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Dear readers and partners,

You are holding in your hands the latest edition of the first 2004 Biannual English Digest Newsletter of the Foundation for Local Government Reform. As one of our main organizational priorities states, we continue to support the on-going reform of local self-government in Bulgaria through a wide range of projects, initiatives and activities, some of which are covered within this issue of the Digest.



The period since October 2003 has been marked with various challenges for the newly-elected municipal officials in Bulgaria. The efforts of the local authorities have been directed towards issues related to fiscal and governing decentralization, strengthening the competitiveness of Bulgarian municipalities, encouraging citizen participation and providing better public services. These efforts are guided by the common vision of the future membership of Bulgaria to the European Union and the key role of the local authorities in this process.

FLGR continues to ensure professional and timely support and services to the Bulgarian municipalities in terms of their administrative and managerial capacity, exchange of successful practices and know-how, building stronger local communities and creating conditions for sustainable economic development. We stay opened for international partnerships by means of which to build on our experience and contribute to the successful preparation of local authorities to become confident and competent members of United Europe.

**Ginka Kapitanova,
Executive Director,
FLGR**

THE MUNICIPAL CITIZEN INFORMATION CENTERS - A PROVEN SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

The Citizen Information Center (CIC) practice **was implemented by more than 60 Bulgarian municipal administrations** over the last five years. The practice is a result the consistent efforts of the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR) and a team of experts from eight municipalities (Innovative Local Government Practices Team), with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

This modern service delivery model is based on a study of leading international practices, adapted to the Bulgarian conditions. The underlying principle of the model is the understanding that **the Municipality is the supplier of services to the citizens and needs to treat the latter as clients of municipal services**, and not only as taxpayers or voters. The citizen information center provides strictly regulated quality and timelines for the services delivered to citizens and companies.

The leading examples of citizen information centers in Bulgaria include the municipalities of Blagoevgrad, Gabrovo, Dobrich, Stara Zagora, Rousse, Silistra and Sliven. These municipalities were the first to build their citizen information centers (1998 - 2000) and have been transferring their experience to other Bulgarian municipalities since. Smaller municipalities that may serve as a good example of citizen information centers include: Botevgrad, Mezdra, Beloslav, Provadia, Dolni Chiflik, Elhovo, etc. The citizen information centers in these municipalities were built in 2001 - 2002. The establishment of almost 40 citizen information centers in Bulgarian

Mezdra Citizen Information Center



municipalities would not be possible without the exceptional support of USAID under FLGR's Danubian Initiative and Service Delivery Improvement programs.

PROVEN ADVANTAGES OF THE CIC MODEL

To the citizens, CIC provides optimal and convenient access to municipal services; a friendly, business-like and transparent environment; saves time and efforts; guarantees the elimination of eventual corruption pressure on behalf of the municipal administration; provides clarity and information through service catalogues, brochures and information boards.

To the municipal employees, CIC provides sufficient operating time to deliver quality services and an opportunity for professional development and improvement of customer service skills.

To the municipal management, CIC creates an opportunity for automated internal control and an adequate basis for informed management decisions. The immediate effects from the delivery of municipal services through a citizen information center include: reduced service delivery times; service of more users per day; reduction of service delivery delays to 5%; positive responses and approval on behalf of the citizens.

A municipal citizen information center is established under Art. 6 of the Administrative Services to Legal and Physical Entities Act. The center is administratively subordinated to the municipal secretary, with regard to the latter's competencies under Art. 43, Para 3 of the Local Self-Government and Local Administration Act. To have the status of the center regulated within the municipal administration is critical (a sample status has been developed by the Innovative Local Government Practices Team and is available at FLGR).

The center should be staffed by specialists who know well the functions of the different municipal departments. Apart from that, CIC employees need to go through customer service training. The norms of polite attitude to clients, fastest delivery of requested service, information delivery on service requests submitted and the stage of their implementation need to be instilled as unconditional responsibilities of each CIC employee. In this way, a maximum number of citizens would remain satisfied by the new service delivery procedure. Software implementation should be accompanied by training of the specialists who will use the software.

The simplified service delivery procedure is one of the reasons why citizens get used so fast to the citizen informa-



Sevlievo Citizen Information Center



tion centers. The citizens submit their respective service request to the center and come back there to receive the service, i.e. the rules are extremely precise, clear and apply to all services. This approach separates the center employees from the operative work on the delivery of the service, which accelerates the delivery process. On the other hand, the client doesn't have any contact with the person who actually provides the service, thus eliminating possible corruption practices.

The accessible and open space for contacts between the citizens and the administration at the citizen information centers contributes to real transparency of administration's actions. The desks of CIC employees are open, without any barriers between the employee and the visitors, which creates an atmosphere of goodwill and closeness.

The feedback from the citizens to the administration is achieved not only by live contact at the center, but also through surveys filled by the visitors. The existence of feedback provides an opportunity for citizen control on administration's activities, for the improvement of service quality and for the prevention of corruption practices.

The municipal citizen information centers provide in an

adequate way an optimal volume of information sought by the citizens. Brochures containing detailed descriptions of available services and contact information for the different municipal departments are available to the citizens. Information about the activities of the different municipal activities, request and other forms are posted on special boards in the centers. The boards are also used to announce upcoming competitions and bids, which makes the procedures accessible and open to businesses and citizens. The municipalities' websites also increase the opportunities for external contact and greater publicity of the information provided by the citizen information centers.

The concentration of administrative service delivery in the centers by itself imposes a better coordination between the departments and the employees providing municipal services. The constant flow of information to the municipal managements, needed to make rational and effective decisions, is a critical aspect of CIC operations. This also shortens the response time in case of problems, omissions or errors made.

The success and the effectiveness of the citizen information centers are results from the competent, well-thought and consistent implementation of modern computer technology and the automation of municipal administration operations. The citizen information center is a part of the municipal information system, which is comprised of a certain number of programs and program systems. The quality of administrative operations depends on the choice of subsystems, the link between them and the way they are used.

The center is an important step towards e-government at local level, as it creates prerequisites for the electronic delivery of services to legal and physical entities. This is consistent with the European Commission's requirement to Bulgaria to have our country provide electronic delivery of at least 20 specific administrative services by 2005.

The ten basic steps that would help you establish a citizen information center in your municipality include:

1. Form a work group comprised of enthusiastic influential employees (the municipal secretary, PR and IT specialists, the Mayor's Office, etc.) that would study the existing experience and develop a concept for a center consistent with the needs of your municipality.

2. Present the CIC concept to the municipal management team and convince them in the benefits from its existence.

3. Organize an information campaign to inform the citizens about the idea, solicit their opinion and win their support. Ensure that the municipal councilors, the media and the non-governmental organizations are empathic to the idea. Use press conferences, printed and video materials.

4. Develop a specific funding strategy for the project - by privatization revenues, by the budget, by donor programs, etc., in consistency with the concept.

5. Submit the proposal to a Municipal Council session. Be prepared to explain the specific goals, funding arrangements, center location and layout.

6. Develop terms of reference and organize a competition for the design.

7. Hold a competition for the construction works. Assign the contract.

8. Express a new attitude to the citizens using the center. Procure modern equipment and furniture. Place detailed information signs and inscriptions, print information brochures and catalogues containing the process and delivery tomes of available services.

9. Carefully select the employees of the center, based on their readiness to work with the citizens in a friendly manner. Rely on both proven specialists and on younger, less experienced ones. All employees must go through customer service training.

10. Organize a nice and memorable ceremony for the official opening. Publicly state that the center belongs to all citizens of the municipality. Ensure that everyone understands that this is just the first step towards the development of new relations between citizens and local government.

The physical construction of the center is conducted in the following sequence: 1/ Development of engineering cost estimates that clearly define the parameters of the goal; 2/ Phased-out project implementation. The engineering cost estimate needs to assess, quantitatively and qualitatively, all resources needed and to develop a schedule for the implementation of the relevant activities.

To shorten construction times and to faster achieve the final result, it is possible to work in three directions at the same time. The first one includes the design and the implementation of architectural and construction works. The second covers the design and the installation of the cabling for the local computer network, the delivery of the necessary hardware (computer systems and peripheral devices), the delivery of office furniture. The third direction includes the selection, delivery and installation of appropriate software and training the employees to use it.

The municipal citizen information centers are a model is constantly being revised and improved. The richness of this model is due to the variety of its applications in the Bulgarian municipalities. Based on their specific needs and views, they introduce new elements and innovations to the center's basic functions, thus making the administration even more transparent and easily accessible by the citizens. Some specific **examples** to this end include:

1. Open doors day at the Municipality of Silistra, which allows the citizens to get acquainted with the structure, the functions and the services provided by the municipal administration.

2. Three mailboxes placed at the center's entrance and



Veliko Tarnovo Citizen Information Center



Zlatograd Citizen Information Center

addressed to the mayor, the deputy-mayor and the municipal secretary of the Municipality of Gabrovo. The citizens can use the mailboxes to send opinions, advice, recommendations and objections.

3. A special desk for entrepreneurs in the centers of the municipalities of Gabrovo, Mezdra, Dobrich, Dryanovo and Sevlievo.

4. Automated call center in the Municipality of Silistra, with interactive capabilities, allows the citizens to select the information they need with regard to administrative services.

5. An opportunity for the citizens to get online information about all municipal services, including specific prices and timelines, and to download the required forms from the website of the municipalities of Blagoevgrad, Stara Zagora and Dobrich.

6. Electronic information terminal with a touch-screen at the entrance of the citizen information center in Dobrich.

Thanks to USAID support, in 2004 FLGR will continue to provide **information, expert technical assistance and advice to municipalities** with regard to the implementation of the CIC model. The Foundation's website (www.flgr.bg) contains resource materials on this topic. A special section, *e-Municip@lity*, is to be developed on the website; the section will contain materials and sample documents developed by the Innovative Local Government Practices Team. ◆

GABROVO IMPLEMENTS E-REGION PROJECT

On January 14, 2004, the Gabrovo Regional Administration officially opened its new Citizen Information Center, introducing a one-stop electronic service delivery system. A modern electronic document exchange system will function between the regional and the municipal administrations and will be integrated with the existing document flow systems in the municipalities within the region.



