



December 19, 2007

Bi-weekly Newsletter

>> USAID-funded Documentary Marks International Human Rights Day

On December 10, Mission Director Michael Fritz participated in a press conference marking International Human Rights Day organized by the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. The Commission's Executive Secretary, Antoaneta Vassileva, presented the short documentary "Not My Life" funded by USAID and showing human trafficking stories from Romania. Ms. Vassileva also introduced American director Michael Cory Davis, whose documentary "Cargo" was screened two days later as part of the commemoration of 16 Days Against Violence Against Women. When answering journalists' questions, Mr. Fritz emphasized the importance of having a viable partner such as the National Commission to conduct anti-trafficking work in Bulgaria. ❖



The trailer of the documentary "Cargo" captured the attention of the audience.

>> USAID Legacy NGO Continues to Work for Improvement of the Justice System



The professionals from PDJS, BCDT, and the media agreed that much more can be done to improve the justice system in the country.

On December 11, USAID sponsored a working breakfast for the members of the new Supreme Judicial Council (SJC). Former staff of the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative presented the accomplishments of U.S. assistance programs in the areas of judicial administration and court improvement in the last seven years. The Bulgarian professionals who worked on these programs have formed a non-governmental organization of their own, the Program for the Development of the Judicial System (PDJS), and are determined to build on USAID accomplishments and further improve the justice system in Bulgaria. SJC members

who attended the event had a number of practical questions and expressed a strong interest in working with the new NGO. The event was organized by the Bulgarian Center for Development and Training (BCDT), another USAID legacy formed by the team of the USAID Participant Training Program. The working breakfast was followed by an informal and lively meeting with journalists. ❖



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>> USAID Helps Bulgarian National Bank Establish a Cash Center

The groundbreaking ceremony for the new Cash Center of the Bulgarian National Bank (BNB) took place in Sofia on December 6. The ceremony was attended by the Mayor of Sofia and BNB Governors from the last 20 years. The construction of the Center is expected to take more than one year.

The new cash center will be instrumental for the smooth introduction of the euro currency, currently planned for 2010. The USAID Financial Sector Integrity Project, which closed in June 2007, provided various assistance to BNB in designing the cash center, which will meet BNB objectives in currency circulation management, ensure the purity, security and efficiency of cash operations in accordance with the requirements of the European Central Bank, and establish efficient payment mechanisms.



Ivan Iskrov, Levon Hampartsumyan, and Boyko Borissov break ground for the new cash center despite frigid temperatures.

With USAID financial support, five experts from the BNB visited the Cash Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and became acquainted with their methods for distribution of banknotes, security systems, and other aspects of their work. The visit allowed BNB experts to assess the possibility for changes in their own methods, procedures, equipment and technologies. ❖

Bulgarian, Romanian and French Mayors Share EU Regional Experience

Twenty Bulgarian mayors attended a local government conference in Dijon, France, from December 6-8 at the initiative of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB), a key USAID legacy organization. The conference was hosted by the French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, a longstanding partner of NAMRB.

The conference highlighted the opportunities and challenges facing French, Bulgarian and Romanian local government practitioners in the implementation of EU policies at the local level. It also promoted partnerships between local authorities from France, Bulgaria and Romania around key municipal development issues. The conference proved an interesting venue for Bulgaria's elected officials to share lessons learned from the first year of EU accession and to coordinate the joint positions they will advocate at the level of European institutions. ❖



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>> Bulgarian Journalists Explore USAID Accomplishments in Romania

A group of seven journalists from national Bulgarian media outlets traveled with USAID to Bucharest, Romania to learn about what USAID has accomplished in their neighboring country. Four print journalists and three radio journalists visited Bucharest on December 10 and 11, where they met with implementers of USAID projects and representatives of the USAID Mission. USAID will close its mission to Romania in September 2008, at the same time that USAID will close its doors in Bulgaria and Croatia. Most of the Bulgarian journalists were visiting Romania for the first time and were struck by the similar challenges facing the two countries.



