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FLGR MAILBOX



Dear readers, partners and friends,

The Foundation for Local Government Reform is happy to present you the latest issue of its biannual English Digest Newsletter, covering news and events of the second half of the year 2002. This publication is our way to update regularly a wide community of international partners on events and developments in Bulgarian local government and civil society, many of which have been initiated and supported by FLGR.

In this issue, you will find information about our new annual Innovative Municipality Award, the improvement of public services, international cooperation activities, fiscal decentralization, accomplished participatory community development programs.

FLGR is grateful to all of you, who have written or spoken to us since our last issue, in order to comment the value of information found in the newsletter and to share their immediate reaction and reflections, provoked by the publication.

We do hope you will discover here new reasons to contact FLGR in its capacity as an independent professional resource center, supporting local democracy in Bulgaria. We remain open to your ideas and suggestions and wish you a successful 2003!

Sofia,
January 2003

Ginka Kapitanova,
Executive Director,
FLGR

BULGARIAN PRESIDENT IN BOTEVGRAD: THE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER WILL SHORTEN THE DISTANCE BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE MUNICIPALITY

On 17 July 2002, the Municipality of Botevgrad inaugurated its new Municipal Customer Service Center within the *Improving Services to Citizens Program* of FLGR/USAID. Official guests at the opening ceremony were the President of Bulgaria, Mr. Georgi Purvanov, Ms. Nadereh Lee, Chief Democracy Officer at USAID/Sofia, the Ambassador of Denmark to Bulgaria, representatives of FLGR. Members of Parliament from the region, national media journalists and local citizens also attended the event.

In his opening speech, President Purvanov congratulated the Municipality of Botevgrad, USAID and FLGR for succeeding to mobilize resources and find ways to establish this attractive center. **„It will certainly be part of the municipal policy of opening up to the citizens. It will shorten the distance between citizens and the local government in terms of service delivery. This is one of the necessary steps for minimizing the opportunities for corruption in any administration,“** said President Purvanov.

„Transforming the image of the municipality from a closed administrative structure to an open and customer-friendly place is a priority of Botevgrad’s municipal leadership. The center will provide through its five desks 50 types of services, which comprise 80% of the total number of administrative services offered by the municipal administration,“ announced the Mayor of Botevgrad, Mr. Tzvetoliub Savov. In his speech, he thanked the USAID for the financial assistance covering the cost of the center’s technical equipment and information technology, as well as FLGR for the delivered expert, methodological and organizational support. Botevgrad received 14 000 USD of donor funding and contributed 11 500 USD of own resources for the establishment of the center.

Ms. Nadereh Lee, USAID Chief Democracy Officer, addressed participants at the event on behalf of the US Government and the US Agency for International Development. „One of the most democratic things that local governments can do is opening their doors to citizens,“ she said in her speech. Ms. Lee expressed hope that in her future visit to Botevgrad she would find as many visitors in the center as on the day of its opening. ◆



US AMBASSADOR PARDEW: STRONG AND INDEPENDENT LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IS A KEY ELEMENT OF ANY DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

On 20 June 2002, the United States Ambassador to Bulgaria, James Pardew, USAID Director for Bulgaria Debra McFarland and the Mayor of Beloslav Municipality Emil Dichev cut the ribbon of the new municipal Customer Service Center in Beloslav.

„Citizens are the capital of the municipality. Citizens are the capital of the state. I hope that in the future our excellent partnership with USAID and the FLGR will continue to achieve better results for our citizens.“ With these words, Beloslav’s mayor opened the inauguration ceremony. Guests at the event also included Nadereh Lee, Chief Democracy Officer at USAID, Kiril Kiryakov, Local Government Specialist at USAID, Ginka Kapitanova, FLGR Executive Director, the regional governor of Varna, the mayors of Dobrich, Byala and Aksakovo, representatives of the business and the media from Varna region, as well as citizens and visitors of Beloslav Municipality. Keynote speakers at the ceremony were Ambassador Pardew, Ginka Kapitanova, FLGR Executive Director, and Yani Yanev, Regional Governor of Varna.

„I believe that strong and independent local self-government is a key element of any democratic system. The best way in which local governments serve their citizens is by opening their doors for services and accepting citizens as customers. That way government works for people and not the other way around,“ Ambassador Pardew said in his speech. Ginka Kapitanova expressed gratitude on behalf of FLGR to the US government and USAID for the demonstrated trust in a Bulgarian non-governmental organization and in Bulgarian municipalities to implement such a significant public program and reinforce the idea that public administration must be transparent and serving the citizens. „What has been achieved here in Beloslav is in full accord with the national government’s concept for building electronic governance, which aims to facilitate administrative services for citizens, transparency of administrative procedures and limit corruption,“ stated Varna Regional Governor Yani Yanev.

The Beloslav Customer Service Center received USAID support amounting to 17 500 USD through the *Improving Services to Citizens Program* of FLGR, spent mainly on computer equipment and software, information boards and materials, as well as staff training. 8 000 USD is the total direct and in-kind contribution of the municipality for building the center.