Apart from a presentation of the center, the opening included a demonstration of the electronic document exchange system. A real-time request was received from the Municipality of Sevlievo and the response was sent back in electronic format. All this happened in front of the regional governor and the mayor of Sevlievo. Other impressive innovations included SMS or email notification for the completion of a specific re-

quest, the opportunity to check the current status of a request through the regional administration's website and the opportunity to use different access channels to request services. The presentation was attended by Roumen Trifonov, advisor to the minister of the national administration, Georgi Vulchev and Kamen Spasov, director and coordinator, respectively, of the Information, Communication and Management Technology Center of the Council of Ministers, Gabriela Bakalova, chief secretary of the Public Administration and European Integration Institute, mayors, secretaries and chairs of municipal councils from the municipalities of Gabrovo, Dryanovo, Sevlievo and Tryavna, Ginka Kapitanova, executive director of FLGR, Todor Mladenov, FLGR, Slaveya Hristova, Chair of Balkan Assist Association and media representatives.

Gabrovo is the first regional center that has implemented an e-Region project in compliance with one of the main goals of the National e-Government Strategy: to improve the delivery of administrative services to the citizens and enhance the functioning of the administrations by the implementation of modern computer technology. The Gabrovo region was selected for the start of the e-Region project for its traditions in this field. Over the last two years, the municipalities of Gabrovo, Dryanovo, Sevlievo and Tryavna developed local computer networks and implemented document flow, performance control, property management and other systems. These efforts were a part of the establishment of citizen information centers, facilitated by the Foundation for Local Government Reform with the support of the United

States Agency for International Development.

The **advantages and the results** from the Gabrovo e-Region project include:

1. The new system considerable reduces the time for the delivery of administrative services to citizens and businesses and improves the quality and the number of services provided. Citizens and companies are provided optimal access to services and information. Conditions for the delivery of additional services (Xeroxing, scanning, references, access to legislative documents, etc.) have been created, communication and feedback mechanisms have been improved.

2. The capabilities of the regional



administration's management to exercise control and task management are significantly improved. Graphic or textual information about unsolved tasks, tracking of service requests and control on timeline compliance are available at any point in time.

3. The work of the regional administration employees is enhanced, as many routine activities with regard to the transfer, preparation and development of documents are now automated. All tasks assigned for the day to an employee are clearly prioritized. The delivery of the services requested by the citizens of the region is now possible within shorter deadlines and with minimum staff.

4. The transparency and the reporting of administration's achievements are improved.

5. The restriction of the direct contacts between citizens and the administration employees delivering the services significantly reduces corruption opportunities. This also provides

optimal conditions for the employees who have more operative time to deliver better quality results.

6. The protection of the information from unauthorized access is improved.

7. The opportunities for malpractices are reduced, as every documents issued is registered by the document flow system.

8. Conditions for direct electronic communications with the municipal administrations in the region and with the national institutions are provided. The coordination between the individual administrations is improved, the paper flow of information and documents is reduced. The automated exchange of documents between the regional and the municipal administrations allows for the reduction of postal expenses, while at the same time reducing the deliver time to several minutes.

9. The opportunities for the delivery of information to citizens and municipal administrations are expanded.

10. Conditions are created for the involvement of the citizens in the identification of solutions to specific public problems.

The Gabrovo e-Region project was developed by a team of the Technical University: Assoc. Prof. Mosko Aladzhem, team leader; Vasilka Svirachevska, IT consultant; and Todor Mladenov, team leader, Funding Programs Team, FLGR. The project was implemented by a team of the Gabrovo Regional Administration, led by Andrei Kostadinov, chief secretary.

The regional administration team is willing to provide information to all interested parties at tel./fax: (066) 800 364, tel./fax: (066) 800 356 and through the website

<http://www.gb.government.bg/> 

TRANSPARENCY IN THE MUNICIPALITIES CAMPAIGN

Ginka Kapitanova

Executive Director, FLGR

The Foundation for Local Government Reform and USAID's Local Government Initiative initiate **a campaign for transparency in the municipalities**. The campaign is targeted at all Bulgarian municipalities.

Why is this campaign important and necessary? What are the prerequisites for such an initiative?

- There is a public attitude that corruption is present at all levels and areas of government;
- The citizens expect election slogans and promises to become principles of government guiding the behavior of the municipal administrations and the municipal councils;
- The effective decentralization requires more and more opportunities for involvement of the citizens in the formulation of local policies and the decision-making process at local level;
- Partnership with businesses and increased trust in local government on behalf of investors are needed;
- The principles of the European Charter on Local Government need to be enforced;
- Many Bulgarian municipalities have developed positive practices for transparency in government which, when combined, could be applied in a systematic and targeted manner by all municipalities.

The purpose of the campaign is to increase the transparency of the operations of the municipal councils and the municipal administrations, which would result in increased confidence in local government on behalf of the citizens and would encourage citizen participation.

The specific goals/steps include:

- To have each municipality evaluate the degree of transparency in the operations of the municipal administration (MA) and the municipal council (MC), by using the **self-assessment questionnaire**;

The formation of a team of representatives from MA and MC that will assess, in a professional and objective manner, the extent to which each practice from the questionnaire is implemented in the municipality and whether the citizens are informed about it, is a very successful approach.

- To build consensus and develop a program for a phased-out introduction of the practices that have remained unused until now - timelines, persons responsible;



The self-assessment questionnaire doesn't include all practices developed by the municipalities. In case you're applying practices that are not described in the questionnaire, you could send the former to FLGR and thus help enrich the questionnaire.

- To implement new management approaches borrowed from international practices;

FLGR and LGI will form a Demonstration Team of municipalities, which will be involved in the implementation of a comprehensive program aimed at increasing the transparency, wish to test new practices and are willing to share their experience with the remaining municipalities.

- To exchange information and experience between the municipalities on an ongoing basis;

Share your experience with FLGR and it will reach all municipalities via our newsletter and website.

- An annual prize for most transparent municipality and best practice in a difficult and risky area of municipal operations will be established.

The criteria for the prizes will be announced in April, 2004.

FLGR's and LGI's partners in the implementation of the campaign include NAMRB, the regional associations of municipalities and the professional associations of the specialists in the municipal administrations.



WE ADDRESSED SEVERAL OF THE MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPARENCY TEAM WITH THE QUESTION: „WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUR COLLEAGUES IN THE BEGINNING OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR TRANSPARENCY IN THE BULGARIAN MUNICIPALITIES?“



Valentin Chilikov

Mayor, Municipality of Strumyani:

There is hardly any mayor or municipal team in Bulgaria who wants to be known in public space by the lack of transparency.

I don't accept talk about corruption, but rather about conflict of interest - such conflicts really exist, especially in the smaller communities, where, for example, thirteen municipal councilors make decisions on all issues - that need to be solved by adherence to the accepted public rules.

In the beginning of the term, I think that both the municipal councils and the administrations will have to adopt their codes of ethics and make these texts a part of the Statutory Regulations, for which there are no restrictions about size and could contain everything that regulates the relations within the team and, of course, those of the team and society.

The civil society in Bulgaria is underdeveloped. The lack of citizen associations and organizations reflects on the functioning of the local governments. There should be an active citizen position on solving certain issues. Yes, this procedure takes some time but then it produces better results.

In this respect, the large ones are favored, as there the different forms of citizen participation, even the media as a corrector or as a deliverer of information to society, are much better structured than in smaller ones.

The self-assessment questionnaire is rich, but hardly more than a third of the practices it contains really exist in the Bulgarian municipalities at present. The questionnaire is not a reporting document; it was developed to serve as guidelines for more effective and more transparent operations. At the same time, the purpose of the questionnaire is to help us in our capacity of local government representatives to fill in the remaining two-thirds. I hope that in a year we'll be able to report very good results.

At this point, it is still early to talk about a measure but the campaign initiated by FLGR to award a prize to the municipality that has done the most to assert the principles of transparency, the whole campaign for the dissemination of best practices on transparency in the municipalities, the comments that are already being made at the general assemblies of the regional associations of municipalities and at other levels, will all produce results, I believe.

As a member of the Transparency Team, I presented the campaign and the self-assessment questionnaire to the NAMRB's General Assembly. I hope that the colleagues will be interested, as this is something that we could only benefit from.

Georg Spartanski
Chair, Pleven Municipal Council:

As a second-term chair of the municipal council, I can say that we're not talking about a witch hunt, but about the fact that Bulgaria will enter the EU and



when you enter a new house, you have to learn to observe the rules that have been adopted in that house. In this respect, we'll have to get used to the transparent procedures as a prevention of corruption. Our goal is not to prosecute corruption as such, as this is the job of specialized bodies, such as the police, the prosecution, the court, etcetera. The problem here is that the citizens are not sufficiently aware of the management procedures in decision-making and the practices, i.e. the government practice. In my opinion, our society is still divided in rulers and ruled, and the goal is the citizens to be the object, instead of the subject, of government. This may be achieved by empathy to the problems with clarity on the decision-making process and the process of their implementation. When the rulers make decisions in open and transparent conditions, this is a guarantee and a prevention against corruption practices. In this respect, one line of action is to increase the transparency, to increase the awareness of the citizens, and here the non-governmental organizations and the journalists are most useful as intermediaries between the rulers and the civil society. A second line of work is the improvement of the skills of those involved in decision-making and then in the implementation of these decisions. This is how I see this campaign for transparency - not as a fight against witches, but as the assertion of democratic models in society.

The rulers in a municipality are supposed to be best informed and have the vision on the development of their municipalities, the Bulgarian municipality and the Bulgarian nation as a whole. The good practices must, first of all, be promoted, and secondly, the rulers must be interested in learning and applying these practices. I think that this is a process that can't happen overnight, but that's where the efforts need to be focused. Time won't wait for us. I think that the practices we're discussing are useful. Their implementation is a matter of government will. And of a good management team of prepared individuals, convinced in the necessity and knowing how to apply them.



Marius Konov

Secretary, Municipality of Montana:

The self-assessment questionnaire is quite extensive and many of the governance transparency practices it contains may be applied by the Bulgarian municipalities immediately. The people in general are not aware how the decisions are made - this is

my personal observation - including in our own municipality. Despite the fact that the media in our municipality definitely demonstrate interest in municipal council meetings. We can work on the introduction of more transparency in the decision-making procedures or in budget development - the citizens are unaware of this interesting issue. In our municipality, we have the practice of having the citizens propose certain things that are reviewed by both the committees of the municipal council and the administration.