Examples of materials from the successful USAID civil society program in Romania.

- At a visit to the USAID Civil Society Strengthening Program, journalists learned about the “two percent” law that enables Romanian taxpayers to allot up to two percent of their taxes to NGOs. The amount donated through this mechanism increased to 5 million euro in 2006.
- Journalists met with Romanian reproductive health experts who, with USAID support, led efforts to cut the abortion rate and triple contraceptive use. USAID has invested \$44 million in family planning education initiatives and training for family doctors since the early 1990s.
- The journalists saw how USAID helped Romania overcome the legacy of the former regime and its devastating impact on child welfare. They witnessed the high level of care provided to disabled children at the Sfanta Ecaterina Child Welfare Services Center in Bucharest’s Sector 1.
- The director of a USAID legacy organization, the Center for Entrepreneurship and Executive Development (CEED), described to the journalists how CEED offices in Romania and Bulgaria are introducing the concept of networks to the region’s small and medium-sized businesses.
- USAID Mission Director Debra Mosel described the role of USAID in building Romania’s vibrant democracy, booming economy, and healthy families.



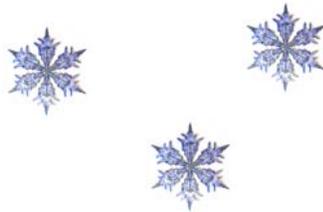
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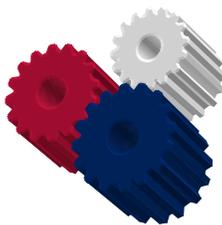
- The newly launched Black Sea Trust, a joint effort of USAID and the German Marshall Fund, hosted the journalists in their new office, located in one of Ceausescu's former family residences. The Black Sea Trust will extend grants over a ten-year period to promote civic participation, cross-border initiatives, and east-east cooperation in the Black Sea region. ❖



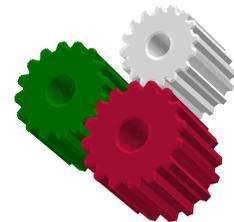
Mark Cunningham, Program Officer of the new Black Sea Trust based in Bucharest, explains the trust's goals to journalists.



And... introducing a new section highlighting the ongoing and long-term impact of our work...



USAID Legacies in Motion



Bulgarian NGOs Continue Getting out the Vote

NDI's pioneering efforts to encourage citizen activism and participation in Bulgaria began during the 2001 election cycle of parliamentary and presidential elections. NDI recruited a network of 70 Bulgarian NGOs, ranging from large consortia to small community groups, selected with careful effort to assess their qualifications and their potential to reach marginalized groups such as youth, women, disabled, and ethnic minorities. The GOTV campaign, which included bus tours, concerts, voter education materials, candidate debates, and canvassing of Roma and other marginalized communities, continued during elections in 2003 and 2005.

NGOs that participated in USAID-supported get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns since 2001 continue to pursue voter education activities five and six years later, using some of the original messages and techniques. According to NDI Bulgaria Director Sevda Voynova, eight NGOs from the original NDI network were joined by two other organizations in a national campaign during the presidential elections held in October 2006. During local elections in October 2007, at least 7 NGOs from the original network conducted local-level GOTV activities.

For more information on USAID and its programs, please visit our website at: <http://bulgaria.usaid.gov>.



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"The target groups we worked with over the years continue to have representation," says Voynova proudly, citing a campaign in Haskovo to mobilize disabled voters and an NGO initiative in Sevlievo to encourage youth participation in elections. An NGO in north-central Bulgaria targeted the issue of vote-buying.

In a striking example of how deeply the campaign message became ingrained in Bulgarian society, the Bulgarian version of the TV quiz show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" recently used the campaign slogan "Ti Izbirash!" ("You Choose!") as one of its "easy" questions for contestants. ❖

Six years ago, a future voter showed off voter information materials developed under NDI get-out-the-vote activities for the 2001 elections



USAID/Bulgaria Wishes You Happy Holidays!

