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Bi-weekly Newsletter

>> USAID Interethnic Interaction Program Celebrates Achievements

“Diversity and Equal Opportunities: The Debate Continues” was the theme of the closing conference of the USAID Interethnic Interaction Program in Bulgaria on June 14-15. Deputy Chief of Mission Alexander Karagiannis delivered welcoming remarks at the conference, which marked the achievements of Partners Bulgaria Foundation (PBF) in promoting ethnic minority inclusion in 13 Bulgarian municipalities. More than 120 participants attended the event, including ministry officials, local community representatives, NGO leaders, diplomats, and media.

A highlight of the event was the presentation of the latest Index of Ethnic Integration for Bulgaria. The Index measures equality among ethnic groups in seven areas: participation in local government, access to the labor market, access to quality education, health care, social services, living standard, and attitude to others. The survey results showed that although Bulgarians, Roma, Turks, and Bulgarian Muslims enjoy high level of equality in some regions, there are still municipalities with a wide gap between ethnic groups.

USAID Interethnic Interaction Program Results

- ✓ 215 small projects supported in the areas of social services improvement, educational advancement, and local economic development;
- ✓ 438 new jobs created, including 253 for women;
- ✓ 9 Mediation Centers established for out-of-court dispute resolution.



Faces from Bulgaria

A screening of the USAID-funded documentary “Faces from Bulgaria” captured the attention of the audience by showcasing personal stories of program beneficiaries. Two beneficiaries featured in the film, Father Slavcho Prodanov, of the St. Ivan Rilski Church and Imam-Hatip Oktay Hashim of the Saat Mosque in Targovishte, made a joint presentation about religious tolerance and reaffirmed one of the basic principles of the program that interethnic interaction can be achieved through deeper knowledge about the culture, religion, and traditions of others. ❖

>> American and Bulgarian Cities to Continue 10-Year Relationship

Phillip Dunlap, the Economic Development Director of Auburn, Alabama, has traveled to Bulgaria dozens of times over the last 10 years to work with his Bulgarian counterparts. Like his American colleagues from six U.S. cities who traveled to Varna in June, he often used his own vacation time to come to Bulgaria to share his expertise. Gary O’Connell, City Manager from Charlottesville, Virginia, is even bringing Bulgarian models back to his city: Charlottesville will soon open its first one-stop-shop for municipal administrative services based on the centers that are now in more than 120 Bulgarian cities.



USAID Mission Director Michael Fritz recognized the best local economic development practitioners from Bulgarian municipalities



Dunlap, O'Connell and municipal experts from four other American cities and 39 Bulgarian municipalities attended the Best Practices Symposium organized by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR) in Varna on June 11-12. It was called "Get Ready for Business: 10 Years of U.S.-Bulgarian Partnerships." In the past three years the U.S. Bulgarian CityLinks partnership has trained more than 100 Bulgarians in economic development. Thirty-three cities were certified as "Ready for Business" and six passed the certification criteria with excellence, making them eligible for small grants to support economic development projects developed in partnership with their American counterparts. Seven new investors established themselves in participating cities, and the enlargement of existing companies resulted in more than 2,500 new jobs. Participating cities attracted 120 million euro of new investment. ❖

>> **Business and Education Unite to Enhance Entrepreneurship among Young Bulgarians**



Milena Stoycheva from Junior Achievement Bulgaria explains the benefits of entrepreneurial education

On June 21, Junior Achievement Bulgaria (JAB) and the Confederation of the Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria (CEIBG) held a roundtable on the development of entrepreneurship education in Bulgaria. Leading business and educational organizations, as well as state institutions, participated in the discussions moderated by Sasha Bezuhanova, General Manager of Hewlett-Packard Bulgaria, Deputy Chairperson of CEIBG and Chairperson of the JAB Board of Directors. The participants discussed ideas about how the stakeholders in the process – business, universities, schools, and state authorities – can support the development of entrepreneurship education, which is a key competency for EU citizens. CEIBG and the universities declared their commitment to join the JAB Business Club. Business representatives declared their

readiness to be involved with the training of teachers who will teach entrepreneurship courses. ❖

Junior Achievement Bulgaria Business Club

The members of JAB Business Club work to create stable and effective links between educational theories and real business practice through the participation of proven professionals and business practitioners in the educational process. The Business Club holds regular meetings during which participants offer and work out strategies and methods directed at development of the entrepreneurial culture among youth; encouragement and promotion of innovation; improvement of the quality of teaching; and advancement of methods for business to support the professional and personal development of young people – the future labor force and the citizen society of Bulgaria.

