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Bi-weekly newsletter

JA Bulgaria Expands Reach to Younger Students

As part of Junior Achievement Bulgaria's continued efforts to expand entrepreneurial education to younger students, more than 90 Bulgarian teachers participated in training in business and economic education for kindergarten, elementary, and middle school students on November 13-14 in Sofia. Two Sofia schools opened their classrooms to trainees, who observed the JA lessons in action.



A Tavria kindergarten student learns about her role in the economy and in the community during a JA Bulgaria lesson.

JA youth programs provide an opportunity for students to learn the basic concepts of business and economics and how education is relevant to the workplace. Children learn how they can impact the world around them as individuals, workers and consumers. ❖

CLRP Seminar Initiates TV Debate on Private Enforcement Agents

On November 8, the USAID Commercial Law Reform Program (CLRP) helped organize a televised debate entitled "Private Enforcement Agents – Vicious Collectors or Knights of the Law?" The debate was aired during prime time on 7 Days Television. Private enforcement agent Katilin Popov, former CLRP legal adviser, faced leading journalist Vassil Chobanov in a discussion moderated by host Diana Tusheva. USAID supported the reform of judgments enforcement to address the inefficiency of the system and a backlog of over 1 billion in non-enforced judgments. As the program moves ahead and newly-appointed private enforcement agents collect debts, discussion continues on whether they deserve the public trust. The TV program aimed to raise public awareness and dispel negative stereotypes about the new profession.

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During the debate, private enforcement agent Katilin Popov conveyed the message that agents seek positive decisions in collecting claims. He encouraged debtors to take initiative and contact private enforcement agents to discuss possibilities of resolving claims.



Katilin Popov, private enforcement agent, and journalists Diana Tusheva and Vassil Chobanov discuss the public image of private enforcement agents.

The idea for the televised debate was generated at a CLRP seminar for journalists in Borovets on November 4. Twelve leading Sofia journalists gathered to discuss how they can help in developing the new profession of private judgment enforcement agents. A well-informed and critical press plays a key role in oversight of the new profession. As a result of the workshop, participating journalists produced more informed articles and broadcast reports about the private enforcement profession, raising awareness about enforcement agents' role and the need for adequate supervision mechanisms. Stoimen Chakalov from *Banker Weekly* commented, "This seminar was timely, informative and provided open answers to important questions."



Journalists prepare to vote in the "Best Title Contest" organized at the end of the CLRP media seminar.

To address the public's high expectations for the profession, the USAID Commercial Law Reform Program has engaged its partners – the Ministry of Justice and the Chamber of private enforcement agents – in building an effective system of supervision over the operations and the financial activities of the agents. ❖



Private Enforcement Agents Speak Out Against Violence at National Conference

Bulgaria's new profession of private judgment enforcement agents, established with USAID support last year, broke new ground at its National Conference organized by the Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents on November 11-12 in Pamporovo. The Conference was the Chamber's first major event after the second group of new entrants to the profession in October brought the total membership to 169.



Chamber Chairman Georgi Dichev talks about the two violent assaults; Svetozara Petkova (USAID) and Ivan Cholakov, Member of the Chamber's Board look on.

The Conference provided a public forum for the Chamber's reaction to two violent assaults against private enforcement agents in previous weeks. The membership voted unanimously to adopt a Protest Declaration addressed to the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, members of Parliament and responsible ministers, and to distribute it through the media. The Chamber Chairman, Georgi Dichev, stated that "These crimes only prove that the reform is working. Private enforcement agents are disturbing the forces in society that do not respect the rule of law. . . . Our strength doubles today; so does our impact and our responsibilities, and we are not hesitant to execute our public functions and apply the law."

The Chamber organized the Conference to integrate and educate its new members on the Chamber's values and principles. The new agents took their oath of office and participated in an open discussion on issues faced by the new and growing profession. Those issues include current work to create uniform standards of professional practice, plans for professional training, and the development, with CLRP assistance and USAID funding, of a performance monitoring IT system. ❖

Career Facilitation in Education Gaining Speed

Career counselors can play an important role linking students with potential employers. The USAID-funded Labor Market Project is helping to improve labor market conditions in Bulgaria by building career facilitation capacity within the educational system. Two recent events demonstrated a growing public and private interest in the field of career facilitation in Bulgaria.

The Technical University (TU) in Sofia held its first career fair on November 14 and 15. The fair was organized by the TU Career Development Center, established with USAID support earlier this year. The fair was held under the motto "Meet Your Future Employer." A total of 60 companies from the mining, electronics, communications and IT sectors participated in the fair and more than 2000 students visited its stands. Fifteen companies made individual presentations which received great interest from the students. Among them were distinguished employers such as Globul, BTC, Mtel, Ericsson, Shneider Electric, Tumbelweed, and Roca.

The Master's Program in Career Facilitation was launched at Ruse Angel Kanchev University on November 16. USAID helped design and introduce the program, the first of its kind in Bulgaria, with a first class of 23 students this year. The speakers at the opening recognized the importance of the program for bridging the educational system and the labor market. ❖