



MUNICIPAL FOREIGN POLICY



De Gröna i Europeiska fria alliansen
i Europaparlamentet

miljöpartiet de gröna



INTRODUCTION

Our time is to a large extent marked by the European Union, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and a number of other supranational institutions. At the same time, there is a trend towards increased "sub-nationality" with a growing number of inter-regional and inter-local cross-border contacts. These decentralised international connections increasingly affect the international course of events and are sometimes referred to as **municipal foreign policy**.

Global phenomena have increasingly local impact – climate change, nuclear accidents, currency crises and refugee streams put a physical and financial imprint on the world's municipalities. A nuclear breakdown in the Ukraine can – as shown by the Chernobyl meltdown – cause radioactive precipitation on remote villages in northern Scandinavia, with manifest consequences for public health as well as local business. Greenlandic Inuits have high amounts of environmentally hazardous toxic substances in their blood. Unrest on the stock exchange in Djakarta throws hundred of thousands of people into unemployment thousands of kilometres away. No society on earth can any longer isolate itself from the surrounding world.

Not only threats, though, but also co-operation opportunities are increasing rapidly. Humanity has never been so interconnected as today – a village co-operative in Mali is only a keyboard stroke away from a fair trade group in Maine. Local initiatives and popular movements - and their intertwining across borders - have mushroomed in the wake of the implosion of one-party states and military dictatorships in Eastern Europe, Latin America and parts of Asia. A global civil society is arising.



PEACE

Inter-municipal co-operation between municipalities in different countries is not a new phenomenon. The struggle for peace contributed already during the beginning of the 20th century to municipalities developing links and in 1913, the *International Union of Local Authorities* (IULA) was founded. It was, however, unable to prevent the First World War, which the nation states unleashed over the peoples the subsequent year. Yet another inter-municipal association - *Fédération Mondiale des Cités Unies* (FMCU) - was founded in the 1950's, focusing on twinning between municipalities in the West and the Soviet bloc, in the shadow of escalating arms race and threatening nuclear armageddon. Armed forces and advanced weapons systems are not at the disposal of local authorities and, consequently, relations between municipalities are characterised by co-operation and reciprocity rather than force and subjection.



NORTH - SOUTH

In the 1970's, there is an increasing focus on the relationship between the rich countries in the North and the poor majority world in the South. In 1974, the UN General Assembly holds an extra session about a new economic world order and the so called Brandt commission is charged with compiling a report - published in 1980 under the title *North-South: A Programme for Survival*.

North-South issues are now starting to involve the global municipal movement and in 1985 local politicians from a large number of countries met in Cologne to discuss how to make a more just world possible. Solidarity groups and a wide array of non-governmental organisations also participate in the meeting. A final document entitled *From Charity to Justice*, the so called Cologne Appeal, directed blistering criticism against traditional development assistance and emphasised the importance of mutual learning in North-South relations. Co-operation projects, therefore, ought to be developed jointly and, further, the appeal stressed the importance of profound structural changes in the North.

Organic farming, care for the elderly and direct-democratic decision-making are examples of areas where the North could learn from the South. In 2003 for example, a delegation from Porto Alegre in Brazil travelled to 63 German cities to report about the successful Brazilian experiments with “participatory budgeting”, where local residents through direct-democratic assemblies are given the opportunity to influence part of the municipality’s budget – something that has led to increased investments in poor and neglected areas.

Early on, the Dutch government let municipalities take over part of the national development assistance. As a consequence, it has for a long time been possible for Dutch municipalities to send elected representatives as well as officials to twin towns in the South and the East and, inversely, representatives of the twin towns come to the Netherlands for stays lasting up till three months. Several Dutch municipalities are involved in these inter-communal activities and it appears as if this has increased awareness of global issues - a large majority of the country’s municipal and regional bodies have, for instance, switched to fair trade coffee.



In municipalities in Belgium it is common that a local councillor - and, sometimes, an official as well - is assigned the responsibility for North-South issues. In November each year, many Belgian municipalities arrange cultural festivals, seminars and fund-raising activities to attract attention to twin towns in the South; according to some analysts, this might have positive repercussions on integration.

Municipalities bothering about incorporating their international ambitions in vision documents and activity plans are, on average, more successful in the execution phase.