Four municipal employees in the center assist local citizens and business in filing requests and receiving services and information from the administration. The municipality plans to establish in the future Internet connection of the center with the three villages on its territory in order to provide closer access to services for their inhabitants. ◆

THE BULGARIAN TECHNICAL TWINNING PROGRAM - A GENERATOR OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Nevena Kaneva
FLGR

At the end of the Bulgarian Technical Twinning Program Phase III, a final Best Practices Conference titled „Local Solutions to National Challenges“ was convened on June 20-21, 2002 in Riviera, Varna. Representatives of 12 Bulgarian and 6 US cities gathered to share best practices resulting from their jointly developed projects. The conference hosted guests from Serbia and Romania who had the opportunity to learn from the experience of their Bulgarian colleagues in the area of technical cooperation.

FLGR Executive Director Ginka Kapitanova opened the conference with the following words:

„I suppose that all city teams are impatient to share the accumulated expert knowledge and experience, the successfully working practices and management solutions as a result of the partnerships. It is the main goal of the Technical Twinning Program to increase the institutional and expert capacity of the Bulgarian municipalities in solving problems of their communities with active citizens' participation, in improving the quality of public services and stimulating favorable business environment.“

Official guest and keynote speaker of the conference was His Excellency James Pardew, US Ambassador to Bulgaria, who underlined that:



„This program supports the development of Bulgarian municipalities through transfer of skills between Bulgarian and American partners. It is a very successful formula, which demonstrates how international municipal cooperation can

really assist the development of cities. I am proud that American cities are helping Bulgarian cities.“

Jon Bormet, Director of the International Resource Cities Program of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) noted:



„It is very important that you have the opportunity to build your communities, to establish good governance traditions.“

The Technical Twinning Program is being implemented in Bulgaria since 1996. It is coordinated jointly by ICMA and FLGR and funded by the US Agency for International Development. The program's main principles are based on the exchange of know-how and successful management practices that allow Bulgarian counterparts to look beyond the traditional approaches to solve problems of national importance. In the long term, the program contributes to strengthening the capacity of local authorities and encourages citizens' participation in local self-government.

During the last five years, the program has been constantly enriched and expanded. While in its first phase three Bulgarian-American partnerships were established, in 2002 the partnerships are already eleven. Each new phase of the

program provides an opportunity not only for creating new twinning partnerships, but also for competitive selection and support of the most successful ones established in earlier phases of the program. The new component of Phase III included new Bulgarian cities as „replicating“ successful projects and innovative practices developed by the participants in the previous two phases of the program. Successful management models were replicated in five Bulgarian municipalities - Sliven, Novi Pazar, Harmanli, Gabrovo and Sevlievo.

In order to define areas of cooperation, the challenges that Bulgarian cities face are being surveyed and according to Mr. Jon Boromet:

„We always start with the question: What are the needs of the citizens?“ I understood that all cities discuss one and the same issues such as economic development, unemployment and how to create new jobs. People need clean



environment. We deal with simple issues like, for example, how to achieve better waste collection. A local government is effective, if it is to the benefit of citizens. That is what cities do in the United States. That is what local governments are beginning to do in Bulgaria.“

Based on this principle the cities of Haskovo and Abington, Pennsylvania, chose to unite their efforts in attracting investments through the establishment of a corporate office-center and an industrial park. As a result of their two-year cooperation, an Orientation Program for investors was created. It contains major topics that present the economic and social environment in the Municipality of Haskovo. A marketing profile and a DVD presentation of the municipality were developed. Haskovo shared their experience with another Bulgarian municipality - Harmanli - where once again with the assistance of the American partners a municipal marketing profile was developed.

The Municipality of Silistra and their partners from Kettering, Ohio, also developed economic development practices focusing their efforts on establishing a business incubator and creating incentives to encourage business development.

The cities of Vidin and West Carrollton chose to create a business-information website of Vidin, providing users from all parts of the world an opportunity for quick access to up-to-date information on the economic environment in Vidin.

During Phase III of the program, the Blagoevgrad-Auburn partnership was also joined by the Municipality of Sliven, where with the exceptional assistance of the City of Auburn (Alabama) counterparts, the project on municipal marketing profile creation was replicated.

Another interesting example is the development of the Regional Strategy for Tourism Development by the cities of Razgrad, Shoumen and Veliko Turnovo. The Bulgarian partners received support by the American City of Brunswick. The strategy aims at uniting the efforts of the three Bulgarian cities to provide opportunities for development of this business activity in their region.

With the help of their US partners from West Bend the Municipality of Pazardjik developed the concept and started marketing of a new economic development zone using the US industrial parks model.

Apart from the traditional areas of cooperation, participants in Phase III of the Technical Twinning Program looked for solutions to their typical problems also in new spheres, unexplored by the partnerships during the previous two phases. An inventory of the Danube Riverfront Parks was completed in Vidin and Silistra. For the development of the parks revitalization concepts public opinion was surveyed and new fundraising methods were adopted. A Donors' Alley was created in the Municipality of Silistra Riverfront park. Involving citizens in the decision-making process definitely provoked their feeling of ownership and understanding the necessity of green areas maintenance. That was the reason for many citizens and organizations to get

involved in the creation of this alley.

The cities of Veliko Turnovo and Golden, Colorado, embraced the challenge to work together in the area of spatial planning. They created a Strategic Plan for the Redevelopment of the Old Military School Site in the City of Veliko Turnovo and, later, a Detailed Development Plan, which will allow more effective management of the land property and improvement of the economic environment. By organizing public hearings, where the community benefits from the redevelopment of this downtown site were discussed, Veliko Turnovo's local government took into account and supported the interests and respected the opinion of its citizens.