I believe that the campaign will produce results by the end of 2004. A program of such scale has not been implemented until now. Things need to move bottom-up, starting from the municipalities, I believe that this is an appropriate way of achieving our goals. ◆

END OF THE INTRODUCTORY TRAININGS FOR MAYORS AND CHAIRS OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

From December, 2003 through February, 2004 the Foundation for Local Government Reform organized 4 trainings for newly elected mayors and chairs of municipal councils. The seminars were held consecutively in the cities of Sofia, Kyustendil, Shoumen and Silistra. The purpose of the training was: to provide quick orientation that would save time in the initiation of the efforts of the new municipal managements; to acquire knowledge about management decisions and skills needed in the different areas of municipal government; to apply in practice the principles of teamwork, transparency and partnership.

The training program was developed jointly by the Foundation for Local Government Reform, the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Local Government Initiative Program, with the support of the United States Agency for International Development. **Such a large-scale training program for elected local government officials in the beginning of their term has never been organized before in Bulgaria.**

Twenty-eight seminars were held within two months throughout the country, which provided **all municipalities an opportunity to include their representatives in the training.** The seminars were organized in partnership with the nine regional associations of municipalities. A total of 740 participants were trained (mayors, deputy-mayors and municipal council-

ors). 121 participants went through FLGR's trainings □ representatives of 35 municipalities (16% of all municipalities in Bulgaria). Every participant was given a folder of detailed materials on the following topics: legislative framework of local government; municipal property; urban development; management skills; and partnerships. At the same time, NAMRB, FLGR and LGI published the materials for the training as a special manual for the 2003 - 2007 term mayors and municipal councilors. The manual was printed in circulation of 10,000 and disseminated gratuitously to all municipal councils and municipal administrations, according to the number of elected officials in each of them.

The latest changes in different areas of local government were also discussed during the two-day training, so the training was interesting to both the newly elected and the re-elected municipal leaders. The lecturers included leading municipal specialists in the respective areas and experienced local government consultants. The participants and the lecturers discussed specific case studies in the area of municipal property, budget and urban planning.

98 percent of the attendees state that the training was extremely useful and timely. „The fact that the seminar is in the beginning of the term is positive, creates common behavioral standards, irrespective of political affiliation. Specialized seminars are also needed“, says one of the participants.

97 percent state that the materials developed are a very good source of information that can be used after the training is completed.

99 percent believe that the time allotted for each topic was not sufficient and express a desire to have trainings of longer duration organized for them.

The training spurred a lot of interest among municipal councilors. A survey indicated that 80 percent of the municipal councilors in this term are newly elected, have no experience in local government and would like to attend such introductory seminars which would provide them a basic understanding of the work that lies ahead of them.

As a result from this interest, the Foundation for Local Government Reform received invitations to organize trainings. Six trainings for municipal councilors have already been held (with more than 300 participants), five of them for all municipalities in the Sofia Region (upon the initiative of the regional administration) and one for the municipal councilors from the municipalities of Lom and Broustari. A training is to be organized for the municipal councilors in the municipalities of Toundzha, Smolyan, Rudozem, banite and Madan.



The municipalities gave also expressed interest in FLGR's Training for Mayors of Communities and Mayor's Representatives. At this time, this training has been attended by the mayors of the communities in the municipality of Sliven and the municipality of Smolyan. The training is comprised of two modules. Those who have passed both modules received a certificate from FLGR.

Detailed information on other trainings provided by FLGR may be found at the Foundation's website (www.flgr.bg) and electronic newsletter or in the next issues of monthly newsletter.



RESPONSES OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE SEMINARS FOR MAYORS AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILORS HELD BY FLGR IN SHOUMEN AND SILISTRA, FEBRUARY 24 - 26



Rafaytin Sefer, Mayor, Municipality of Vurbitsa, Turgovishte Region:

This is my first term as mayor. Since 1994 till now I've worked as a Chief Specialist, Education, healthcare and Culture, at the Vurbitsa municipal administration, so I'm aware of the work and know the people I'll have to work with.

Capital investment was one of the first tasks that came up in the beginning of the term. A significant amount remained unused, so we managed to use it and at the end of the year we organized procedures for the repairs of the central heating system in the school and the kindergarten in Vurbitsa. I also implemented a project for the computerization of the whole Municipality. The sixteen communities within the municipality of Vurbitsa are now equipped with computers and printers, more powerful workstations were provided for the municipal administration. All this was financed by capital outlay funds from the last year that have remained unused during the previous term. This will allow the employees of the municipal administration to increase their effectiveness, which will be very helpful during this term.

As you know, I asked to be included in this seminar, as I attended the seminar of the National Association of the Municipalities in Turgovishte. To me, every seminar has its benefits. Every meeting is separate and every lesson learned is separate. A mayor cannot be an expert in all areas and municipal activities, so the manual we were given will be very helpful. I intend to use it in my future work. The municipal councilors and the mayors need to be shown more examples, in order to make the link between theory and practice. They have to be related, in order for us to apply them in our work.

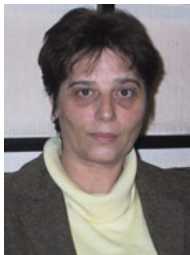


Tourkhan Halilov, Chair, Nikola Kozlevo Municipal Council, Shoumen Region:

This is my first term as a municipal councilor and I'm probably the youngest chair of a municipal council in Bulgaria. During the election campaign, we promised to solve some problems related to the water-supply, electricity-supply and street lighting. These are the basic problems of our citizens. This is why in the beginning of the term we brought up these problems first and, with the assistance of the superiors, of course, will try to solve them.

These seminars are very important and useful because we are now making our first steps in local government. We've had great difficulties in understanding the basics of local government but these seminars, organized by the Foundation, let

us get a real understanding of the things that we'll use in the future in overcoming the problems at local level. I'd like to thank FLGR and the lecturers. I think that it would be good to have more seminars as this one. For example, here I got information about the legislative framework but there are also some sub-legislative norms and terms that need to be known to allow for making good and quality decisions.



**Margarita Keranova, Mayor,
Municipality of Smyadovo, Shoumen
Region:**

I have experience in local government as a municipal councilor and as a chair of a standing committee, but this is my first terms as a mayor.

In my opinion, the first problem faced by me and the Municipal Council in the beginning of the term was the new structure of the municipal administration that had to be made compliant with the new aspects of the funding and the participation in the accession funds. The Municipal Council made a sound decision and despite the small staff of the administration we now have employees who will be responsible for the international relations and European integration. The department is functional and we're ready to apply to SAPARD with our first project.

Today's seminar has several benefits for me. First of all, the topics are very interesting. On the other hand, the contacts with my more experienced counterparts are very useful. The exchange of opinions and the opportunities for a dialogue with the lecturers are also beneficial. Theory is combined with practice.



**Ahmed Basri Topchi, Mayor,
Municipality of Zavet, Silistra
Region:**

I'm a newly elected mayor and I have no experience in local government.

What I've inherited is not very satisfactory and based on what was left we had to develop and target the strategy of our municipality through 2007. We face many problems: to build the infrastructure in the communities, the roads between the communities, to reduce the unemployment in the municipality, to improve the wealth of our citizens, to repair schools and provide them with fuel.

The organization of the seminar was wonderful. The topics were very interesting because I'm a new mayor. Everything has impressed me very much. The lecturers for the last two days were very useful both to me and, I believe, to all my counterparts. I was especially impressed by the presentation of Mr. Lachezar Rosenov on management skills and leadership. I intend to use many of the positive things that he said.



**Dafinka Georgieva Staneva,
Deputy-Mayor of Economic
Activities, Municipality of
Kaynardzha, Silistra Region:**

I've been in local government since 1991. For two terms, 1991 through 1999, I was the chair of the municipal council. From 1999 to 2003 I was a councilor.

Our municipality ranks fifth in the country by unemployment. The presence of a large percentage of illiterate residents additionally hinders the solving of all problems. Municipal property management is the toughest problems we face now, as the municipality is small in terms of population but large in terms of area. The lack of inventory of municipal assets is also a barrier to the management processes.

In this respect, the seminar was interested with the lectures on municipal property, as the process is complicated and is related to knowing many legislative acts. In principle, everything that was shared at the seminar is useful if it's practice-oriented and I'll be able to apply it immediately. I was most impressed, not only emotionally but also pragmatically, by the lecture on leadership and management skills, as until now I've been at one side of local government, the legislative body, and now I've changed sides and am in the executive power. This requires a different set of personal skill and improvement of the management skills most of all. The management skills require much more than the skills of a municipal councilor - knowledge of legislation, communication with people, knowledge of human psychology and, most of all, knowledge of the municipality's problems. ◆

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BULGARIA - REFORM CONTINUED

Aleksander Mikhailov

**Director, Territorial Management and Decentralization,
Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works**

I dare say that the last 14 years were the years of constant, albeit inconsistent, process of democratic changes in Bulgaria. It is important to all of us to know where we are in the reforms, how much more is left. Of course, democracy doesn't have a final condition the achievement of which would mean ultimate success. Which makes the task of finding out whether we're moving in the right direction, and how much more we have to go, very difficult.

By definition, the reform is a **targeted change** for the improvement of the social relations system. To review the possible system problems in the process, we'll have a look at the two parts of the phrase.

First, **targeted** means that the change must be planned with regard to certain goals. A clear **vision** and established priorities are needed as a basis for the necessary actions. Such a vision is in fact a *desired image* of the future of local government in Bulgaria, which is shared not only by the municipalities but by all key stakeholders.

The existence of a shared vision and priorities provide the great **restrictions in the process** of reform in local government in Bulgaria, because:

- It is a matter of a vision not for the development of independent entities, not for relations between government bodies and businesses or NGOs, but of *inter - governmental relations*. In this respect, there could be no vision on the way local government should look, unless that vision is a part of the vision for the general framework of the development of the nation - state in general;

- To a great extent, the municipalities' participation in the process of national reform is based mostly on *municipal managements' interests*. What remains in the background, however, are the rights of the citizens both in terms of their

opinion and involvement in municipal and national policies and in terms of the quality (and the price) of public services;

- Along the same line of thought, the involvement of the citizens in the identification of solutions with regard to the structure of inert - governmental relations is critical. It is often assumed that the Municipality expresses directly the opinion of the citizens. In principle, it is true that *the Municipality is closer to the citizens* than the central government; however, the practice indicates that, for a series of reasons, the citizens are not sufficiently informed. This holds true to both the Municipality's activities and its involvement in the reform process;

Irrespective of the development of the democratic practices, there are still some *problems with transparency*, especially at local level. Despite the statements of mayors, municipal administration representatives and municipal councilors that their municipalities operate in a transparent way, certain items, such as staff schedules, payrolls, contracts, leases, public procurement, etc., are still safeguarded as 'military secret'.

