



August 1, 2007

Bi-weekly Newsletter

>> **New Supreme Judicial Council Department to Continue USAID Court Improvement Work**

Seven years of USAID work toward Bulgarian court improvement became another USAID legacy on July 11 when the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) created a Department of Court Administration. The new department will continue to recruit and support courts under the ongoing SJC Courts in Partnership program. Earlier this year, as a result of field visits with JSI staff, the SJC added four courts to the 32 that partner with the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative. The creation of the new Department firmly fixes this work in the structure of the SJC, allowing it to continue the program into the future.

In the past two years the SJC has shown a strong interest in endorsing USAID activities. The SJC approved a plan for improving court administration, became engaged in expanding the number of public information centers at courts, and agreed to continue the Model Courts and Courts in Partnership program started by USAID, which helps courts to meet high standards of efficiency and transparency. The creation of the Department of Court Administration now gives a home to these efforts. ❖



The Supreme Judicial Council building in Sofia.

>> **Volunteers Offer Expertise to Grassroots Initiatives**

A group of Peace Corps volunteers and the Bulgarian Center for Development and Training (BCDT), the NGO formed by the staff of the USAID Participant Training Program, conducted a series of pilot initiatives to connect Bulgarian and American professionals with local organizations seeking small-scale training and consulting. The goals of the Volunteer Network for Training and Consulting are to seek inexpensive, creative ways to address local needs and to promote volunteerism in Bulgaria. The initiative, supported by the USAID Participant Training Program, builds upon earlier exchanges in which Peace Corps volunteers with particular expertise traveled to other Peace Corps locations seeking that expertise.



Bulgarian and American volunteers visit Simitli to offer advice about the municipal newsletter.

In a recent exchange, two Bulgarian volunteers and a Peace Corps volunteer traveled from Gabrovo to Simitli to respond to a request coordinated by a Peace Corps volunteer there for expertise in journalism and public relations. In Simitli, the volunteers met with representatives of a new youth magazine to discuss ways of gathering material, design improvements and journalistic ethics. They also met with the Municipal Secretary to discuss Simitli's new municipal newsletter, and with the founder of a Day Center for Mothers to explore ways to promote the facility and maximize its use. Some of the other exchanges in the series have focused on computer skills, at a chitalishte in Trud; website development at the Ethnographic Museum in Plovdiv; and techniques for regional promotion of a hospice in Gabrovo.

The initiative is growing as an exciting and promising partnership between Peace Corps, with its network of American volunteers all over Bulgaria, and BCDT, which as the successor of the USAID Participant Training Program will inherit a rich database of nearly 4,000 Bulgarian professionals trained by USAID. ❖



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>> USAID Enables Nachala to Expand Micro-lending

On July 26, USAID signed a four-year portable guarantee agreement with the micro-lending cooperative Nachala. The guarantee agreement will enable Nachala to seek financing from local and international financial institutions on favorable conditions and to meet not only the increasing needs for investment capital, but the demand for working capital from small and medium-sized businesses in Bulgaria. The maximum cumulative disbursement is \$1,500,000, and the level of guarantee coverage is 50 percent.



USAID Mission Director Michael Fritz (right) and Nachala Chairman Petar Arnaudov (left) signed the guarantee on July 26 at Grand Hotel Sofia.

USAID has a longstanding collaboration with Nachala Cooperative. Since 1999, USAID support has enabled Nachala to extend 15,000 loans for a value of \$40 million to small and medium-sized businesses. These loans helped to create or sustain more than 69,000 jobs.

After the closing of the USAID Mission in 2008, Nachala Cooperative will need additional financial resources to increase the number of micro-lending offered in the next five years. The USAID guarantee will help Nachala meet the needs of hundreds of new clients who will have access to credit, including micro-entrepreneurs and small business start-ups. ❖

>> Composting for a Cleaner Bulgaria!

The Bulgarian government has passed new legislation making the widely used, improvised dumpsites at village outskirts illegal. Local governments have been charged with finding new ways to collect and dispose of household waste.

The USAID-funded CityLinks program implemented by the International City Management Association (ICMA) joined forces with the Bulgarian Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR) to address waste management practices in Bulgaria. Analysis by ICMA staff revealed that more than 98 percent of the household waste deposited in village dumpsites was organic, which made composting the obvious solution.

The ICMA program identified the need for regional landfills and local waste reduction strategies, focusing on 18 villages for a four-year period. The municipalities built composting sites where there had once been dumpsites, purchased household waste containers for inorganic waste, and asked residents to separate the organic waste from their gardens. Pamphlets were published and meetings held to emphasize the benefits of composting and how it enriches soils.

The program has been a huge success, reducing the amount of waste going into municipalities' landfills, increasing the efficiency of waste management operations, and providing fertilizer to enrich gardens and farms in the regions. The program was designed to provide training and technical advice that can be distributed through other networks within the country after ICMA involvement is completed. A training session conducted each year for 30-40 environmental officials from throughout Bulgaria is used to provide technical training and to select other municipalities to receive funding. ❖



Composting site near a Bulgarian village.



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>> **Razgrad Event Highlights Civil Society and Court Partnerships**

Coming together from across northeastern Bulgaria, representatives from NGOs and their partner courts met in Razgrad on July 20 to share best practices at the fourth public exhibition sponsored by the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI). The exhibition is part of the “Courts and Communities Together” series developed by JSI, which showcases the ongoing partnerships between the courts and civil society groups at the leading edge of judicial reform in Bulgaria.

The JSI grantees from the region presented their work in several areas, including Court Watch programs and documentary films on the judiciary. The five grantees presenting their work were:

- E-Region Varna Association
- European Spaces 21 in Russe
- Legal Initiative for Training and Education (PIOR) in Varna
- NGO Center in Razgrad
- Open Society Club Varna

“Court Watchers” spoke about their experience monitoring different courts. The chairs of the Veliko Turnovo District Court, Shumen Regional Court, and Silistra Regional Court each described the Court Watch project implemented by the Razgrad NGO Center in their courts, and shared their satisfaction that the civil society is engaged with the better functioning of the judiciary.

The Razgrad exhibition and its forerunner in Targovishte in 2006 are important corollaries to the National Public Exhibitions which have been held in Sofia. By organizing conferences for practitioners across the country, the JSI has enabled more NGOs and courts to communicate about the latest developments in judicial reform. ❖