The City of Veliko Turnovo also introduced a successful model for infrastructure management and maintenance allowing relevant short-term and long-term financial planning.

An example of effective cooperation with the business is the project of Gabrovo and Portage on public-private partnerships for economic development, replicated in the municipalities of Tryavna and Sevlievo. Through this public-private partnership model the three Bulgarian cities improved their privatization procedures.

Last but not least, during Phase III of the Technical Twinning Program a project in the area of solid-waste management was implemented. The cities of Blagoevgrad and Auburn, Alabama, worked on redeveloping the existing landfill and assessed the opportunities for building a new regional one. The remediation measures recommended by the American partners and implemented by Blagoevgrad counterparts extended the life of the existing landfill with fifteen years.

In the past two years the Technical Twinning Program proved to be a generator of innovative practices on municipal level. With regard

to disseminating the experience of the immediate participants in the program, FLGR summarized and published several case studies in its Innovative Practices Bulletin and through the Local Government Information Network (LOGIN). The municipalities started preparing themselves to replicate their projects straight after their successful completion. Training workshops were held on local government performance measurement and public infrastructure management.

All cities demonstrated willingness to continue their cooperation. Attractive ideas about future opportunities for Bulgarian-American municipal partnerships were shared at the final conference and good will was declared for transferring the accumulated knowledge to other Bulgarian municipalities that were not direct beneficiaries of the Technical Twinning Program. ◆



VENETZ MUNICIPALITY: EVERY OPENING IS UNIQUE

On 3 August 2002, the Municipality of Venetz, Shoumen region, inaugurated its new Customer Service Center. It was the sixth center in Bulgaria created with the efforts and enthusiasm of the municipal administration team with the financial assistance of USAID and the technical and expert support of FLGR within the *Improving Services to Citizens Program*. With 14 000 USD of support delivered by the US Agency through the program the Municipality of Venetz has purchased equipment and software for the center that has three working desks. The municipal contribution for the creation of the center amounts to 8 500 USD.

It is Saturday - a usual day for work in the fields in this rural region. Along the road of 30 km, detouring off the highway to Varna and leading to the village of Venetz, one could see peasants from the nearby villages arranging and binding stacks of brooms from this year's crop in the fields. To the right of the road the wooden watermill, symbol of the municipality, greeted visitors, arriving to the municipality.

Two children groups - for traditional local dance and disco-ballet - came to perform at the opening of the center in Venetz from the neighboring village of Yasenkovo, the largest one in the municipality.


The entire municipal administration, representatives of the municipal council, citizens and guests participated in the ceremony. Official guests included: Dr. Kent Hill, Assistant Administrator of the US Agency for International Development, Washington D.C., responsible for the Agency's programs in Europe and Eurasia, Ms. Nadereh Lee, Chief Democracy Officer at USAID/Sofia, Mr. Tom Potocki, Senior Local Government Advisor at USAID/Sofia, Ms. Ginka Kapitanova, FLGR Executive Director, Mr. Ebazer Redjeb and Ms. Nora Chalakova, deputy regional governors of the Shoumen Region.

Before the ribbon-cutting ceremony the Mayor of Venetz, Mr. Kahri Ibrahim, greeted the participants and outlined the significance of the event for citizens and municipal administration.

In his speech to the citizens and guests at the ceremony, Dr. Hill noted that after the end of the Cold War the US Agency for International Development supports the countries in transition in three major areas - economic reform, political reform and humanitarian aid. „What we witness today is an example of building democracy through involving citizens in the local decision-making processes,“ said Dr. Kent Hill.

The Mayor of Venetz, Mr. Kahri Ibrahim, shared that by opening this center the municipal administration makes a serious commitment to its citizens: „**From now on the municipal administration will keep its commitment to effectively manage the Customer Service Center, the professional relations among staff and a friendly environment for citizens.**“

Significant contribution for the successful completion of the center has the municipal team that worked on the project with the mayor's support - Ms. Zyubeide Kioseva, Deputy Mayor of Venetz, Ms. Zyubeide Ibriam, Municipal Secretary, and Ms. Ainur Ibriz, Administrative Services Director. The service in favor of the citizens requires daily efforts for making services better and closer to them. That is why Ms. Kioseva admitted that the municipality had to do still two thirds of the work. The next step that the administration considers, for example, is translating the information brochures presenting services in the Turkish language. Thus, the center will even more closely address the needs of the citizens.

„We are the people. This is the place. Now is the time.“ That slogan of the municipal administration welcomes every customer of the center. These words express the philosophy behind their efforts and will to improve service delivery to citizens. Through the program, municipal teams make this really happen. 



ACCESSIBLE URBAN ENVIRONMENT FOR OVER 850 DISABLED PEOPLE IN DUPNITZA

In the end of August 2002, two small projects were completed with the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation within the ***Improving the Social Environment Program*** of the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR). The projects aimed at improvement of the living conditions of disadvantaged social groups, while encouraging their participation in community life and in the decision-making processes. The project, presented here, was supported within the funds of Phase I of the ***Improving the Social Environment Program***.

The „**Building Ramps for the Disabled**“ project, implemented by the Zora Chitalishte in the town of Dupnitsa, aimed at improvement of the urban environment with regard to ensuring access to people with physical disabilities. Sidewalks of all major crossroads and in proximity to the main governmental, municipal, health and bank institutions in the town were reconstructed.