Let's look at the second part of the phrase - **change**. Parallel to the achievement of priorities at national level, there are also opportunities for local changes. What can be achieved at municipal level is a change of the internal structures and features of local government. Municipal capacity building, the growing of their capabilities to the benefit of the citizens, is a process without restrictions. The main aspects of work are related to:

- Investment in trust in the Municipality;
- Development of public ethics in the municipal councils and the municipal administrations;
- Improvement of reporting and citizen control.

It becomes evident that this is not so much a matter of increasing the technical capacity, including financial, but of developing and maintaining common democratic values. An effective public organization - political, administrative, legal, etc. - may be based only and solely on *consensus* between all interested parties, with the observation of the rights of the





individual citizens or groups of citizens. This means that maintaining an active democratic society is related to the need of having all three pillars of civil society - government, business and non - governmental organizations - involved in governance. In this respect, all systematic actions within civil society formulate policies that link the participants in the process in terms of **rights and interests**.

There are different views on how government, business and NGOs formulate their policies and on the way changes are effected. In all cases, the process is not linear and simple but may have the following directions:

1. Policy to the public benefit: The main goal here is the reform targeting the citizens and aspiring to protect the public interest to the maximum extent possible. The public interest is defined as those activities that best serve the ma-

ation.

4. Democratic policies that give priority to citizen involvement in government. The main principles of this approach are that politics is not so much a result than a process, and that politics is not an area reserved for experts only. The understanding in this case is that, once included in the process, the people will effectively defend their rights and interests. The public hearings prior to the adoption of the municipal budgets are a good start but the budget process continues throughout the year and the citizen participation has to be constant.

5. Expansion of the public participation in politics, transformation of government into a shared function between those in power and the citizens, is a direction that relies on such *decision - making* forms that guarantee success. Local referendums are still held when the citizens of a community



jority of the population. For example, it is more important for the citizens of a municipality to have access to quality healthcare that to preserve at any cost the ineffective municipal hospital. Inter - municipal cooperation is still close to the zero ground.

2. Identification and implementation of specific political goals: This includes the reform of political parties, the restructuring of the relations between the different government and/or territorial levels, the politics - business relations. The expectations of the supporters of this direction are related to the belief that the political change must (automatically?!) result in real and profound changes. For example, it would be good to have the principles of the municipal schools appointed by the mayor or the municipal council, but providing the students in the municipality quality education is more valuable.

3. Social policies targeting mostly the marginalized groups of citizens: In this „perfect“, to some extent, direction the aspiration is to achieve a just society in which everyone, especially the weak, will have a dignified place. The work on employment increase projects cannot compensate the lack of municipal policy on local economic development and job cre-

are not satisfied with a service and wish to become a part of another municipality.

Should we try to position local government reform with regard to these five axes, in this *5 - dimensional space*, the picture that we'll get won't be very positive. The established partnership network for reforms has concentrated its activities mostly in the directions related to the **identification and implementation of specific political goals** and to some extent to **the social policies**. There is no doubt that the very fact that such a partnership network has been established and is operational is a success for our country. What needs to be done, however, is to encourage the public involvement in policies to the public benefit. These directions require **the center of gravity to be shifted from the defense of municipal managements' interest to the formulation and implementation of policies developing and protecting the rights of the citizens**. And this requires the transformation of the legal and institutional changes at local level into social capital, which is the ultimate goal of public development. ◆

CITIZENS IN GOVERNMENT NATIONAL CONFERENCE SOFIA, MARCH 31, 2004

A one day national conference, Citizens in Government, was held on Wednesday, March 31, at Rodina Hotel, Sofia. The conference was organized by Balkan Assist Association, Foundation for Local Government Reform and Local Government Initiative, with the support of the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency. The conference was opened by Petya Gegova, deputy-minister of regional development and public works, Kiril Kiryakov, United States Agency for International Development and Roland Python, deputy director of the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency for Bulgaria.

The forum was attended by 120 participants, including members of parliament, ministries and national agencies, regional governors, mayors from all over the country, chair of municipal councils, non-governmental organizations, media, embassies and donor institutions.



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGEMENT IDEAS

Ginka Kapitanova

Executive Director, FLGR

*Report to the Citizens in Government
National Conference*

Sofia, March 31, 2004



Over the last several years, many municipalities have established various practices aimed at involving the citizens in *decision-making*. Some of these practices were generated by successfully implemented projects. Others were built on existing experience and sought to develop the *partnership between citizens and local governments* in new ways. The ongoing enrichment of *communication forms* with the citizens and the *civic control forms* is a mandatory and critical prerequisite for a successful local government term.



The partnership network of organizations operating in support of local governments: the Foundation for Local Government Reform, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, regional associations of municipalities, professional associations of municipal employees and many other non-governmental organizations at local and national level, plays an important role for the replication of the experience.

The initiated *Campaign for Transparency in the Municipalities* is a new incentive for the municipalities to enrich their

experience. The purpose of the Campaign is to have the individual citizen participation practices categorized and transformed into a *municipal policy*. This municipal policy is to be shared both by local authorities and the administration and the citizens, to be independent of temporary wishes and trends.

Many practices that have been implemented at local level can be successfully applied both by the regional administrations and at national level. In smaller municipalities, direct involvement of citizens in governance is possible. At regional and national level, as well as in larger municipalities, citizen participation is exercised rather through non-governmental organizations, professional and expert groups and business associations.

What is the price of citizen participation to the authorities?

- Longer planning periods, in order to provide for the involvement of more people who would contribute viewpoints, information and ideas;
- Making a decision on a specific issues might prove to be more difficult;
- Less evident direct control on results.

What is the price of citizen participation to the citizens?

- Time that they need to spend, in order to be involved in tracking a problem until a solution is found;
- Emotional load, especially with regard to more complex and lasting problems;
- Potential disappointment and internal pressure when participation does not produce the expected results.

Citizen participation benefits:

- The citizens get a better understanding of how complex the issues are;
- The authorities get support from the people who are interested in, or affected by, the decisions;
- The authorities have an opportunity to utilize the contribution and the ideas of a larger circle of people;

The whole community, and not only the authorities, shares the responsibility and the understanding - „This is our common problem, and not only a problem of the authorities“.

Despite the positive experience accumulated, it cannot be summarized that the making of all important decisions is preceded by a public discussion and a publicly announced opportunity for direct or indirect citizen participation. In addition, the national legislation and the municipal ordinances and procedures not always require the implementation of such an approach. There is a general recognition of the need for a *minimum legislative framework* that would regulate consulting and citizen participation procedures. Subsequently, ordinances, regulations, codes and good *management practices* may complement the legislation by clarifying the consulting and citizen participation mechanisms and the ways of their practical implementation. In addition, *financial mechanisms* may be developed to encourage citizen involvement at local level. Also, an additional requirement for *consultations and citizen participation* can be imposed on the management of national funds and programs *as a prerequisite for the granting of funds*.

WHAT COULD BE DONE AT LOCAL LEVEL?

The regulations on the functioning of the Municipal Council can develop the procedures regulated under the Local Self-Government and Local Administration Act, in order to provide more citizen participation opportunities. Specific texts should be included on the regulation of the formation and operation of advisory and expert groups, public boards, citizen commissions, etc., as well as on the requirements with regard to the transparent operations of municipal councils and mayors.

Public discussions and publication of information on municipal budgets, under the Municipal Budgets Act. Opportunities for more information to the citizens with regard to the budgetary process, the standards for the individual activities and budget implementation.

Preliminary analysis of the effects and the social tolerance for certain Municipal Council decisions, e.g., kindergarten fees.

Wide participation of citizens, businesses and non-governmental organizations in the development of long-term municipal strategies and development plans.



❑ Information and service delivery should be revised in the light of the new communication opportunities: one-stop shop service delivery (citizen information and service centers), online services, interactive websites, electronic discussion forums, etc.

❑ The municipal investment program/the implementation program of the municipal development plan should be discussed with wide citizen participation. The same approach may be applied also to the projects submitted for financing under different funds and programs.

❑ Ensure publicity and consultations in municipal property management. Develop a long-term municipal property management program.

❑ A public municipal policy on public procurement.

❑ Sign an agreement or a memorandum of understanding with the non-governmental organizations within the municipality.

❑ Delegate service delivery (social services mostly) to relevant non-governmental organizations and provide adequate funding.

❑ Financial support from the municipal budgets for civic initiatives, such as public works initiatives by civic organizations and groups, as well as social initiatives generated by wide citizen participation.

❑ Establishment and regulation of a *Public Fund* that would finance citizen initiatives and encourage donations at local level.

WHAT COULD BE DONE AT NATIONAL LEVEL?

❑ Legislative and sub-legislative acts to regulate more norms requiring a consultation process and civic control opportunities.

❑ Wide public and professional discussions during the preparation of a new, or the amendment of an existing, legislative act. Feedback by the entities enforcing the act and periodical monitoring of its impact.

❑ Implementation of a wide consulting process with the representation of all interested parties during the formulation of development strategies for specific industries and identification of partner roles and public-private partnership opportunities (e.g., the Environmental Tourism Strategy).

❑ Impose an additional requirement for consultation and citizen participation as a prerequisite for the granting of financing from national funds and programs. This practice has already been adopted by some funding programs trying to encourage citizen participation in the country.

❑ Establish a special *Community Development Fund* that would support public works initiatives by matching the funds collected by the respective community or allocated by the Municipal Public Fund, when the latter is available (Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works).



Examples:

Ministry of Finance:

❑ More publicity and better justification in the consulting process with the National Association of the Municipalities, with regard to the relations between the national and the municipal budgets, the division of the activities and activity standards.

Ministry of Labor and Social Policy:

❑ Have the activities under the *From Social Benefits to Employment* program publicly discussed with the citizens targeted by the program and those who will be involved in them.

❑ Have the sites under *Beautiful Bulgaria* publicly discussed at municipal level, with clear prioritization criteria.

Regional governors:

❑ Have the regional development strategies developed in partnership of all interested parties and publicly discussed, considering the priorities identified in the municipal development plans.