In a number of German municipalities there is a North-South forum assembling solidarity groups, churches, trade unions and other civil society organisations; the forum influences public opinion on issues regarding global justice and - ahead of local elections - usually interrogates local party representatives about their global-municipal insights and views.

Bremen belongs to the German cities that are the most advanced as regards municipal North-South co-operation and a special unit has been set up for this. Ever since the mid 1970's, Bremen is successfully co-operating with its Indian twin city Pune on biofuel projects and other green technologies, something that has had positive effects for local business in both towns. Pune is in turn conveying this technology to its twin towns in Asia and Africa – North-South co-operation can thus stimulate increased South-South relations and in these cases more often than not bring about significant multiplier effects.

One kind of municipal North-South co-operation, often with remarkably good results, is information and exchange of experience within occupational groups – for example between teachers, between nurses or between electricians - in the twinning towns.

THE ENVIRONMENT

In the 1980's, the environmental issues were high on the UN agenda. The Brundtland report on sustainable development was published in 1987 and, five years later, the Rio conference on sustainable development was held. Yet again, global and local levels interplay and as a consequence of the Rio meeting, many municipalities started working with environmental issues in a more systematic and preventive manner. *International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives* (ICLEI), established in 1990, gathers and spreads best practice in terms of local environmental work. ICLEI, sometimes referred to as the international environmental agency for local governments, also co-ordinates global campaigns such as *Cities for Climate Protection*, where broad coalitions of frontrunner municipalities inspire each other and show the rest of the world what is actually possible.

MUNICIPALITIES VS. NATION-STATES

In many US municipalities there is a tradition of openly challenging the federal political power in Washington. Some of the hundreds of US municipalities that declared themselves nuclear-free zones during the cold war went so far as to criminalise all work connected to the production of nuclear arms. A number of American municipalities have forbidden their police forces to co-operate with the federal police in the search for refugees without residence permits.

In the struggle against apartheid rule in South Africa, many US municipalities boycotted companies – both in terms of public purchasing and investments – with activities in South Africa. As a consequence, two thirds of these left South Africa and Congress tightened sanctions against the racist regime.

Ahead of the invasion of Iraq in the beginning of 2003, a number of municipalities joined forces – led by New York, Los Angeles and Chicago - in *Cities for Peace*, protesting against the Bush administration's plans for non-UN mandated military action; a number of municipalities all over the world quickly joined this "glocal" peace initiative.

Today, an increasing number of US municipalities adopts climate goals at Kyoto levels and the co-operation between them has been formalised into *US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement*, which in turn has inspired several states to climate commitments. Some municipalities have sued the federal Export Credit Agencies for facilitating fossil energy projects abroad, since these – through the greenhouse effect – have negative consequences also at home and, thus, is to be regarded as a local issue.



The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has a markedly high profile in terms of international issues and demands to participate in the elaboration of Canada's foreign policy. For example, FCM claims the right to appoint its own representatives in national delegations to international trade negotiations. The national aid agency spends significant amounts in supporting municipal aid co-operation; one major program is concerned with increasing citizen participation in a number of Chinese municipalities.

In Holland, parliament adopted already in 1972 a law giving municipalities considerable freedom in establishing international contacts - provided these are compatible with the general guidelines, adopted by the parliament and central government, for the country's international relations. The French national assembly passed a similar law regarding international relations of French regions.

Trondheim, Norway, has turned its back on the market liberalism of WTO and EU - focused on promoting deregulation and privatisation - in favour of re-communalisation of previously outsourced municipal enterprises. A number of other Norwegian cities - labelled "quality municipalities" - are following suit in what amounts to an open challenge of neoliberal dogmas. An alternative model dawns, characterised by democratisation replacing privatisation as the driving force of public sector transformation, with employees and clients in the front seat of decision-making structures, together with local politicians and officials. This has already resulted in markedly reduced levels of sick leave as well as more content citizens. The local level seems to offer alternative societal models - benefiting people and planet - more of a level playing field in the combat against TINA (There Is No Alternative), the neoliberal claim to hegemony.