The successful implementation of the project was achieved through the extremely good cooperation between the Zora Chitalishte, headed by Ms. Sylvia Balinova; the local Association of People with Disabilities; the Dupnitsa Rotary Club; the local Phoenix Company; the local branch of „Hemus Highways“ and the media. Dupnitsa Municipality was also partner of the project. Its experts performed investment supervision over the construction of ramps and coordinated the relations with the relevant municipal departments on the documentation, necessary for the project.

With the grant funding of 3 700 USD from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, delivered through FLGR and with the financial contribution of 850 USD from the partner organizations the Zora Chitalishte built a total of 30 ramps at key points in the town. The places were chosen together with the partners from the local Association of People with Disabilities. This helped identify the most relevant and frequently visited by disabled people places and institutions. Eighteen street signs informing about the ramps were installed, as well as five signs at parking lots, where parking space for disabled people with special vehicles was allocated. By a decree of the Mayor of the Dupnitsa Municipality to the company, hired to manage municipal parking lots, the preparation of the special lots has been facilitated.

Accessible urban environment has been ensured to over 850 people with disabilities living on the territory of the municipality. The immediate feedback from citizens about the usefulness of the new ramps was positive. It became clear that not only disabled citizens, but also retired elderly people and young mothers with baby-strollers, benefit from the performed improvements.

The active cooperation between the participating organizations, united by the common noble cause of turning the town into a place with equal-access opportunities for all citizens, continued throughout the project implementation. On August 15, 2002, the ramps were officially inaugurated with the participation of representatives of Dupnitsa Municipality, the local Association of People with Disabilities and Rotary Club. The significance of the event and the active interest from the media turned the opening into top news of the day for the region.

At the opening ceremony representatives of the Zora Chitalishte distributed to all present citizens with disabilities a copy of the town center map marked with all new ramp-aided routes they can easily use.

In September, the Zora Chitalishte continued its efforts in constructing banisters that assist the movement of disabled people in the town center area, as well as in building two additional ramps at places important for the members of the Association of People with Disabilities. The expected improvements will cost another 325 USD. ◆





Dupnitsa now and then



The Dupnitsa town center with the new ramp-aided routes is now accessible to the people with disabilities

MAKING THE NEIGHBORHOOD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE IN

Diana Bebenova
Silistra Municipality

The residents of the Iztok neighborhood in the City of Silistra wanted to have a well-arranged public space with places for recreation and sport. This has been their openly expressed wish since 1992. The necessity to execute public works was evident. Ten percent of the city's population lives in the Iztok neighborhood mainly including families with small children. The overall number of households (apartments) is 2 940 situated on a total of 362 840 square meters, which makes the neighborhood the second biggest in Silistra. „7, 07 percent of all households in the city are to be found in that neighborhood,“ remarked Mayor Ivo Andonov during a Municipal Council meeting in November 2001. He thus argued in favor of the proposal, that the renovation of the public area in the Iztok Neighborhood be included in the Danube River Initiative Program II of the Foundation for Local Government Reform, supported by the US Agency for International Development.

The intentions of the municipality gained active support by two non-governmental organizations - the Bulgarian Women's Union and the Ekaterina Karavelova Club. They disseminated an information poster named „Green Iztok Is Coming“ and launched a survey in the neighborhood, studying what was the readiness of citizens to participate in specific activities of the project. The results of the signature poll on „I Say YES to Green Iztok“ demonstrated support for planned activities on behalf of respondents.

After the initiative gained the support of the Municipal Council, a team of municipal experts designed a project for renovating the neighborhood. It was submitted to FLGR for participation in the ***Danube River Initiative Program*** call for project proposals. The proposal of Silistra was one of the ten projects approved to receive funding and, after USAID's bidding procedure, 32 000 USD were invested in the improvement of the living environment of 4 000 citizens.

Before the start of the actual construction work, the project design team including architect Antonina Ogneva, architect Dimo Mihailov and engineer Ivelin Lozev, Deputy Mayor on Spatial Planning, surveyed the opinion of the residents about the project's technical details. On a specially organized meeting, 28 residents of the neighborhood gave specific ideas for building a sports playground, reconstruction of existing

children's playground facilities and creation of green areas.

„It would be very good to have a multifunctional playground for basketball, volleyball and football, which can become a place for recreation of children of different ages,“ shared her concern Daniela Mihailova, resident of the neighborhood.

The young environmentalists from the Center for Students' Technical and Scientific Creativity cleaned the neighborhood in March and planted with trees a large area in it. Their enthusiasm had also impact on the grown-ups and the elderly citizens, who, in response to a request of the municipality, cleaned the construction site and removed the existing five illegal buildings.

In the beginning of May 2002, the local unit of the Glavbolgarstroi Company in Silistra began the construction work under the project. „We shall complete the site on time by the end of July,“ declared firmly Atanas Atanasov, manager of the company, and he did keep his promise. The public works consisted of laying tiles, reconstruction of the existing children's playground, and building of a parking lot, sports playground and areas for social recreation. The project also had a social effect, as it provided 24 three-month jobs.

Making the neighborhood a better place to live in became a constant topic for the journalists in Silistra. The local media published various articles describing the progress of reconstruction activities and the opinion of citizens about them. „Finally, we have a place to get together outdoors during summertime. It would be good for us to plant more trees,“ shares 63-year-old Ganka Georgieva.