❑ Have clear and publicly announced selection criteria for the projects proposed in the regional development plans and in the National Operative Program for Regional Development, consulted with the municipalities and the social partners.

❑ Have the operations of all committees of the Regional Governor regulated in such a way as to require a consultation process not only with the municipalities, but also with a wide range of non-governmental organizations, professional and social groups.

It is only by the combination of *enabling legislative environment* and procedures, more information and replication of existing *successful governance practices* that citizen participant could be encouraged in three major areas: *decision-making, monitoring and control, partnership with the authorities* in the implementation of specific initiatives. The requirement for a consulting process when applying for financing under various donor programs would be an additional incentive. ◆

MEMORANDUM BY THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CITIZENS IN GOVERNMENT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

organized by **Balkan Assist Association, Foundation for Local Government Reform, Local Government Initiative Program**
with the support of **Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency and United States Agency for International Development**
Sofia, March 31, 2004

FOR EXPANDED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

We, the participants in the Citizens in Government National Conference,

Appreciate the importance of citizens' involvement in the decision-making process at local, regional and national level as a guarantee for a democratic and responsible government and a criterion for a developed civil society;

Consider the requirements imposed by the European legislation in the process of our country's accession to the European Union;

Welcome the will expressed by the Parliament and the National Government through the latest changes to the National Government Act and the Municipal Budgets Act, requiring the implementation of the citizen participation principle by the local governments;

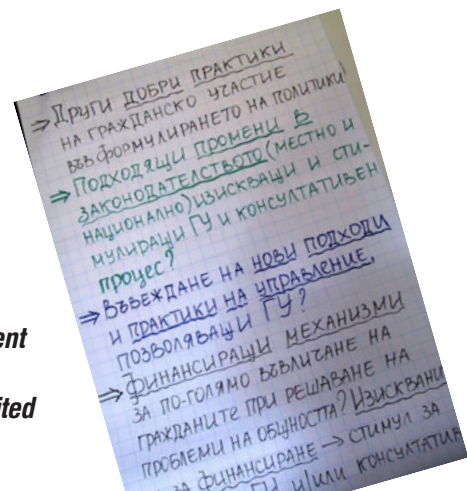
Believe in the necessity of providing more legislative opportunities for a real involvement of the citizens in the governance processes;

Consider the aspiration and the rich experience accumulated so far by the Bulgarian municipalities and non-governmental organizations in increasing citizens' involvement in government through multiple donor-supported projects and programs.

We hereby express our wish to form a partnership network, For Expanded Citizen Participation in Government, by which we commit to contribute to:

- The organization of public discussions to build a wide consensus on proposed legislative changes, resulting in increased involvement of our citizens in government;
- Implement advocacy initiatives for the optimization of the legislation and the governance approaches;
- Provide coordination between the non-governmental sector and the respective authorities in the implementation of citizen participation projects and programs;
- Organize appropriate meetings of all interested parties - NGOs, municipalities, donor organizations, national authorities, media - to exchange successful citizen participation encouragement practices.

We appeal to all non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria that support the idea of expanded citizen participation in government to become members of the partnership network, For Expanded Citizen Participation in Government!



THE PRACTICUM - A STEP FORWARD FOR THE MUNICIPALITIES

Marina Dimova

Project Coordinator, FLGR

As a part of the second phase of a project, *The Bulgarian Municipalities: Competent Participants in the Utilization of EU Funds*, funded by the Open Society Institute, Sofia, FLGR organized a practicum for the representatives of the local and regional administrations in the Northeastern Area for Planning and the members of Trakia RAM. The practical training was held on April 16 in Stara Zagora.

The training was based on a gradual (step-by-step) development of a real project idea with the assistance of the facilitator. The reason for the use of this „on the job“ training approach was the desire to not only develop further the knowledge and the skills acquired during the first phase of the project, but to also provide specific assistance in the development of a project proposal that could be submitted for funding in the future. Representatives of the municipalities of Brezovo, Gulubovo, Radnevo, Stara Zagora and Dimitrovgrad, as well as specialists from the Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency attended the practicum.

This practical approach of group work and training was applied for the first time by FLGR. The participants were required to do some preliminary work prior to the start of the practicum, and namely, to identify a priority project idea for the respective municipality or non-governmental organization. At the beginning of the training, each participant presented his or her idea and, depending on the area of the idea, the participants formed teams and began drafting specific project proposals. There were some work groups that were based on a territorial principle, guided by the idea of partnership at regional level. A computer was provided to each participant and the training materials were also available in electronic format, which made it easier for the participants.

The practicum methodology included the presentation of basic theoretical information about every individual component of the project proposal. Next practical work in work groups on the components followed. The participants were advised and assisted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vasil Marinov, a lecturer at the University of Sofia, and by Sonya Enilova, executive director of the Bourgas Regional Tourism Agency.

After the participants went through the separate stages of project proposal development, a discussion of possible funding sources ensued. The three days of consolidated efforts

resulted in the development of 3 project proposals. The energy saving project developed by specialists from the municipalities of Brezovo, Dimitrovgrad and Gulubovo will seek funding from the Ministry of Energy. The second project was for the renovation of the Ayazmoto Park (Stara Zagora) and was developed by representatives of the Municipality of Stara Zagora and the Regional Economic Development Agency. The project proposal will seek funding from PHARE - Bulgarian Tourism Development. The third project was aimed at reducing youth unemployment in the municipalities of Gulubovo and Radnevo and will apply for funding under PHARE - Youth Unemployment Reduction.

The practicum provided the participants an opportunity to develop their ideas. Of course, some finishing touches on the projects will be needed, but the framework, the goals and the activities of each project were developed to a great extent. The successful finale, i.e. the solicitation of funding and the implementation of these ideas, would depend on the specialists from the municipalities and the non-governmental organizations who participated in the practicum.

Two more practica will be organized by the end of the year, with participants from the Northeastern Area for Planning. ◆





One of the first successful contacts established by the Local Economic Development Partnership was with the German BIT Analytical Instruments GmbH. In June, its representatives will visit Impuls Inc. in Gabrovo to discuss joint business opportunities in CNC technology in medical equipment.

The Local Economic Development Partnership includes business development experts from 14 municipalities. The Partnership is implemented under a program of the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR) and the International City/County Management Association, Washington (ICMA).

Five business development specialists from the Bulgarian municipalities attended the Hannover Trade and Industry Fair (April 19 - 24, 2004) to proactively present investment opportunities in specific municipal business projects. Such an initiative is organized for the first time, with the support of FLGR, ICMA, USAID and the City of Auburn, Alabama, USA.

A presentation of Bulgaria, as well as the premiere of the www.invest.bg website, was delivered at a special session before more than 60 interested parties.

The April issue of FLGR's Municipal Radio Forum was dedicated to this topic.

Upon their return from Hannover, the municipal business experts discussed with their counterparts the lessons learned from the participation in the fair.

In this issue we have the pleasure to provide you a mix of the two events. The editor's team of the newsletter believe that the experience shared will benefit Bulgarian municipalities' future efforts in local economic development, a priority area for all all municipal managements in the country.

**ANTOANETA MATEEVA, PROGRAM SPECIALIST,
BULGARIAN TECHNICAL TWINNING PROGRAM,
FOUNDATION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM:**

More and more municipalities identify local economic development as a priority. However, their efforts so far were chaotic and did not include any marketing studies of municipal resources and potential. The attitude was reactive, i.e. the municipal managements reacted to external initiatives, such as investment interest on behalf of domestic or foreign inves-



The cube building, the symbol of the Hannover Trade and Industry Fair, the largest show of this type in Europe

tors. The new concept involves the establishment of **local economic development units** within the municipal administrations, staffed with trained local economic development professionals.

What happened and continues to happen as a result from the project?

The managements of the 14 municipalities involve din the project committed to establish such professional units in their administrations and hired specialists for these jobs. 18 individuals were provided professional training under the project, with the assistance of American experts. These specialists collect information that needs to be provided to investors and market their municipalities' potential.

This means that all 14 municipalities that hired such specialists conducted an analysis and evaluation of their business development resources: workforce analysis and evaluation; traditional industries; the priority industries in which the Municipality will try to encourage investments. Further workforce training opportunities were identified, consistent with the needs of potential investors. In other words, a flexible system, based on capacity assessment, was established to meet manufacturers' needs of workforce training.

The municipal business development specialists have access to the necessary information and can provide it within the shortest possible time and in an appropriate format to anyone interested in doing business in their municipalities. Our goal is to make these individuals valuable aides to the mayors, who would present all positive aspects of the respective municipality, stimulate the interest of an investor and encourage him to decide to relocate to that municipality.

Of course, the mayor still has the most important role in the investor recruitment process. The mayor makes the management decisions. However, the whole preparatory work is done by the local economic development specialist. It is up to him or her to provide timely, reliable and needs-based information to the investor.

I'd like to add that one of the results from

the project included steps towards the development of a wider dialogue with businesses, which is important for the improvement of the business environment and especially for the support to the expansion of existing businesses. Four municipalities have already established business advisory boards; the other municipalities involved in the project are also expected to form such boards.

The 14 participant municipalities are implementing proactive municipal marketing programs. They all developed new, or updated existing, marketing materials. The marketing of the municipality is an important part of an investment recruitment program. As a rule, the Bulgarian didn't do any marketing until now.

Marketing a municipality means to offer and demonstrate, to outline the positive aspects and to give the potential investors an opportunity to appreciate them. Of course, advertising is not excluded; it has to be positive and may make use of different tools.

Municipal marketing profiles were developed in various formats: printed brochures, leaflets and CD-ROMs. It is my pleasure to say that our specialists learned how to develop appropriate business presentations targeting potential investors.

One of the major positive signs of our work under the project was the fact that we managed to establish a local economic development partnership between the 14 municipalities. The specialists hired for the newly created positions established a network of municipal local economic specialists and developed the by-laws for the establishment of a professional association. In this way, we will all consolidate our efforts to become more successful, to have others know that Bulgaria has advantages and is a very good place for business.

The www.invest.bg investment website is one of the things that we are doing in this respect. The site is common effort of the 14 municipalities and we sincerely hope that a large number of other municipalities will be interested, will train their own specialists and will develop the relevant information and upload it to the website. At present, the website is available in English. The Bulgaria version will be available soon.

