



December 20, 2006

Bi-weekly newsletter

Plovdiv Courts Launch Information Center With USAID Support

The Plovdiv courts joined ten other Bulgarian courts in opening public information centers with USAID assistance on November 21. Ambassador John Beyrle and Supreme Court of Cassation Chair Ivan Grigorov were guests of honor at the event hosted by Plovdiv Appellate Court Chair Radka Petrova. Developed with the support of the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI), the Information Center will help improve the efficiency and openness of the Plovdiv courts.



Supreme Court of Cassation Chairperson Ivan Grigorov and Ambassador John Beyrle meet after the ceremony.

The Plovdiv Information Center will serve the Appellate, District and Regional courts, and allows public access to information about the movement of cases, the location of offices and courtrooms, and state fees. The Information Center also has a computer terminal to help members of the public make inquiries. The opening of the center by Ambassador Beyrle and Justice Grigorov came as the JSI Information Center Working Group prepares its final recommendations for the Supreme Judicial Council to promote the standardization of information in the courts nationwide. ❖



Plovdiv Regional Court Chair Vesselin Hadjiev and Appellate Court Chair Radka Petrova at the opening of the new courthouse information center.

USAID Marks End of Assistance in Bulgarian Energy Sector

After three and a half years, the USAID Energy Regulatory Development Program celebrated its successful completion on December 7. A ceremony at the State Energy and Water Regulatory Commission (SEWRC) marked the end of over \$3.6 million in USAID assistance to the Bulgarian energy sector.

USAID provided legal assistance in developing sound energy sector legislation and regulations, and supported the development of a performance-based tariff system and uniform accounting system. These reforms aimed at improving transparency and combating corruption within the energy sector. The program also helped the SEWRC in building their capacity to act as an independent energy regulator, providing day-to-day advice as the SEWRC transformed into an industry-respected energy regulator. The SEWRC is now recognized as one of the best energy regulators in Europe. It has a solid legal basis for its operations, pricing mechanisms that will improve energy companies' performance and benefit the energy consumers, and transparent accounting and regulatory auditing procedures.



Mission Director Michael Fritz presents the USAID medallion to Prof. Konstantin Shushulov

One of the program successes was promoting over \$1 billion of foreign investment to Bulgaria by supporting SEWRC during the privatization process of the electricity distribution companies in 2004 and a large generation utility in 2005. ❖



New USAID Initiative Promotes Greater Opportunities for Disabled

*H*ealth for Everyone Association, a Pleven-based NGO, launched a nationwide information campaign to promote its new USAID funded project - Social Inclusion Network for People with Disabilities. Informational meetings were held in November and December in every Bulgarian district. The campaign presented the innovative concept of social entrepreneurship as a tool for social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The project aims to encourage organizations serving people with disabilities to start their own social enterprises and to participate more actively in the policy arena.

More than 400 people participated in the informational meetings, including NGO representatives, municipal and district officials, and journalists. ❖



Social entrepreneur Todorka Ovcharova helps Rumiana Grozeva of the Stara Zagora office of the Regional Economic Development Agency try on one of the hand-knit items produced by women with disabilities, a project which has received support from USAID and Peace Corps, For more information see <http://www.szeda.bg/handknitcrafts>

USAID Completes Court Trainings on Public Trust and Confidence

*J*udges and court staff from across Bulgaria completed two trainings, in Varna and Plovdiv, focused on developing strategic plans to improve trust and confidence both inside and outside the courthouse. The second workshop took place on December 1 in Plovdiv. The regional workshops were led by the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative, and involved representatives from 19 USAID Model Courts and Courts in Partnership. The trainings emphasized the importance of building internal organizational trust first, through a transparent process based on teamwork, laying the foundation for improved outreach to the public.

Linked to the USAID Court Improvement Plan, the trainings emphasized key outreach tools such as information centers, courthouse signage, media work, and customer service. Guest lecturers from the Plovdiv and Varna courts led discussions on how to partner with journalists to give greater reach to ongoing reform work. Also discussed were less visible efforts to improve court administration. Participants discussed how to incorporate key areas of court reform such as case delay reduction, random case assignment, and use of model hiring processes into broader outreach goals. Judges and staff developed plans for unifying court improvement activities in order to build trust within judicial institutions. ❖

USAID/BULGARIA WISHES YOU A

HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON!

