



April 11, 2007

Bi-weekly Newsletter

>> USAID Open Government Initiative Marks Successful Completion

A National Conference on Public Procurement System Integrity organized by the USAID Open Government Initiative on April 4 in Sofia marked the successful completion of the program after five years of work in the field of public procurement.

The Conference was attended by all key stakeholders in the public procurement process: the Public Procurement Agency, the Commission for Protection of Competition, key Ministries, and business associations. Ambassador John Beyrle made an opening address and stressed the importance of maintaining the integrity of the public procurement system as a tool in preventing corruption.

USAID invested almost \$10 million to help Bulgarian public institutions become more transparent, efficient and responsive. The program helped Bulgaria amend its Public Procurement Law to make it compliant with EU procurement directives, and trained over 1,200 civil servants in best practices of public procurement and internal audit. The program also worked extensively with all key players in the public procurement process and trained judges and prosecutors to identify infringements of procurement procedures. A major achievement of the program is the web-based Public Procurement Register, which became a powerful tool for making the procurement process open and transparent. The Register now contains data on 20,799 public procurements and 23,718 contracts awarded for a total of 16.5 billion leva (over \$11 billion). The website of the Public Procurement Agency, where the register is located, had 440,000 visitors in 2006.

The project also did significant work in the audit field, working closely with the Institute of Internal Auditors in Bulgaria since its founding and supporting its activities in promoting and implementing international standards and best practices of internal audit and internal control in Bulgaria's public sector. ❖



Right to left: Ambassador Beyrle, Petko Nikolov, Chairman of the Commission for Protection of Competition, Emil Rainov, Deputy Minister of Health, and Tihomir Dimitrov, Secretary General of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works

>> Junior Achievement Celebrates 10 Years in Bulgaria

On March 28, USAID implementing partner Junior Achievement celebrated its 10th year in Bulgaria with a conference, "10 Years' Investment in Education - Let Their Success Be Your Inspiration." The conference was organized with Minister of Education and Science Daniel Valchev. The event gathered students, teachers, educational institutions and businesses from all over the country. During a one-day training, the most active JA teachers shared their achievements, experiences and best practices with more than 150 participants. For the past 10 years JAB has been working to introduce entrepreneurial programs into every stage of the Bulgarian educational system. ❖



Milena Stoycheva, JAB Director, Prof. Guirov, Deputy Rector of "St. Kliment Ohridski" University, Vania Kastreva, Director RIO - Sofia and Martin Bankov - Public Sector Lead, Microsoft Bulgaria



>> *Judicial Independence Debated at USAID-Sponsored Forum*

Bulgaria's top judges, the Minister of Justice, several members of parliament, and legal experts met on March 27 in Sofia at the only national forum on the proposed new *Judicial System Act*. Hosted by the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative, the forum featured addresses by Minister of Justice Georgi Petkanov, Supreme Court of Cassation Chair Ivan Grigorov, and chairpersons of all Sofia courts and all national magistrates' organizations. Speakers repeatedly noted the forum's essential role in fostering dialogue on this keystone legislation for the judiciary.



Minister of Justice Georgi Petkanov (right) addresses the participants in the forum. JSI Director Ken Stuart (left) listens to Minister Petkanov's address.

The forum brought together the three branches of government to deliberate on the underpinnings of judicial independence. The main issues included the full-time status of members of the Supreme Judicial Council, and the role of the Ministry of Justice in overseeing judicial facilities and property. The JSA forum was moderated by Judge Sotir Tsatsarov, Chairperson of the Plovdiv District Court, a USAID Model Court.

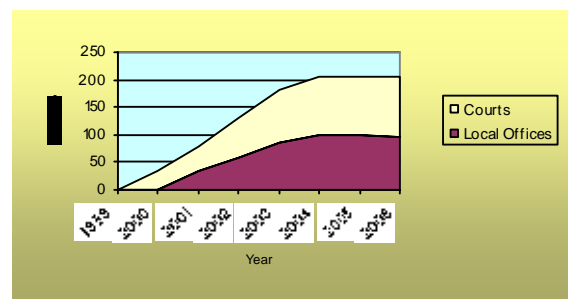
Top magistrates from across the country attended. News coverage of the forum was widespread, with over twenty-five stories highlighting the issues, including reports by six different television stations. ❖

>> *National Association of Court Clerks Marks 7 Years of Growth with USAID Support*

The Board of the National Association of Court Clerks met on March 17 in Sofia to vote for its new Board Members and marked seven years of ongoing support from USAID. The NACC is a key legacy of USAID, with an active membership facilitating trainings, producing curricula, and advocating for the professional development and labor rights of some 4,000 clerks and secretaries nationwide. In 1999, a few court clerks began to discuss forming a national association. With the support of the USAID Judicial Development Project, they began the NACC. In 2000, their first request for fellow members was met by the resounding "yes" of 556 new enrollments. Today, with the continued support of the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI), NACC active membership is steady at 2,000 court clerks.