The Foundation for Local Government Reform not only recommends this successful model to the municipalities but can also provide training for professionals. We believe that such professionals need to be hired by every municipality, in order to provide for targeted business environment improvement efforts.

In May, FLGR, ICMA and Foreign Investment Agency representatives conducted a certification of the municipalities involved in the project. The municipalities that meet the established international criteria were awarded „Ready for Business“ certificates. The certificate will be an inseparable part of the self-confidence and the image of every municipality.

Once awarded, the certificate can be renewed or re-confirmed periodically. It provides businesses an assurance that the municipal government is not only declaring willingness for commitment to local economic development but is actually prepared and can deliver on its commitment in a professional manner.



A link between local and central authorities is needed and is about to become a tradition. We sincerely believe that this link will strengthen and expand in the future. The insight of the Foreign Investment Agency and their support to our project are very important to us and we are very grateful for their co-operation.

LESSONS LEARNED

FROM THE PRESENTATION OF THE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP AT THE HANNOVER TECHNICAL FAIR '2004

NEVENA MLADENOVA, PROJECT COORDINATOR, LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

When trying to present investment opportunities, you need to know very well the location of the lot, its price, the average price of industrial land in Bulgaria and in the neighboring countries! You need to have a comprehensive knowledge of companies' products, markets, clients and suppliers. This is what foreign business people expect from the person responsible for the economic development in a municipality.

Using interpretation services is critical, especially when talking to local companies. A conversation is always easier when you in a meeting with German companies you use their mother tongue. Every opportunity to breach communication barriers must be utilized.

The conclusion from the participation in international forums, such as the Hannover Fair, is that Bulgarian businesses need to improve their corporate culture.

Corporate culture cannot be instilled by orders. The only way to attain it is by ongoing dialogue between the municipal business experts, who have already been trained on these issues, and local businesses. In the constant expansion of

relations, one must choose the appropriate way of conduct and communication, as while a municipal business development specialist learns from the companies they might also learn something from him. What would be indicative for the companies is how the municipal specialist is contacting them, what forms of communication does (s)he offer or impose, does (s)he meet the agreed deadlines, how many people does (s)he invited to meetings and does everyone invited have a role in the meeting. In one way or another, all this will have a meaning for the business and things will start to move.

It should be remembered that the efforts have to be ongoing and are not restricted within the development of municipal marketing materials. Also, the marketing materials should not be handed out to everyone but only to those who have demonstrated initial interest. Otherwise, they will end in the waste bin of a hotel room. Handing out a marketing brochure to every visitor of the municipality is as ineffective as it is to mail municipal marketing brochures to the Foreign Investment Agency. Because the Agency cannot track whether the information provided is accurate and current - not at the time when it was submitted but at the time someone requests it - which results in discrepancies.

I'm convinced that we should try to develop joint initiatives. It hardly makes any sense for an individual municipality to have its own booth at a fair like the one in Hannover. During our first day there, we were all convinced that the municipalities have to be presented individually. We quickly found out we were wrong. What we need to market is Bulgaria.

DIANA BEBENOVA, CHIEF EXPERT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MUNICIPALITY OF SILISTRA:

Such participation is a great challenge to a municipal employee. We've learned a lot not only while we were at the fair, but also during our meetings with the American experts. It turned out that the American staff have a very aggressive, proactive investment recruitment policy. Something that we were able to see during the fair.

It became clear to all of us that it is not the individual municipality that matters, but the presentation of Bulgaria as a whole. After the first or the second day, we really worked together to market Bulgaria. Of course, it would be really nice if one of the results from this visit was an investment in Silistra. However, it would be much better to have two or three investments recruited to Bulgaria, regardless of the municipality.

HRISTO IVANOV, CHIEF EXPERT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MUNICIPALITY OF PAZARDZHIK:

Bulgarian municipalities participate in an international fair like this for the first time. What we learned was that the Bulgarian municipalities, and Bulgaria as a whole, have to be proactive, as there is a lot of competition on the international market. We are not the only ones trying to recruit investment and the struggle is really cut-throat.

The first lesson is that one should take the huge fair catalogue (510 pages) and spend a day studying the companies



in it. You can't afford going around blindly, you need to have the targets, booths and companies identified in advance.

ALBENA BONEVA, CHIEF EXPERT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MUNICIPALITY OF DOBRICH - CITY:

When you visit the booth of a company, you can't just go there and immediately start talking about the things you want to know. First, you have to demonstrate some interest in the company, commend its booth, show interest in its products, and then explain who you are, what you want and why are you at the fair. And I remembered that this was repeated so many times during the training. Otherwise, you can't keep the interest of the company representative; he starts eyeing the other visitors or the person who is trying to take some promotional materials.

You often meet people who, when they find out where you come from, tell you, „Bulgaria? That's where I got my cellphone stolen!“ And you have to react in cool blood.

The presentations of Bulgaria and of the business opportunities in the 14 municipalities at the Hannover Trade Fair, and the start of the www.invest.bg website resulted in inquiries for business contacts by companies from Greece, Italy, Germany, USA, Jordan, etc.

The local economic development experts in the municipalities and the FLGR team disseminated the enquiries throughout the network and responded with specific proposals by Bulgarian companies. One of the first successful contacts that were established through the network and with the assistance of the Municipality of Gabrovo, was with a German company, BIT Analytical Instruments GmbH. Its representatives will visit Bulgaria in early June. The purpose of their visit is to meet with Impuls Inc., Gabrovo, and discuss business opportunities in CNC technology in medical equipment.

We wish all our partners successful business and new investment recruitment opportunities! ◆



IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN THE MUNICIPALITIES

On May 19, in Sofia, the Foundation for Local Government Reform, in partnership with Moody's International Ltd., held a workshop on *Implementation of Quality Management Systems in the municipalities*.

The meeting was attended by 75 participants from municipalities from the whole country and four regional administrations.

The ISO 9001:2000, ISO 14001:1996 and OHSAS 18001:2002 quality management systems were presented in principle, as well as the specific experience of the municipalities of Kurdzhali and Shoumen.

SEZGIN BEKIR, SECRETARY, MUNICIPALITY OF KURDZHALI:




The quality management system provides the municipal management team:

- A clear process optimization and management tool through the mechanisms of documented procedures for preventive and corrective actions and constant study of the needs of client groups;
- Legitimate and impartial proof to the public and our partners that the management of the Municipality of Kurdzhali is consistent with and adequate to the leading world and European practices;
- A guarantee for the good management of taxpayers' funds.



DR. EMILIA STANCHEVA, DEPUTY-MAYOR, MUNICIPALITY OF SHOUMEN:

The Municipality of Shoumen is the first, and so far the only, Bulgarian municipality certified under 14001:1996. The Integrated Management System applied demonstrates that in the Municipality of Shoumen there is:

- unity and understanding of the organization's goals;
- motivation of the municipal administration and its management to perform their activities and duties in a quality manner, as well as to constantly improve their skills;
- a mechanism for the regular solicitation of information about citizens' needs and focusing the efforts on increasing their satisfaction with the administrative services delivered by the Municipality;
- rational planning and management of resources, methods for the calculation of the effectiveness of the practices applied in the utilization of the existing financial resources;
- an excellent knowledge of the system and the processes within the organization, their interrelations, parameters and non-deviation means;
- comprehensive, easily accessible and systematic information that is disseminated and updated in a timely manner;
- fast and timely delivery of services to the citizens, possibilities for the filing of complaints;
- a transparency of the processes. 



Belin Mollov, member of FLGR's Board, accession advisor to the minister of regional development:

OUR SOCIETY FACES A COLOSSAL TASK: TO REPLACE A SYSTEM AS FAST WE CAN, WITH RESTRICTED FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES, AND, WHAT'S MOST COMPLEX, TO DO THAT IN A DEMOCRATIC WAY

The closure of Chapter 21 „Regional policy and coordination of the structural instruments“ and Bulgaria's commitment under the Chapter naturally induce the greatest interest among the people in local government in our country. We asked Belin Mollov, member of FLGR's Board, accession advisor to the minister of regional development and a participant in the negotiations, to answer the following questions: „Why is the Regional Policy chapter so important to the negotiations? Why is it one of the three financial chapters and why are the funds that will be granted to Bulgaria by the European Union to a large extent related to this chapter? What will be the responsibilities of the local governments through 2007? And after that...“

In my opinion, the European Union exists before all to provide for the implementation of the solidarity principle: the richer help the poorer in the name of the mutual interest to progress together. That was the idea of the European politicians after World War II: the problems cannot be solved by confrontation and separation, within the nation-states. To the contrary, the EU is gradually building and developing itself. The regions with their individuality, with their different opportunities, associate and apply the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, equality, mutual assistance, and later, of sustainable development and environmental preservation (problems that go beyond any administrative borders. Today the European Union is one of the most prosperous communities in the world, communities that many people wish to accede to.

The underlying principle of regional policy is balanced and inter-related development of the individual regions, of local government territorial units, while preserving their identity and specifics, contribution to the common European home of local cultures and traditions, under the condition that everyone would contribute as much as they can and that those who can more would help the weaker ones.

Why are the regional policy, agriculture and budget and finance chapters the so-called financial chapters? These are the chapters that define the rules and responsibilities for the use of EU's structural instruments. These chapters could be closed only if we had the general financial framework which, thanks to Europe's regional policy, will provide the funds that will be available to Bulgaria over the first three years following the accession.

The balanced regional development is related to problems that directly reflect on the people. These are to a large extent tied to the problems that the local government bodies in our country, the municipalities (in countries with two government levels - the regions, too) have to solve: infrastructure, staff development, education, environmental protection and healthcare. These problems are mutually related and are of greatest concern to the individual person.

On the other hand, EU and the nation-states provide a legislative

framework that would govern this balanced regional development. At the same time, the actual identification of solutions to the problems (the infrastructure that will be built, personnel training and re-training, healthcare, etc.) is left to the lower level. This is so not only in Bulgaria but in all other EU member countries as well.

The agreements under Chapter 21 „Regional Policy“ provide the framework under which Bulgarian will utilize the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. These funds have not been given, **they are at our disposal**. We can use them only by means of a very well organized planning process. In other words, the elements of the whole system, national plan - operative programs - regional strategies - municipal plans, have to be related and to reflect the needs of final beneficiaries.

