a year Kalushara Festival. In this way the municipality helps to preserve and spread the custom Kalush, by welcoming thousands of guests from all over the country through the popularisation of the festival in the village.

In the village of Harlets our guests were greeted personally by Mayor Ognemir Simov. He is a dancer in the Kalushari group. His father was a dancer, and his grandfather was also a dancer. Delegates saw the custom of Kalush, after which each of them received a special gift. The towel that is placed on the shoulder symbolises a wish for health and protection. Our guests had the opportunity to participate in another custom typical of the years before the liberation of Bulgaria. It’s very characteristic for the Wallachians to donate. On every wedding towels must

donated and play the attractive Bulgarian horo Pelenitsa — with a towel they playfully invite a girl or boy and hug in the center of the dance.

We wanted our guests to feel the atmosphere of a traditional Bulgarian house. To hear live music played by musicians, to taste dishes that are not prepared in other parts of Bulgaria. That is why in the program we envisaged a visit to the village of Harlets — our participants to get acquainted with another part of the minority groups — Wallachians, and to feel the first settlers on our territory, to get acquainted with their customs and traditions, which are still alive to this day.

Volunteer initiatives — children from Youth Parliament at the Municipality of Kozloduy

On the second day of the visit we started with a discussion about the youth policies implemented on the territory of Kozloduy Municipality. We are proud that 25 % of the population of the municipality is of young people. It is through them that some of the community policies are implemented to support minorities, to include minorities, to work together.

Several young people — part of the currently working parliament — took part in the work of the youth parliament. They had a discussion with the delegates, presenting their activities for the last few years. It is a voluntary structure that brings together young people from all schools. The Youth Parliament works together with the municipality of Kozloduy, as well as with other youth NGOs and groups. The local government annually invests in the Youth Calendar, as the activities in the calendar are initiated and implemented by the young people and cover various topics — training, educational, entertainment, informational, charitable. The municipality, in addition to financial support, provides for free use a room for young people — Youth Club. [MUNICIPAL CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH PARLIAMENT](#)

Young people in the community are active, hardworking and dedicated. That is why we chose to present the Youth Parliament to the Municipality of Kozloduy, as they do their best to benefit society through their civic position and thus participate successfully in the development of the municipality itself. [MCYP VIDEO.mp4](#)

Border Police — experience with refugees

At several of the previous meetings, the topic of refugees was discussed. The experience of the other countries was given. Kozloduy is a city that has a water border with Romania and we chose very briefly with a presentation, without discussion, to present the work of the border police.

Our guest was Ivan Venkov — Head of Border Police, who summarised the data on refugees and the work of the institution. Details here: [BORDER POLICE](#)

Visit to the park in the Turlak neighborhood – a story of Bosilegrad (Serbian) migrants and the story of the Hungarian millers

[Turlak quarters.pdf](#)

The Bosilegrad Serbs are specific to Kozloduy community. We would not call them a minority, because over the years they have successfully integrated and have common symbols, traditions and customs with the local population. After all, there are some customs that they keep to this day. There is a whole neighborhood in Kozloduy, where the descendants of Serbian settlers of Bulgarian origin live. It was in the park of this neighborhood that we welcomed our

guests. Here we were told the story of their coming in the presence of descendants who remember the stories of their parents and ancestors.

Every year in March, large fires are lit and flaming rods are spun in dance. This scares evil spirits and sees winter off. This is called “oratnitsa” - a specific recalling that winter is going away and a tradition that is still observed to day - Kozloduy Municipality holds a big holiday precisely in the park in the neighborhood to encourage and preserve the tradition. A partnership with the municipality of Bosilegrad, Serbia has been implemented, thus meetings with the families of Bulgaria and Serbia are held.

During the visit of the park in the Turlaska neighborhood we had the opportunity to get acquainted with another kin who moved to Kozloduy, and namely the Sabados family — millers from Hungary. The presence of Venelin Sabadoshev and his story about the milling family was a surprise for both the guests and us, the hosts from Kozloduy Municipality. We believe that the story was interesting not only for the Hungarian delegates, but also for all the other participants. The day to celebrate the Bulgarian-Hungarian friendship is 19. October.

