



January 16, 2008

Bi-weekly Newsletter

>> ***Bulgaria Launches the New Business Registry***

On January 2, Bulgaria launched its new business registry, a reform supported by USAID for the past four years. The new electronic, centralized and administrative registry replaced the 29 former paper-based and court-run registries, thus helping Bulgaria ease market entry, enhance transparency in the business environment and comply with EU requirements. The process of registering new businesses is generally proceeding smoothly without any critical deficiencies. The major test for the system in terms of workload will commence on January 20, when courts' vacations will end and all district courts will start issuing certificates for re-registration. Users have identified some problems in the initial operation of the new registry such as the fact that the personal data of companies' managers is now publicly available over the Internet, the requirement that CEOs have to be personally present at the time of re-registration, and difficulties with on-line payment of fees. Some of these problems will be solved with minor technical amendments of the law; others may require improvement of the registry's IT system or managerial practices. Still, this long-awaited reform is finally functional. The website of the new business registry is <http://www.brra.bg/>.

USAID congratulates its partners who worked to make this possible: the Commercial Law Reform Program (CLRP) implemented by BearingPoint and the Technical Assistance to the Registration Agency (TARA) program implemented by Sabev and Partners Law Firm. ❖

>> ***USAID Grantee Named Journalist of the Year in European Voice Awards***



Reneta Nikolova receives the prestigious "European Voice" award.

Reneta Nikolova, Bulgarian National Television journalist and chairwoman of the Journalists Against Corruption NGO, received the Journalist of the Year award from *European Voice* magazine on November 27, 2007 in Brussels. Editors of *European Voice*, a member of the Economist Group, and a panel of advisors selected 50 European citizens to be honored. The nominees were evaluated by a panel that included former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt and *Economist* editor John Micklethwait. Other categories included Campaigner of the Year, Diplomat of the Year and Business Leader of the Year. Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus was named European of the Year.

Journalists Against Corruption received USAID funding for three projects in 2006-2007 aimed at increasing public awareness of the judiciary. Ms. Nikolova received an award in the USAID media competition in October 2007 for coverage of U.S. assistance to Bulgaria. ❖



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>> **USAID Partner, NGO Leader Confirmed as Deputy Mayor in Asenovgrad**

Silvia Hubenova, president of Partners Bulgaria Foundation-Asenovgrad, was elected to the Asenovgrad municipal council in local elections in October 2007. On January 7, she was officially appointed to the position of Deputy Mayor for European Issues. Silvia was one of the most proactive and committed NGO leaders with whom USAID worked on the local level. Thanks to her efforts, Partners Asenovgrad Association has been extremely successful in attracting EU funding following the phasing out of USAID assistance. In addition to more than 4 years coordinating projects for Partners Asenovgrad, Silvia's other experience includes 8 years with Community Association Rodolubie and 12 years at the Asenovgrad City Library, including 2 years as director.

Partners Bulgaria Foundation implemented the USAID Interethnic Interaction Program from 2000-2007. The program addressed Roma and Turkish/Muslim re-integration in Bulgarian society through improving economic, social and educational opportunities and promoting interethnic relations in 13 Bulgarian municipalities with multiethnic populations and high levels of unemployment.

Partners Bulgaria Foundation and local PBF associations in 8 municipalities continue to promote civil society, improved conditions for marginalized groups, and democratic conflict resolution. More information can be found at www.partnersbg.org. ❖

>> **A new career counseling tool available to the Bulgarian students thanks to USAID**



Gergana Rakovska, BFE Director, Ambassador Beyrle and Aurelie Ferre, Microsoft Corporate Social Responsibility and Communications Manager present the software.

On December 12, the Business Foundation for Education launched a new software tool that will assist career counselors to give students better information about their interests and aptitudes and to help them make the right educational choices. The development of the tool was supported by Microsoft as part of their corporate social engagement with Bulgarian youth. Ambassador John Beyrle personally demonstrated the tool at the launch event, which was also web-cast live to the 36 career centers throughout Bulgaria. More than 60 students from different universities were present at the event.

Following the software presentation, Ambassador Beyrle had a lively discussion with students about their career development and the skills needed to compete in the global labor market.

The new software is already available in all Career Development Centers and through the career orientation web-site www.kakvidastanem.bg, developed with USAID assistance.

The Business Foundation for Education is a key legacy of USAID assistance to Bulgaria and its mission is to strengthen linkages between the labor market and education. Partnering with Microsoft and other socially responsible companies, BFE will continue to support career counseling in education and help create a more efficient and competitive labor market through practical training and career services long after USAID closes its Mission to Bulgaria. ❖



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>> League of American Communications Professionals Recognizes USAID Close-Out Campaign

USAID Bulgaria placed in the Top 50 (#35) out of more than 450 entries in the Magellan Awards for communications campaigns sponsored by the League of American Communications Professionals. The entry encompassed all aspects of the USAID communications campaign, aimed at raising public awareness about U.S. assistance provided to Bulgaria since 1990. This included TV, radio, print, internet advertisements, media outreach activities, closing ceremony, legacy publication, website (bulgaria.usaid.gov), biweekly report, and an action to plant more than 500 trees in Sofia's South Park as a symbol of the U.S.-Bulgaria partnership. The full list of the top 50 entries can be seen at <http://www.lacp.com/2007magellan/top50.htm>. ❖