„I like the rocking horse in our new playground, even though I fell once from it. Also, my mom does not worry for me any more,“ says with content 4-year-old Plamena Nikolova.

Turning the neighborhood into a green area is an important part of the public works, which will actively continue in October 2002. It is then that with the help of local non-governmental organizations the Municipality of Silistra and the neighborhood residents will plant about 600 shrubs and trees. The official opening of the site is planned to take place at the end of October, when representatives of the donor organizations will also be invited to attend the event.


The promotion of the renovated neighborhood will demonstrate how the joint efforts of the municipality, the citizens and the NGOs, assisted by FLGR and USAID, can improve the living environment and restore social activities in a Bulgarian community along the eastern border of the country - a community that has become a better place to live in. 



Photo 1: Nobody cares any longer about the vegetable garden between the apartment blocks



Photo 2: The papas are only a few, but the moms have obviously taken their decision already



Photo 3: The Silistra municipal administrators believe in the power of public discussions



Photo 4: The most impatient assistants on the site



Photo 5: The new playground is merry with colors: white, pink, yellow, blue, red...



Photo 6: Look at us!



SILISTRA WON THE ANNUAL INNOVATIVE MUNICIPALITY AWARD OF FLGR

In 2002 the Foundation for Local Government Reform inaugurated the Innovative Municipality Award, in order to distinguish annually Bulgarian municipalities that have contributed significantly to the implementation and sharing of innovative practices in local self-government. In this year's national competition for the award, FLGR evaluated the innovative contribution of Bulgarian municipalities since the beginning of the current mandate. For this period of three years, overall 215 innovative practices from 72 municipalities, presented by municipal administrations, non-governmental and business organization, have been submitted to FLGR's Innovative Practices database.

The Municipality of Silistra won FLGR's first Innovative Municipality Award. Silistra's young team successfully combines the efforts of the administration, the council and the citizens. The innovative practices, submitted by the Municipality of Silistra, reflect not only as quantity (18), but also in terms of quality, their targeted efforts and wisdom to work systematically for achieving the vision of the community. These practices cover all topical categories, complement and build on one another. The success of the practices is based on professionalism



HONORARY LIST OF BULGARIAN MUNICIPALITIES WITH SIGNIFICANT INNOVATIVE CONTRIBUTION:

Stara Zagora, Blagoevgrad and Gabrovo - with six innovative practices

Bourgas, Dobrich, Plevn, Sliven, Pazardjik, Rakovski, and the Trakia Regional Association - with five innovative practices

THIRD-PLACE WINNER IN THE AWARD COMPETITION:

The Municipality of Varna - with ten innovative practices

SECOND-PLACE WINNER IN THE AWARD COMPETITION:

The Municipality of Sofia - with fifteen innovative practices

FIRST PLACE AND WINNER OF THE INNOVATIVE MUNICIPALITY AWARD:

The Municipality of Silistra - with eighteen innovative practices

CONGRATULATIONS!



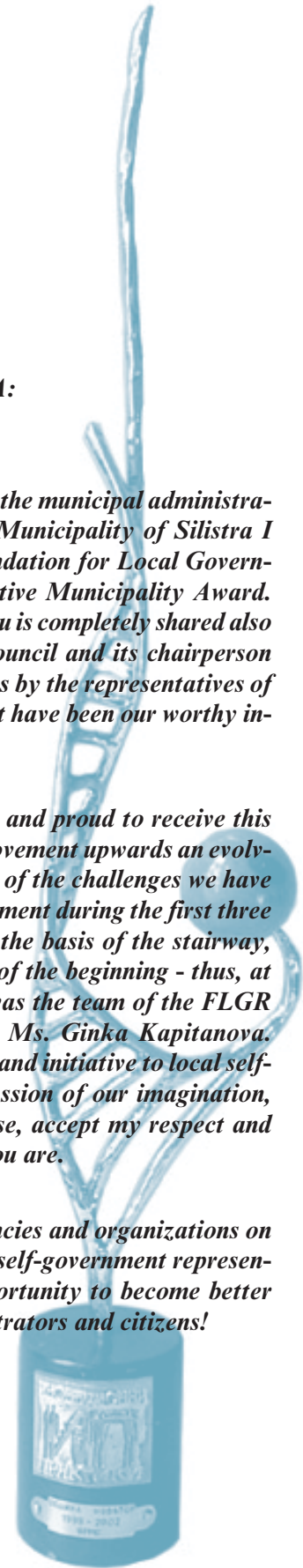
FLGR's information kiosk at the Annual Local Governments' Meeting in October 2002, where the Innovative Municipality Award ceremony took place

**IVO ANDONOV,
MAYOR OF SILISTRA:**

On behalf of my team, of the municipal administration and the citizens of the Municipality of Silistra I would like to thank the Foundation for Local Government Reform for the Innovative Municipality Award. Our expressed gratitude to you is completely shared also by the Silistra Municipal Council and its chairperson Dr. Marin Peychev, as well as by the representatives of local civic organizations, that have been our worthy innovative partners.

We are extremely happy and proud to receive this unique prize. It represents movement upwards an evolving stairway and reminds me of the challenges we have overcome in local self-government during the first three years of the mandate. As at the basis of the stairway, there is the sphere – symbol of the beginning - thus, at the start of our work there was the team of the FLGR and its Executive Director, Ms. Ginka Kapitanova. They transmitted their spirit and initiative to local self-governments and gave expression of our imagination, innovation and energy. Please, accept my respect and admiration for being what you are.