The administrative capacity is the **second important aspect**. The professionals cannot be concentrated only in the capital city. The professionals and the entities have to be spread throughout the whole system of the nation-state, and mostly in the regions and the municipalities. In this way, they will be able to identify the most important development priorities and use the funds in the most effective way. And secondly, they will be able to develop easily defendable, fundable projects.

Another important aspect is the requirement for **co-financing** by the national government. We all know that the assistance provided by external organizations is extended under a co-financing condition. To provide co-financing, the national government needs to achieve consistency between the National Development Plan, the Operative Programs and the national; budget priorities.

The fourth important aspect includes the close **interdepartmental coordination** of the process. My personal impression from the work so far is that during the negotiations the focus was: „Learn to interact more, not to confront“. There has to be one goal: everyone to find their place so that the departments, the regional and the local authorities would interact to achieve the goals. The overall process should also include the civil society, the business sector and the media.

The presence of **the key partners** - national government, local government, local business, non-governmental organizations and media - is incorporated in the problem selection and prioritization system; it is decisive in the selection of projects as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of their implementation. This Bulgarian commitment is also protected by the position on Chapter „Regional Policy“.

And, last but not least, the focus is on **training and professional development**. We will have to implement a national training and professional development strategy, in order to be able to equally use the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund after January 1, 2007.

There is one thing we should not forget - **the rules are the same for everyone**. We should not fear that the rules that will be applied to Bulgaria would be different - stricter, more discriminatory or just different - than those that are applied to Poland, Portugal, Greece, France or Denmark.

WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF CHAPTER 21? WHAT SECTIONS DOES IT INCLUDE?

Each negotiation chapter contains two types of commitments. Firstly, commitments that need to be implemented by the closure of the chapter. Secondly, commitments that require a more precise schedule of their implementation through 2007. This division of the commitments is a good prerequisite for us because it shortens the negotiation time. However, now that the negotiations are over, we are entering a period of close monitoring by the EU of our compliance with the commitments we have assumed under all chapters of the common schedule for the changes through 2007.

Parallel to the work on Chapter 21, we worked on the Regional Development Act (RDA), thus confirming with RDA many of the commitments assumed under the Chapter. The adoption of RDA was an advantage for us, even though the existence of the Act was not a requirement for the closure of Chapter 21 „Regional Development“. I believe that RDA helped us and did a very good job.

The following commitments had to be implemented by the end of the negotiations:

Firstly, Bulgaria confirmed its position that it accepts the EU nomenclature of territorial statistical units for the purposes of the implementation of structural and regional policies, agreed by the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat in 2000. The Bulgarian classification is the following: areas for planning, regions, municipalities and communities. The areas for planning are regulated by RDA (The State Gazette, No. 14 of February 29, 2004).

The precise term is „nomenclature of territorial statistical units“ - NUTS. Throughout Europe, statistics are kept not within the nation-state but within the statistical units. NUTS I could be up to 7 million, NUTS II could be from 800 thousands to 3 million, LAO 3, 2 and 1 (local administrative units) are our regions, municipalities and individual communities, respectively.

The structural instruments (Regional Development Fund, Agriculture Orientation and Guarantees Fund, Fishing Orientation Instrument, Social Fund) are related to regional development and for them the basic unit in Europe is the so-called NUTS II - area for planning. The financial support of the European Union after the accession will be distributed on an „area for planning“ basis. Bulgaria has formed six areas for planning, which are not administrative and territorial units but statistical units. This is the level at which the decision is made whether Bulgaria will receive EU assistance under Objective 1, related to infrastructure building, i.e. mostly with the Regional Development Fund. The condition for the use of such support is the region's GDP to be lower than 75% of the average for

Europe. This means that all areas for planning in Bulgaria will have the opportunity to submit projects for funding under the Regional Development Fund.

Secondly, we confirmed that we'll apply the legal framework that will provide full compliance of EU-funded operations with the Community's policies and legislation.

This is a matter of a group of legislative acts on: competition rules; public procurement; environmental preservation and improvement; gender equality; and multiyear budget programming. At a first glance, regional development is not a part of the group. However, these acts confirm those **underlying EU principles** that define the real opportunities for a balanced regional policy:

The principle of equality: This means equality in the use of EU assistance funds. These funds may be used only in case that equal competition is provided. (For this reason, we closed Chapter „Competition“ last, as it was extremely important). Adequate guarantees must be provided that the principle of equality has been applied to every municipality or region competing for funds;

Public procurement: By the adoption of this principle we declare that the national government does not have the right to subsidize or support by political or any other criteria certain regions at the expense of other. The national government, of course, has the right to legislatively identify targeted action areas; however, these areas will be supported only by the rules of competition, by a clear definition of national assistance and the way it is extended, and on the basis of public procurement. Nothing will be assigned directly just because one region or another is more liked by the national government for some reason.

The principles of sustainable development and environmental preservation: Since 1997, the principle of sustainable development is underlying in all EU documents. This is the new world religion, this is the creed that we are on this planet for only a short period of time, that the land has to be as generous to the next generations as it was to us, that we can use the resources to the extent that would not have any irreversible effects, etc. The environment, combined with the historic and cultural heritage (which is also a part of the sustainability principle). The fast economic returns and easy technological solutions are not sufficient justification for the irreversible destruction of the heritage. Citizen participation is the third pillar of sustainable development.

The fourth **principle** that we have committed to apply is that of **gender equality**.

Thirdly, the identification of the institutional framework is yet another important aspect, i.e. the identification of the management bodies of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, the interaction between them, the payments unit and the units that will conduct monitoring and evaluation. RDA has helped us to better organize the management bodies, to formulate who is responsible for what, what planning documents will we develop, what will be the monitoring and oversight bodies, what will be their capacity and how will they develop in the future.

The management authority of the Community assistance framework will be the EU Funds Management Directorate of the Ministry of Finance (for the Structural and the Cohesion Fund).

The paying authority for all Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund will be the National Fund Directorate of the Ministry of Finance.

The management authority of the regional operative program will be the Regional Development Programming Chief Directorate of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works.

The management authority of the Operative Program for the Development of the Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy will be the



Accession Programs and Projects Directorate of the Ministry of the Economy.

The management authority of the Operative Program for Human resources Development will be the Accession Funds and International Programs and Projects Directorate of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.

The management authority of the Operative Program for the Development of Agricultural and the Rural Areas will be the Rural Areas Development and Investments Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests.

The bodies responsible for the implementation of the operations under the Cohesion Fund will be the Coordination of Programs and Projects Directorate, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Roads Executive Agency to the minister of regional development and public works.

The bodies responsible for the implementation of the operations under the Cohesion Fund in the environment sector will be the European Environmental Funds Directorate, Ministry of Environment and Water and the Executive Unit - ISPA Public Works Activities, Water and Sewer Directorate, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works.

The monitoring bodies at national level will be the National Accounting Office that will conduct joint audits with the European Accounting Office, and the National Internal Financial Control Agency.

The levels below the listed ones will develop the so-called transitional units. The national coordinator of the assistance, the management authority and the respective operative program will delegate functions to these transitional units. They can be formed in different ways. These are the bodies that we need to establish by mid-2005, the ones that will actually evaluate the projects. The projects will be submitted as applications by the final beneficiaries. In many cases, these will be the municipalities, small and medium-size enterprises, and individual school or a hospital, a citizen organization, etc.

There is another mandatory element. We had to commit to the development of a consolidate planning document, the

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

We will build an integrated system of other planning documents, such as operative programs, regional development plans at area for planning level, regional strategies, municipal plans consistent with the National Strategy for Regional Development. In other words, we will have two strategic documents: a national strategy and regional strategies. The planning documents are also two: a regional plan and a municipal plan. There are two more documents related to the general framework of the assistance: the National Development Plan and the Operative Programs.

All these documents will have to be developed with a view on 2007 - 2013. In our country, the scope of the National Plan and the Operative Programs is 2007 - 2013. The national strategy is developed for the 2005 - 2015 period. However, the municipal plans need to be developed now, in order to cover the period through 2007 and to provide for their development for the 2007 - 2013 period. The strategic documents are not updated that often but the plans are updated annually.

Multiyear budget programming is yet another important requirement. This is a requirement that we need to comply with under PHARE even now. From now on, especially with regard to the framework of the assistance, we'll need to have multiyear budget programming in order to provide co-financing.

What is the difference between the socialist planned development and the EU requirements? The five-year plan used to be followed inevitably by the slogan „the five years in three“. In this case, there is no sense to have multiyear programming because there is no link to the resources. Today the planning must be linked to the resources. These planning documents reach the action plans that provide the resources, from Bulgaria and EU, the timelines are provided. The difference is really significant. Planning is a good thing when used as a management tool. And not just to identify tasks that may be completed within a certain time but can be completed in a shorter time, then we don't know where the money will come from, and if we don't get the money we'll do something else... - what kind of planning are we talking about?

Today we are talking about real planning that we, the people of Bulgaria, have mastered when planning our own budgets and intentions - the things that we've gotten used to manage. And we find it very difficult to do, and we do it irresponsibly when it's related to public matters. This is so because over the long period during which we were deprived of the most natural, most basic thing - the right of ownership - we lost our sense of responsibility.

OUR COMMITMENTS THROUGH 2007

include administrative and programming capacity building; budget and finance management; training of administrative staff to manage the assistance under the accession funds and, in the future, under the Structural and the Cohesion Funds.

It would be very difficult to develop real capacity in everyone of the 264 municipalities and we should have no illusions to that end. We can't expect the same capacity in a municipality with a population of 1,000 and a municipality, such as Varna, for example. And that is not necessary. There are 40 - 50 municipalities in Bulgaria that can build capacity. The others will need assistance in the development of the municipal plans. The national government can help them by providing guidelines, methodologies, regulations, etc. The NGO sector and the donor community will target their assistance to training the local governments to develop and defend the plans. On the other hand, we should not forget that we are not starting from scratch. Over the last 15 years, and especially since 1997, a new generation of plans were developed. Good or bad, this is the basis.

We need to encourage the people in the municipalities. We need to tell them: you have the information basis, now you have to update it, to discuss it. All citizen participation projects, such as the community forums, for example, have helped achieve an understanding at local level, a practice and even a belief that dialogue leads to better solutions. The current plans need to be reviewed and updated. The efforts shouldn't start with location analysis or other things that have already been done and are known. The conditions of the urban plans, the cadastre needs to be checked. Based on that, the priorities need to be identified and discussed

with the people. There is no stronger argument for a municipal management than that its idea or strategy has the support of the local community. I think that very few local managements have any doubts about this.