The most recent achievement of the NACC is the publication of the first-ever Court Secretaries Manual, distributed the week of April 2 to 600 court secretaries across Bulgaria. The Manual covers issues ranging from mastering complex job duties and computer skills, to the protocol of the judicial branch. JSI Deputy Director Virginia Leavitt, who has worked with the NACC since its first Board meeting seven years ago, addressed the national organization in a letter to its membership. Leavitt reminded NACC members of the importance of their work: "Court clerks contribute to quality administration of justice for the citizens of Bulgaria, continue to express the value of teamwork, model public service skills, and motivate the public to take pride in its institution." ❖

Year	Members	Local Offices	Courts
1999	0	0	0
2000	556	0	35
2001	847	33	46
2002	1486	59	70
2003	2100	85	97
2004	2100	98	106
2005	2100	100	106
2006	2000	95	110



Membership in the National Association of Court Clerks has increased nationwide since the organization began with USAID assistance in 2000.



>> **USAID-Supported Business Registration Reform on Schedule**

The implementation of the new Business Register Act is on schedule, according to the Bulgarian Registry Agency at a press conference on March 29. The law was passed in Parliament last spring with drafting and advocacy assistance provided by the USAID Commercial Law Reform Program (CLRP). Since the graduation of CLRP's assistance in this area, the USAID Technical Assistance to the Registry Agency (TARA) project continues to support Bulgarian institutions in implementing the business registration reform.

The law provides for a single administrative electronic Business Register to become operational on July 1, 2007. TARA's assistance to the Registry Agency entails expert support in legal drafting and analysis, methodological guidance and training, advocacy and networking, and a public awareness campaign. In order to ensure a successful start of the new Business Register the Registry Agency is focusing efforts on IT System Development, securing offices in 28 locations, and hiring and training personnel. Out of 28 offices needed, so far the Registry Agency has obtained premises in 19 locations. The Ministry of Justice has submitted draft amendments to the Agency's Organizational Rules. That will allow the Registry Agency to hire and train personnel.

In spite of the aggressive deadlines and problematic transitional issues, the implementation of the Business Register Act is on schedule. The Registry Agency demonstrated a strong commitment to implement the business registration reform in a timely manner, and openly discuss with media and businesses the challenges that lie ahead. ❖

Why is it important for consultants to play the guitar?

On March 20, Chris Thompson, Chief of Party of the USAID Commercial Law Reform Program, celebrated his first ten years in Bulgaria by playing with his band Late Night Messiah (LNM) in front of an excited audience of over 70 fans, friends and colleagues.

The band was founded by Chris Thompson, Marc Lassman and Rossen Kolev – all successful international consultants and managers during the daytime. The band's self-described "guitar-driven, fast beat and retro-rock style of delivery" has attracted true fans who love their lyrics and music.



"Late Night Messiah" in action

For me, however, as a member of Chris's team, there was yet another reason to go to that party. For the past three years Chris has demonstrated so much creativity in his office that his stage persona was no surprise to the people he works with. The USAID Commercial Law Reform Program has completed legal reforms that seemed very unlikely only three years ago, like building a system of private enforcement of judgments and a nationwide administrative electronic business register. Looking back in time and at Chris's performance, I was finally able to define what made our team so successful: it was not the knowledge of the experts we hired or the ability to involve our partners, it was not our persistence (and obviously - not our modesty). What made these achievements a reality was our highly motivated team. And one of the most certain ways to motivate people is by being creative and encouraging creativity in your teammates. So, dear fellow-consultants, if you think you don't have an ear for music, start acting, dancing or painting. No other investment is as rewarding and important as this one.

*Ralitsa Petrova,
An LNM fan and CLRP team member*