>> **Euromoney magazine ranks BACB high among best managed companies**

In its May 2007 issue, *Euromoney* magazine released this year's ranking of the best managed companies in Central and Eastern Europe. The USAID-affiliated Bulgarian American Credit Bank (BACB) was the leader among nine Bulgarian companies reviewed by the magazine. *Euromoney* ranked BACB third among 102 "Emerging Europe" companies in the category "Most Convincing and Coherent Strategy." BACB also scored third among 41 companies from the banking and finance sector. In the electronic version of *Euromoney* magazine, BACB ranked second in terms of operational transparency. ❖



>> Courts and NGOs Make Partnerships Public

Forty-two Bulgarian courts and non-governmental organizations showed off the fruits of their labor at the Second National Public Exhibition “Courts and Communities Together” in Sofia. The event was both informative and emotional, as many partners said goodbye to the JSI team and to each other after nearly three years of work. The Exhibition featured a wide variety of items, including research studies, computer systems, and media products such as films and mock trials performed by students. Many NGOs and courts displayed materials to assist the public to better use the judicial system.



Meglana Tacheva (center), the director of one of the founding Bulgarian rule of law NGOs, PIOR, with her team at the Second National Public Exhibition. Court and community relations in Varna have become a model for the country as a result of the NGO's work.

Starting early 2005 through 2007, USAID provided \$1.5 million in grants to improve civil society relationships with the judiciary in towns and cities across Bulgaria. ❖

>> A Human Touch for Private Enforcement Agents

All court judgments have human elements - the judge, the parties involved in the case, and the individual enforcement agent charged with enforcing the court's decision. Dealing with creditors and debtors presents plenty of potential for conflict. A group of 15 private enforcement agents are now better prepared to handle potential conflicts after completing a Conflict Resolution Training Course, organized by the USAID Commercial Law Reform Program (CLRP) and the Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents (Chamber). The



Small group discussions

instructors emphasized the social and psychological challenges in the daily activities of the private enforcement practice, teaching them that their profession should consider more than just the pure legal aspect of enforcement actions. ❖

>> Anti-Trafficking Group Steps Up Work

On June 22 – 23, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with USAID funding, conducted a workshop for the Expert Group under the National Anti-trafficking Commission. As a follow-up of their World Learning study tour in Ukraine and Italy, the members of the Expert Group developed recommendations for the 2007 National Program for Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Victim Protection. Ms. Antoaneta Vassileva, Executive Secretary of the National Commission, led the discussion. A number of the recommended activities will be carried out with assistance from USAID and IOM, e.g. the development of a communication strategy and website for the National Commission, the carrying out of public information campaign, the training of relevant state officials in the area of anti-trafficking and the establishment of local anti-trafficking commissions.



During the workshop, Ms. Vassileva emphasized that she sees the Expert Group as the backbone of the National Commission's work. A few days later Ms. Vassileva introduced the Experts Group to the participants in the quarterly Anti-trafficking Donor Group held at the U.S. Embassy. Ms. Vassileva shared with the donors and the NGO representatives her hope that the next such meeting will be held at the new premises of the National Commission, which will be renovated and equipped with USAID and IOM assistance. ❖

>> *Minivans to Deliver Microcredit*



USAID DAA Thomas Mefford with the Mayor of Blagoevgrad Lazar Prichkapov and the Director of Nachala Petar Arnaudov (left to right)

On June 19, Thomas Fleetwood Mefford, USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, inaugurated the first "mobile branches" of the Nachala microfinance institution at a ceremony in Blagoevgrad. With two minivans equipped with laptop computers and printers from the recently closed USAID Financial Sector Integrity Project, Nachala aims to expand its reach in rural areas in North East and South West Bulgaria. The vans will enable loan officers to meet with remote clients and reduce the time for disbursement of loans. ❖

>> *Peace Corps Swears In Forty New Volunteers*



Volunteers swearing in

Forty Americans were honored on June 29 by Ambassador John Beyrle and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science as the twenty-first group of Peace Corps Volunteers to serve the Republic of Bulgaria. USAID has supported the grass-root development work of the volunteers in the areas of English language education, youth development, and community and organizational development, through the Small Project Assistance Program (SPA) since 1993. Over the years SPA-supported activities have improved access to formal and non-formal education for students and community residents, upgraded infrastructure when needed to support the project, and provided instruction or vocational training. Environmental education, conservation of biodiversity, and sustainable natural resource management are also supported by SPA.

Peace Corps Volunteers in all sectors help their local communities carry out sustainable development projects in areas that are of priority to USAID such as anti-trafficking, local tourism development, increasing youth awareness for prevention of drugs, etc.

Since its inception in 1993, the SPA Program has financed more than 400 projects community projects developed with the support from Peace Corps Volunteers. The SPA Program will continue through 2008. ❖