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Cooperation of twin towns in the process of European integration (summary)

When examining European integration, it is necessary to distinguish clearly the post-war integration of Europe from integration within the European Union. The processes of European integration covered the entire spectrum of activities under the aegis of international organizations, bilateral activities by national states as well as by sub-state actors and all non-state actors in international relations. This does not mean, however, that these processes have taken place independently of each other. It is appropriate to assume that they complement each other, and even that individual actions within one integration process have changed in another.

The research problem of dissertation is the definition of the role of twin towns in the process of European integration after 1945. The aim is therefore not to show how cooperation between partner cities influenced self-governance in Europe but influenced the internationalization of self-government, especially in the process of European integration. The socio-political and historical conditions of countries and regions that determined international cooperation at local level were analyzed in detail. The first attempts at institutionalizing such co-operation and legal solutions of the European Union aimed at supporting city partnerships were also presented. On the basis of such a researched problem, a research hypothesis has been formulated: Cooperation of partner cities in Europe after 1945 was important for the bottom-up processes of European integration and has become a factor deepening the process of democratization, building civil society and addressing global problems at local level.

Cooperation of partner cities is a post-war product of Europe. International activity at self-government level quickly proved to be a support for the unification processes at the governmental level. After the Second World War, European societies had to reorganize their relationships. This process was supposed to be easier in Western European countries that did not share the "iron curtain". In the speeches of German local government officials as early as 1945, the message was about the need to build friendship based on cooperation between the inhabitants. Bottom initiatives were to be based on the idea of "Locarno from bottom-up," referring to the 1925 peace treaty. To help build friendship, the first postwar conference of German and French mayors was organized in the Swiss Mont Pélerin in 1948. The initiators of the meeting were Swiss journalist Klemens Alfermann, Swiss writer Eugen Wyler and sociologist and writer Hans Zbinden.

As a result of their organized meeting, a partnership of cities was born, for which the mayor of Ludwigsburg and the mayor of Montbéliard are considered precursors.

Against the background of all European integration processes, the international activity of European governments has played an important role. On 9 May 1950 Robert Schuman presented his political declaration on the shape of a new Europe. A month later the Mayor of Ludwigsburg and the French Mayor of Montbéliard began a conversation about building a partnership between their cities. At the time when the European Coal and Steel Community was formed, the mayors of the French and German cities had been meeting within the framework of the International Union of Mayors for Franco-German reconciliation for two years. Almost simultaneously the German-Dutch border began to develop border cooperation, also inspired by the neighborhood of cities with a common past and the need to build a common future. This form of integration was adopted by the European Union in the form of cross-border cooperation, commonly called Euroregions. The signature of the Treaty of Elysee in 1963, a breakthrough for Franco-German postwar relations, was preceded by a partnership of German and French local governments, which has lasted for over ten years. It is significant that the leaders of France and Germany signing the Treaty stressed the importance of the bottom-up process of reconciliation between the two nations through the cooperation of cities. The deepening of cooperation between German and French communities at the local level facilitated reconciliation at the government level, which in turn resulted in the development of city partnerships after the signing of the Elysian Treaty. This clearly shows how the cooperation between German and French local governments has influenced the building of new relations between these states and, consequently, between the states of the whole of Europe. The potential inherent in the city partnership, important for the process of European integration, was also spotted in later years. In 1989 the European Parliament launched the first program to support the co-operation of local governments financially, treating it as an important element of bottom-up integration processes.