UNITED CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

At a meeting in May 2004 in Paris – with the participation of more than 3000 local representatives from all over the world – IULA and FMCU merged into one single global organisation: *United Cities and Local Governments* (UCLG), sometimes referred to as the “United Municipalities”. The mayors of Sao Paulo, Paris and Pretoria were elected to the presidium and a council and general assembly were established. This new “glocal” organisation, seated in Barcelona, has received observer status within the UN. The level of ambition have been high from the outset and the organisation wants to influence the agenda of international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Increasing women’s participation in local policy all over the world is a top priority of the new organisation. Municipal peace mediation is another area high on the agenda. UCLG tries, for example, to facilitate contacts between the Palestinian and Israeli local government associations – “insolvable” disputes about for example water distribution has in some cases been transformed into inter-municipal co-operation projects.

SWEDISH MUNICIPALITIES WORLDWIDE

In Sweden, the local government act restricts the ability of municipalities to act internationally. For example, when many municipalities wanted to boycott South African goods during the apartheid era, parliament first had to pass a special South Africa act. Inter-communal relations such as deepened twin town co-operation, called **municipal partnership**, is however a rapidly growing phenomenon – thanks to funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Some 70 Swedish municipalities are already involved in this and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions has set up a special unit - SALA International Development Agency (SALA IDA) - for counselling and transfer of means from SIDA. These partnerships are often most successful when not only politicians and civil servants are involved, but also schools, libraries, trade unions, associations and local firms take an active part.



THE FUTURE

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs was established in 1791, when Gustav III was king of Sweden. Initially, it was referred to as the *King's cabinet for foreign exchange of letters*. The ministry's highest civil servant is still referred to as "Cabinet secretary" in Swedish and traits of aristocratic inaccessibility still lingers within the ministry. Transferring part of this to the sub-national level – to municipalities, county councils and regions – could be a path towards democratic renewal. A more decentralised handling of Sweden's external relations would probably also increase awareness of global issues and stimulate people's commitment and – not least – make it more difficult for prejudice and xenophobia to grow.

Globalisation has, until now, mainly brought about increasing concentration of economic and political power – large companies merge to mega corporations and national parliaments are subjected to supra-national bodies. Lobbyists for powerful vested interests are constantly playing at home, and when the playing field is extended to continental level as in the EU – or global level as in the WTO – representatives for environmental movements, trade unions and small companies are more or less doomed to lose. These representatives of the civil society can however make themselves heard on arenas the size of a municipality or region and mobilise opinions that local potentates have to take into account – if they want to be re-elected or have their goods sold. The kind of world we will live in is thus to a large extent depending on whether we choose to build it from the top – or from the bottom.

A "global society" of the world's municipalities, popular movements and committed individuals is dawning, marked by mutuality and co-operation rather than competition and dominant relationships. It is about to create new arenas for democracy.

RESOURCES

United Cities and Local Governments (“United Municipalities”)
www.cities-localgovernments.org

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
www.iclei.org

Swedish Association of Local Authorities -
International Development Agency (SALA IDA)
www.salaida.se



CARL SCHLYTER



After having worked with people at a garbage dump in Brazil, Carl Schlyter realised that a better environment is hand in hand with improved social conditions. This became his way into the green movement.

Today, Carl Schlyter is MEP for the Green Party of Sweden. In the European Parliament he is a member of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and co-chairs the committee on Economic Development, Finance and Trade in the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly is a cooperation between the EU and 77 African, Caribbean and Pacific states.

The greatest political challenge of the future can be found at the global level. Environmental problems, war and hunger are issues that we need to solve together. But solving these problems requires an insight into how they are interconnected, creating great power unions between rich countries is no use. Therefore, we cooperate with countries that see the consequences of the problems and where the greatest will to change can be found.

The rich countries in the world have a great responsibility to escape the poverty trap, not least by giving the poor countries fair trade rules and stop exploiting their primary products and labour with unsolidary methods and agreements. For us greens, it is self-evident to take that responsibility, and you can help.



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CONTACT

Carl Schlyter, MEP

Phone Brussels: +32 2~284 5273

Phone Strasbourg: +33 38817 5273

E-mail: carl.schlyter@europarl.europa.eu

Jeanette Perman, political assistant

Phone Brussels: +32 2~284 7273

Phone Strasbourg: +33 38817 7273

Johan Schiff, assistant in Sweden

Phone: +46 8~786 4625

E-mail: Johan.schiff@riksdagen.se

Valter Mutt, political analyst

Phone: +46~730 302027

E-mail: valter.mutt@mp.se



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