I'd like to talk about the tasks that would be most labor-intensive through 2007:

It is important for us to provide the sequence of document development: plans, multiyear budget programming, long-term plans, strategies, etc. By January 1, 2007 we need to have provided institutions and experts, in order to be able to start using the funds immediately. It will be very difficult. But we are not unique; it was difficult for the others as well. Many countries still have difficulties. Others have achieved great successes in this respect, such as for example the Irish who from one of the poorest became one of the richest: magnificent planning, many successes, a large percentage of EU funds utilization.

It is critical for us to establish and apply precise, **effective mechanisms of interaction**, of responsibility, monitoring, control, reporting, etc., in order to ensure that the European money won't be wasted for useless things and won't be, roughly said, stolen.

What are we doing in this respect? The work on the development of the National Plan commenced; the development of the Operative Programs is under way; all RDA-related regulations, ordinances, instructions, guidelines, etc. have been developed and are currently being coordinated. We are trying to discuss these with as many local governments as possible, to hear their opinions. We need more interaction. We'll have to establish new institutions, especially with regard to training, and further develop them. We need to use the funds that the donors can provide us until 2007 for the strengthening of local and regional capacity.

The municipal managements should preserve their staff, especially the trained employees. They have to protect them. The aspiration for radical changes in the administration after every election must be avoided because there are simply not enough trained professionals. After political changes, many of the trained municipal employees move to the non-governmental sector. Of course, they are useful there as well. But the government also needs such people, doesn't it? The attitude of the government to the motivation, the remuneration of its employees must change.

The people are motivated to be trained. But if a mayor only sends to seminars those who are not needed at the time or randomly chosen people, just to record presence, and if he doesn't require from those people to apply what they've learned, to enrich the knowledge of their colleagues, then there will be no effect. There are trainings that the Municipality pays for and then doesn't even ask whether the employees have attended the training. Or if they have, what have they learned and how have they applied it in practice? I have facilitated trainings in which 30 people had signed in and only 5 were present in the room. This is wrong, this should be overcome.

If the municipal administrations don't invest any efforts for the development of strategies now (experts need to be used because you can't expect that everyone will be able to manage without external assistance, but should be used in a targeted manner, under control!), and if those strategies are not used as management tools, then the efforts (and the money) would have been wasted. The terms are the same for everyone and if the others can follow the rules, then we can, too. If we want to utilize the European funds, to use them rationally, we'll have to follow the rules. We won't get any EU assistance if we try the tricks of the proverbial Andreshko; if we do that, we can't blame anyone.

Education, even the change of the mindset, is a critical aspect. Since very early age, the children have trained to think that they live in a

democratic environment that provides great personal development opportunities, but that these opportunities are related to the observation of the rules. Democracy is about rules - no less, no more. My freedom to wave fists ends at the tip of your nose. I can't infringe on your dignity, rights, desire for personal development. We want to have a clean environment? Then we have to keep it clean. And we need to regard it as personal responsibility. We want to have good public transport system? Then we have to pay, because if we don't, we'll still pay but in another way for the delivery of this service. We want a pretty urban environment? Then we shouldn't destroy what we already have, we need to safeguard it as it belongs to us. We need to have a sense of public responsibility. And this is not just idle talk.

I have to add that the people who promote these ideas, especially when they are public leaders, or people elected as members of parliament or as municipal councilors, have to provide a personal example.

The role of the media is to closely track the public process. Their job is to reprimand the offenders, but they should invest the same amount of energy in praising the ones who do the right things.

Our society faces a colossal task: to replace a system as fast as we can, with restricted financial and human resources, and, what's most complex, to do that in a democratic way. The task is colossal indeed and if one or two generations manage to accomplish it, they should feel happy and proud that they have done it in such a short time.

When speaking of training, professionalism, administrative and management capacity building, we also mean the municipal council. The things are even more complex here, as they are linked to a change of the culture, of the understanding that when one decides to run for a councilor, (s)he should be very well prepared. The society should require that from him/her, to be prepared for the responsibilities because the municipal councilors make decisions on the future of the people they represent.

This brings up another question - of our election system, of our democratic practice. We can't and we shouldn't continue the practice of voting for an anonymous political party list or by party affiliation. Let's make politics in the municipal council by supporting a left or right, liberal or social approach, and to have the politics focused on group interests. Still, I have the feeling that many things are beginning to change. I remember well the first years and I know that there have been changes. One of the greatest advantages of Bulgaria's accession to the EU is that we will be encouraged to follow the rules.

DO THOSE EMPLOYED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT TODAY REALIZE THEIR ENORMOUS RESPONSIBILITY?

I think that many of them do. But there are also many others who don't have the capacity of trained professionals, don't have the capacity of physical dedication to their jobs, don't have the moral capacity to overcome what is enrooted deep in human nature or in the self-preservation instinct - to place own interest above common ones. Let's forget the proverb „It's not important whether I feel good, it's important that my neighbor feels bad“.

Many prerequisites favor this type of thinking: fast economic development, technological revolution, tremendous urbanization, lost connection with the land, alienation, life in huge apartment blocks where you know no one and where your property starts at the threshold of your apartment and everything beyond it is common property. And you tell yourself, „Why should I maintain it, when the others are destroying it?“ And it is that thinking which ruins everything.

Let's think and say, „If not me, who else?“ 

KNEZHA BOASTS A MODERN CITIZEN INFORMATION CENTER

A modern citizen information center was opened in Knezha on June 11, 2004. The center is the first of its type in the Plevna Region and has four workstations, plus one more on an as-needed basis.

The ribbon was cut by the mayor, S. Shabanski. The guests included Ginka Kapitanova executive director of FLGR, Georgi Vulchev, director of the Information Technology Coordination Center of the Council of Ministers, mayors and experts from neighboring municipalities.

The center was opened under the motto „The Municipality are the People“. It will provide fast, quality services to the citizens of the municipality. The center is equipped with a local computer network and has a rich database. The center will provide information on all administrative, legal and technical activities of the municipal administration, in a way consistent with modern standards.

The CIC team is comprised of experienced and responsive employees who represent the friendly face of the municipal administration.

The Civic Status Department was relocated to be closer to the new center, which will result in more effective, faster and timely service delivery.

The project was implemented by the Municipality of Knezha in four months and was financed exceptionally by own funds. The actual construction and the selection of the technical solution were done with the consulting assistance of the Foundation for Local Government Reform. The Foundation provided expert assistance in the implementation of the one-stop shop model.

The administration's aspiration is to work towards the development of optimal relations between the administration and the citizens, on one hand, and improvement of the effectiveness of the municipal departments, on the other hand. The elimination of the direct contact between those requesting a service and those who provide it at expert level will result in a significant boost to the achievement of this idea. ◆



THE APRIL 2004 ISSUE OF FLGR'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER WAS NUMBER 100!

I have preserved (not only) Issue No. 1 of 1996 of the Reform IN Local Government newsletter. In his address, President Zhelyu Zhelev reminds about the „difficult road to the revival of local government in Bulgaria“ that we have to go. FLGR's newsletter accompanied us along this difficult road, always current and competent, now with 100 issues. To me, the newsletter is a needed information and discussion publication that encourages the spirit of constructive competition and municipal development. Thank you and good luck!



Boryana Andreeva, Director, Municipality of Dobrich - city



„I wholeheartedly greet the FLGR team on the occasion of the 100th issue of its newsletter. Over the last years, the newsletter asserted itself as a leading publication on municipal issues. Furthermore, for the first time in Bulgaria the FLGR newsletter offered to its wide audience comprehensive analyses and legal comments on different pressing issues of local government. More specifically, I'd like to point out regional development, urban planning, public-private partnerships in municipal asset management, citizen participation. And since local government reform is a very dynamic process, it seems to me that your newsletter was, and remains, to some extent the catalyst of this process. I wish to extend the dynamics of the newsletter and as always to be a step ahead of the hot topics in local government.

Kiril Kiryakov, Local Government Advisor, United States Agency for International Development, Sofia

FLGR's monthly newsletter has helped me a lot in my work. The truth is that I always look forward to the next issue.

The newsletter has a neat look and provides summary information that has helped me with ideas and with opinions of colleagues from the whole country. In the newsletter I find specific opportunities for solutions to problems that I encounter in my work as a PR specialist. For example, the last issue provided a very clear layout of a communication strategy with regard to the Transparency Campaign.



This newsletter provides the type of information that isn't available elsewhere. It is also useful in the work of my colleagues in different areas with the additional training opportunities provided. It seems to me that the newsletter's policy is to expand its audience.

Because I have such trust in the newsletter, I have disseminated its issues among the municipal specialists, the mayoralities and the mayor's representatives. The newsletter is also present at mayor's staff meetings. The fact that through the newsletter the colleagues get an idea about what's happening in the country is very important.

It's true that I've been saying only nice things, but that is because I have a very positive attitude towards the team that compiles the newsletter and to the newsletter itself. I'd like to congratulate all colleagues with this occasion, the publication of the 100th issue of the newsletter. I wish you to have greater creative successes, to be as partial and addicted to the municipal problems, because you are a strong shoulder in these tough times for the local government.

Svetlana Ilieva, Junior Expert, PR, Municipality of Silistra



FLGR's monthly newsletter is received by the mayor, the municipal council and the PR specialist. It develops current and interesting topics, of which the radio topics are most interesting to me. I believe that this is an achievement - the consolidation of the capabilities of the two media to provide an opportunity for different municipalities to express their opinions.

The people working for the municipal administrations share their views on the pages of your newsletter. There, one may find a solution of a problem. In other words, you are the hot link between the people who have solved their problems and those who are still looking for solutions (because the problems are often the same or similar). In this way, your publication becomes the bridge to solving the municipal problems.

Vanya Petrova, PR Specialist, Municipality of Doulovo

We are grateful to FLGR for the materials it develops - not only for the newsletter whose 100th issue is to be published. In our municipality, the newsletter is read and we are even making a special library to make it available to all municipal employees. This year I've noticed that the new municipal council is also demonstrating a significant interest in the newsletter. The materials in which colleagues from other municipalities share their experience, as well as those about seminars held, are very interesting. I hope that in the future even more interesting things and experiences will be shared on the pages of the publication by our colleagues.



Nina Dankolova, Secretary, Municipality of Mezdra