I thank to the donor agencies and organizations on behalf of all Bulgarian local self-government representatives for giving us the opportunity to become better and more successful administrators and citizens!



WE OPEN THE CHANNELS THAT ALLOW THE SYSTEM TO BREATHE

On 19 and 20 September 2002 in Sofia, the Foundation for Local Government Reform organized a training workshop on Effective Communication, allowing exchange of best practices among 30 municipal media and public relations officers from cities all over Bulgaria.

William H. Guerrant, a US communications consultant for the Research Triangle Institute, presented to participants the topics of Communications Audit, Positive Media Relations, Using a Website to Communicate with the Public and How to Increase the Value and Prestige of the PR Function. Neri Terzieva, journalist, public relations expert and director of the press-office of former Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov, presented to participants practical advice and successful professional solutions from her long-standing experience in the media and government.

The workshop became a meeting place of ideas and best practices that participants shared with one another through panel discussions and informal conversations. At the end, they expressed contentment and gratitude to organizers, confident that the workshop goals have been achieved. Seventy percent of participants gave and „excellent“ overall evaluation of the workshop, while eighty percent said that the topics and the work of the seminar completely responded to their expectations. The workshop was organized with the financial support of the US Agency for International Development and assistance from the Local Government Initiative Program.

We offer you inspiring excerpts from the workshop presentation of Ms. Terzieva.

NERI TERZIEVA

JOURNALIST AND PR EXPERT:



Does the healing of the human body have something in common with the healing of the human soul, which is part of our vocation? Yes they do. If I can be any help to you, it is with the extract of my practical knowledge and observations that I had the chance to acquire during my five years as a press director for the President.

I think that the most important thing you already have felt is the duality of our work. First, we are communicators within our institution. Second, we are communicators between the institution (the municipality, the mayor), on the one hand, and the citizens, on the other. The work on internal communication, on opening the internal chan-



nels of communication took me personally the most energy and time. However, this duality of the function of the public relations person is incredibly motivating and extremely exhausting at the same time.

To make media reporters feel at home, to make them feel supported, is one of your most important tasks. Let them be like guests, but also a little bit like relatives, who know where to find what they need in the house. This is very useful. At the same time, being a good host for them has a nice effect on the institution itself, as well as on its leader. It is important for you to find a place for the reporters, where they can attend the end of events and feel comfortable. When municipalities can afford this, it is nice to provide the journalists with their own room in the municipal offices, from where they can send their materials.

For press conferences, I have used the advice of TV camera operators and photographers. We chose together the places in the building where official and informal meetings could occur. You know that camerapersons and photographers have a better eye for backgrounds, distances and colors. If you have not done this already, invite them to an informal meeting and they will certainly discover for you the most visual place inside the building.

It is good, when the weather allows for that, to hold the briefings and press conferences at unusual places. Unusual for everyone else except you, of course. You must be very well acquainted with each place. It is very useful, if you write down a „scenario“ in advance, so that you are clear from which side will the mayor enter, who will stand next to him, etc. It is even better, if you manage to arrange the event in such a way that will locate the people, because of which the mayor has come, in the center of the event and in the focus of the cameras.

We must always speak from the point of view of public interest. Even when your boss is visiting an important place or produces an event that looks like his/her own show, you should expose the people in the background, because of whom he/she is there. It is those people and not your boss that should represent visually the event.

I live with the vanity of the conviction that I am among the

first press people, who introduced the off-the-record meetings in Bulgaria. These are in the domain of crisis PR. They are simultaneously very dangerous and very effective. That is why I would like you to allow me to expand more on them. Something turns into crisis PR the moment it becomes a curious, but unexpected point of interest for the media. Whenever unexpected interest is rising towards someone or something, this means soon you will have problems with that. Overall, we have conducted seven off-the-record meetings of the President with media reporters. Tape recorders off - this means that the conversation is not being recorded and at the end of it we can all together agree to publish a short headline. A crucial condition is the 100-percent sincerity of the answers. Another condition is that there are no forbidden questions at these meetings. I think that the collective integrity, the common unwritten ethical code of the journalists suggests the most proper moral conduct to everyone. When there are „traitors“, who do not keep up the agreement, they will be sentenced forever by the common integrity of their colleagues. Organize off-the-record meetings, but be very careful with the first one of them.

In urgent situations, when we have no time to prepare news reporters for the eventual theoretical and purely practical consequences of something, we need emergency aid. One way is to call-up the colleagues (journalists) at an off-the-record meeting, to describe the facts of every possible development of the situation and, at the same time, to appeal for their responsibility, when it comes to critical matters involving huge masses of people. It is not true that journalists are irresponsible.

Due to the poverty and the social collapse, people in Bulgaria continue to get informed mainly through radio and television. This, I suppose, is no news for you. When we say television, this mainly means the on-air TV channels, since 50 percent of the population possesses old television sets, incompatible with cable or satellite TV and without remote control, which is the tool for voting confidence to the media. According to researchers, the active audience in Bulgaria at the moment is about four-and-a-half million viewers. This is on a national scale and only for the air TV.

