



September 12, 2007

Bi-weekly Newsletter

>> Prime Time Documentary Tells the USAID Story in Bulgaria

During the evening prime time block on September 9, Bulgaria's largest private TV station aired a thirty-minute documentary tracing the seventeen-year history of USAID in Bulgaria. Through in-depth interviews conducted by bTV journalist Vyara Andreeva, the film highlighted the stories of three enterprising Bulgarians who realized their dreams in the difficult years of the transition with the help of USAID assistance.

Entrepreneur Veselin Prokopiev received credit from the Bulgarian-American Enterprise Fund to develop the largest mussel farm on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast. Vyara Yotova, owner of a Pleven-based sewing company, started in 1998 with a 50-square-meter working space and a few employees. Since then, she obtained loans from the microfinance institution "Nachala" that helped her expand her business substantially by purchasing new equipment and hiring dozens of new workers. Galina Bankovska, executive director of the Gabrovo Community Fund, actively contributed to the revival of local philanthropy. She participated in more than 20 community development projects implemented as a result of the Fund's fundraising initiatives, including renovation of the maternity wing of the town hospital.

The film also featured interviews with USAID Mission Director Mike Fritz, Local Government Advisor Kiril Kiryakov, and Financial Sector Advisor Rayna Dimitrova.



Veselin Prokopiev, mussel farm and restaurant owner



Small business owner Vyara Yotova



Galina Bankovska, Gabrovo Community Fund



The neonatal wing of Gabrovo Hospital, renovated with the help of Gabrovo Community Fund.

>> Second National Survey Confirms Wide Impact of USAID-Supported Court Reform

Intensive work on USAID-supported court improvement plans has a dramatic impact on court users, according to the second national study of over 3,000 people by Alpha Research released on September 11 at a press conference in Sofia. Conducted in partnership with the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative, the study of the impact of specific court reforms confirmed earlier findings of substantial increases in the

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opinions of court users. The Alpha Research study of court users and members of the general public again demonstrates significant improvements in court user views of key areas of court work: the efficiency of trial proceedings, delivery of administrative services, and access to information. Significant press coverage greeted the release of the study, with over a dozen stories including the prime time news broadcast of Bulgarian National Television.

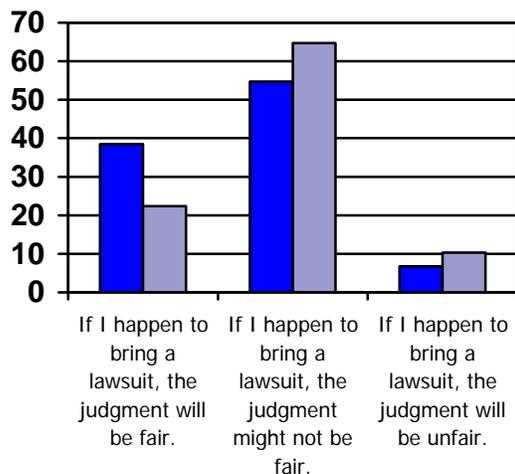
The 2007 study bolstered the 2006 findings, which demonstrated that USAID Model Courts and Courts in Partnership scored significantly higher (often 15% or more) than courts in unassisted regions. This year's study, which again involved in-depth, face-to-face interviews, also showed improvements in court user views of judicial fairness, independence, and other areas in the last year. Statistical significance for the study is measured by differences of 5% or greater.

Especially noteworthy was the decrease in negative answers to general questions in the cities of Plovdiv, Varna, and Burgas. Those "unsatisfied" with their trial or lawsuit dropped by 12%, and those describing the performance of their court as "getting worse" dropped by 16%. This decrease in negative responses from 2006 corresponds to a parallel increase in positive responses to these same questions. On a separate question predicting future court fairness, these city court users registered a 16% increase when expressing confidence that judgments in future lawsuits "will be fair."

On specific court activities, the "very good" answers of court users in the big cities also shot up in several areas over the past year:

- conviction certificate procedures – 14% increase
- case schedule information – 12% increase
- claim initiation procedures – 15% increase
- access to case information – 12% increase
- quality of administrative services – 11% increase
- clear safeguard mechanisms for case assignment – 13% increase
- overall prompt provision of information – 9% increase

The Alpha Research team concluded that the significant growth in positive court user assessments can continue and eventually overtake negative perceptions. The report concludes: "Only if the efforts are sustained could we expect a 'breakthrough' and overriding of the negative by the positive opinions." The logical policy implication would be for Bulgarian courts to continue work on specific, concrete areas of court improvement.



The left bar in the graph demonstrates the increased confidence of court users in large cities. In just one year the expectation of fairness has nearly doubled.