See the story here: [Sabados - the Hungarian millers.pdf](#)

Meeting with retirement clubs and viewing the fish dishes of the Festival of the fish

The Fish Festival is a holiday that gathers thousands of residents and guests of Kozloduy Municipality. It is held for the fifth consecutive year and somehow unintentionally unites the cultures of the Wallachians, Roma and Serbian settlers. The preparation of the fish dishes includes seven retirement clubs, of which citizens from the listed communities are members. The dishes are specific, the music that sounds is unifying, and meetings and conversations about the past and the future are an integral part of the holiday. Fishing is a livelihood that twenty years ago fed dozens of fishermen in Kozloduy. In the present, for one reason or another, there are no fishermen in the municipality who live on fishing, but there are 50 people who practice fishing as a hobby. Fishing competition, culinary contest, eco-competition and eco-initiative were part of the events that took place in parallel in Botev Park, and our participants managed to feel the spirit and mood of the event.

We chose to visit the fish festival because to see how the activities that bring the communities closer together and we sincerely believe that our guests managed to feel this.

Sailing on the National Steamship Museum “Radetzky” with a talk about the ship and Hristo Botev — national hero

On the banks of the Danube River, in Kozloduy is the only floating museum on the Balkans. It is an honor for us to be able to show this national wealth to our guests, so we also conducted an hour sailing along the river. And the Danube is a unifying river of 14 European countries, it is an occasion for a number of partnerships, talks, common policies.

“Solidarity in the policy of the European institutions” meeting with Andrey Novakov, Bulgarian representative in the European Parliament

At the end of all discussions, in our opinion, it was important for delegates to be able to comment with a representative of the European Parliament the summary closing the meeting on the topics of the project. That is why we, as hosts, chose to invite Andrey Novakov — one of the seventeen Bulgarian representatives to the European Parliament, for a discussion on all current topics about Europe and the Union.

Andrey Novakov is a member of the European Parliament for a second consecutive term. For the past five years, he has been part of the European Parliament's negotiating team for the annual budgets of the European Union. In addition to his work on the General Regulation on the management of EU funds, he is the REACT-EU rapporteur on measures to address the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Novakov is the EPP coordinator in the Committee on Regional Development (REGI) and participates in three other parliamentary committees — the Committee on Budgets (BUDG), the Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN), the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT).

The discussion was really fruitful. Questions were raised related to the lifting of Bulgaria's veto towards North Macedonia, the possibility of making an operational decision in the EU, cohesion policy, etc. The system for decision-making in response to crises in the EU is cumbersome and lazy. We saw this with COVID, now we see it in the situation of the measures imposed on Russia. We need an effective, adequate and fast crisis decision-making system", said the Bulgarian representative in the European Parliament — Andrey Novakov. "It is important that the EU preserves the Cohesion Policy, because every euro brings benefits and added value," Novakov said. He gave as an example infrastructure in Bulgaria that generates gross domestic product, including for countries in other parts of the Union. The current challenges facing Europe were discussed, of course the situations in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Participants expressed concerns and concerns about whether the Union's policies will withstand the pressure of economic indicators, the situation in Ukraine, the Union's expansion. Other topical topics were commented, and the main conclusion was that as long as we respect the principles of peace, solidarity and mutual assistance, we will be a strong Union and we will overcome all obstacles in our way.

The four days of the Bulgarian reception passed in dynamics and were very exciting because the guests in Kozloduy felt the Bulgarian spirit, culture and traditions. For us as hosts it was very important to summarise feedback from the participants. By the date of submission of the report, 50 % of the participants had completed a written survey, clearly showing that 90 % of the respondents confirmed the activities we had planned and carried out in Kozloduy correspond with the topics of the project and meet the originally set goals.

In conclusion, the participants from the Bulgarian municipality of Kozloduy are on the opinion that such international joint activities are extremely useful for creating partnerships, bringing us together, exchanging experience, ideas and knowledge.

A brochure on the most famous facts about Bulgaria can be found here: [BG facts.pdf](#)