The situation with radio stations is similar - 37 percent of the Bulgarians still own old Selena and WEF radio sets. Their FM frequencies end at 68 and all private radio stations in the country are positioned beyond that.

If you want your message to reach many people, you must give priority to those media, which have the best penetration and which reach the audiences immediately.

A little bit on the so-called visual side of our work. Carried away by chasing the news we are rarely aware of the backgrounds, the second plain, against which the events, where „our person“ participates, develop. It is very important for you to observe constantly what is happening in the background both in advance and in the course of the event. This is very

simple. Go to the place in advance and see the site. This will take you not more than 10 to 15 minutes. I would emphasize on something that is forthcoming here and very fashionable already around the world: You can organize action in the background, which could be in the context of the important message you want to underline in an event. I repeat again, do it from the point of view of public interest.

I wanted to tell you something about the image of the person, for which you work. My friend Prof. Georgi Lozanov, top media expert, says, „There are two persons living in each one of us - the one we really are and the one we think we are.“ When the difference between these two persons is big, then we have a problem. This is valid for not only the personalities, but also for the entire municipal administration. One of the biggest sins of the PR person can be to „remake the personality“ or the institution, to remake them intentionally for the media. It is only fair to leave them be the way they are and to constantly try to disclose new good features from the ones they possess. If we can assist „the birth“ of more good qualities, let us do it. However, we should never invent them.

Be sure that the media will be the first to discover both the good and the bad features. All of us suffer from what Zoshtchenko calls „administrative admiration“. The moment you hear yourself saying to journalists „you“ and then adding „we“, meaning the administration, you are lost. There is no „you“ and „we“. There is something of common interest. The common interest is that of the citizens. You will see for yourself that the moment you start structuring the most ordinary press release from the point of view of public interest, it becomes easy and the news works out.

We - the PR persons - are not important for history. It is very unfair, being a PR person, to make personal PR for oneself. This is both evident and bad.

Soon we shall be facing local elections. What are you going to do during campaign preparations? Everyone around you, including your mayor, will be trying to get you involved (and this is inevitable) in an election campaign. Moreover, what will you do after the elections? I understand that you are divided in your intentions. Some of you feel like spokespersons of the mayor and his personal friends. The rest of you probably want to continue to be the expert people also with the new leadership.

In your immediate work for the municipality, do not even for a moment let be seen that you are occupied with elections. Let the usual flow of information and your contacts with the media go on, because in the other case, even if you have the best feelings towards the current mayor, this would do harm both to him/her and his/her election campaign.

Be courageous, above all! Our work is hard, but very meaningful. ◆

DANUBE RIVER INITIATIVE II PROGRAM SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED AT THE END OF OCTOBER 2002

340 500 USD invested in 12 infrastructure sites within the program

In 1999 the Foundation for Local Government Reform started the implementation of the **Danube River Initiative Program** in support of the municipalities along the Danube River with the financial assistance of the US Agency for International Development. 13 small infrastructure projects and 8 projects of non-governmental organizations were accomplished within the program. Five municipal customer service centers, three municipal development centers and one municipal tourist center were established as a result of the program. Two regional development strategies, of Rousse and Plevan Regions, as well as the municipal marketing strategies of Montana and Rousse were created through the program. 70 full-time and 270 part-time jobs were created locally throughout the implementation of the program.

FLGR achieved the goals of the first phase of the **Danube River Initiative Program** by providing assistance to overall 21 local governments in the region. The results of the program received high appreciation from both the immediate beneficiaries and the donor - USAID. Following the accumulated experience and successful outcomes, FLGR submitted a new proposal to continue the program, which received the support of USAID, and officially launched the implementation of **Danube River Initiative II Program** on 15 October 2001.

The main objective of the program was to improve the living environment in the target municipalities with a special focus on initiatives assisting people with disabilities, women and ethnic minority groups. The assistance was directed mainly towards small municipalities with numerous minority communities, which had little or no funding available for infra-

structure projects and urgent need to execute infrastructure improvements. One of the program's eligibility conditions was demonstrated support and readiness of local community to participate directly in the projects, including volunteer labor.

Danube River Initiative II Program managed to deliver timely and needed assistance to the municipalities that gained funding for their project proposals.


The program solved concrete problems of the local residents like the need for water supply, sewerage and public works. Special attention was given to regions with minority population. Examples of that include construction of a water supply system in the Roma neighborhood of the village of Archar in the Municipality of Dimovo; reconstruction of the water supply network in three village of the Municipality of Alfatar; building of a sewerage system in the Roma neighborhood in the town of Biala Slatina.

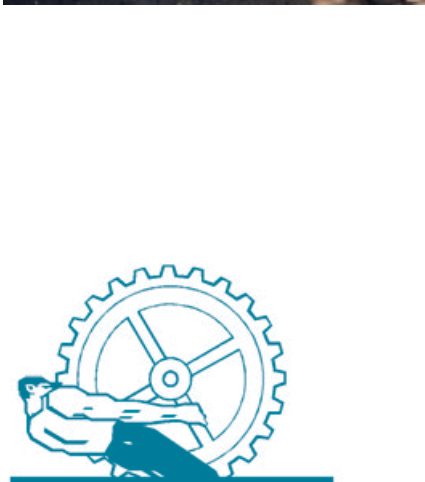
With the help of the local unemployment bureaus, local workers were hired throughout the projects' implementation, which created temporary jobs of several months for long-term unemployed people. On the average, 30 percent of workers at the 12 infrastructure sites were hired in that way.

Another impact of the program on local economies was a decrease in the loss of water, thanks to the reconstructed networks. The water supply system in these communities had been constructed between 1955 and 1965, so, it was extremely damaged and unreliable, causing irregular water supply. We must also underline the program's contribution to better hygiene and healthier living environment, especially in locations that lacked any sewerage system before.



One slightly peculiar project was funded through the Danube River Initiative II Program. It was about cleaning the Ogosta riverbed and building of a supporting wall in the Municipality of Chiprovtsi. The project was of environmental and resolved a specific problem with landslide in the central part of the town.

Last but not least, we should mark the commitment of municipalities to improving the urban living environment of their residents. Through the program the Municipality of Silistra built a new public area and facilities for outdoor recreation in the „Iztok“ neighborhood that has the youngest population in the city. The Municipality of Chuprene renovated for its citizens the central town square, as well as restored the old clock tower, built in 1899. 



THE PREPARED BILLS AND DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2003 ARE NOT IN THE INITIALLY DECLARED DIRECTION

Zdravko Sechkov

Financial Director, FLGR

The demand of local self-governments for greater fiscal decentralization is a fact for some time now. The discussion about the degree of fiscal decentralization goes on during the last several years with varying intensity. **However, never before had local governments come closer to success in this sphere than lately.**

During the current year, the government created an inter-institutional working group that in a very short time drafted a concept paper on fiscal decentralization and a program for its implementation. The working group made a division of expenditure responsibilities between the state and the local governments, developed standards for units of activities, etc.

The government declared its will for providing greater autonomy to local authorities. That will, however, should have been consequently reflected in the State Budget Act for 2003, as well as through changes in the Local Taxes and Fees Act, concerning fiscal competencies with regard to local fees, and change of the Municipal Budgets Act.

The prepared legal texts and, above all, the 2003 budget draft are not in the initially declared direction. The negotiations are hard and continuous because of the expectations, created in local governments, which are not becoming reality due to various reasons.

The reasons are probably both of political and financial nature. In my view, what can now, at this stage, be achieved, although the mentioned reasons, is that, regardless of the financial situation of the state, if there is sufficient political will, the fiscal decentralization can start by implementing certain specific steps:

One step is clearing the unpaid debts of local governments, which in their greater part have been formed as planned structural deficits in their budgets during the last several years. They are not the result of ineffective management. I think, that we can find confirmation of that when looking at the draft budget for 2003, where we see that the state expenditure responsibilities will again not be 100 percent covered. That has been the case also for the last years. That is why there exist such unpaid debts.

The next step towards decentralization is to change the Local Taxes and Fees Act, which must yield greater freedom to local governments in defining the size of local fees.

Another condition, necessary for the start of this process, **is ensuring of funding to the full amount of state expenditure responsibilities in the budget for 2003.** Two thirds of public services are delivered at the local government level.


Providing the needed resources for that would lead to improving the quality of these services and would be directly felt by the citizens, because those services include education, healthcare, culture, etc.

What cannot still happen, according to me?

That which cannot happen yet at this stage is conducting a true reform, ensuring financial independence to local authorities. A reform of this kind requires providing local authorities with rights and responsibilities in defining the types, bases and rates of local taxes. It also suggests changes in the structure of the municipal revenues that would lead to increasing the share of local revenues at the expense of the delegated revenues from the state budget. It suggests changes in laws like the Corporate Income Tax Act and the Physical Persons Income Tax Act.

If we had this structure of municipal budgets, we would not be leading again the discussion about what percent of the VAT should be yielded to local government. Last, but not least such a reform suggests creating a competitive environment among local governments through economic incentives.

Why the reform is impossible?

Because, I think, that at this stage there is insufficient political will for such a change that suggests also a change of the constitution. We also lack one consolidated view from local governments about the scope of the reform. Last, but not least, there is not enough public understanding about the need for such a reform. 

HUGE MUNICIPAL DIFFERENCES

(by publication in the Banker Weekly, issue 47/2002)

On the average for Bulgaria, the amount of **municipal revenue** per capita is **238.5** levs. However, the difference between the municipality with the biggest revenue per capita and the one with smallest revenue per capita is **6.9** times.

The revenue from **shared taxes** (between the local government and the state) varies from **8 to 923 levs** per capita.

The revenue from **general subsidies** varies from **0 to 240 levs** per capita (53 levs on the average).

The revenue from **target subsidies for capital expenditures** is from **0 to 260 levs** per capita (9 levs on the average).

The difference in **own revenues** (from local taxes and fees) is no less. It varies from **7 to 443 levs**.

INNOVATION IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Bogdana Shopova

***Innovative Practices Project Coordinator,
FLGR***

We understand innovation in local self-government as doing things in a new way. The municipal elected leadership and administrators are facing the challenge of improving the process of service delivery, responding more efficiently to the needs of the community and coming to changes that lead to sustainable economic and social benefits for the community.

Since 1998 the Foundation for Local Government Reform works for encouraging innovation by building its Innovative Practices database, which currently contains 270 practices, submitted by 86 municipalities. The philosophy of our project and database, which is available in print through publications and in electronic format on our website, is that it is very open. Everybody can write down their innovative practice directly in the Internet or send us the text in a letter.

The innovative practice is a broad term. It could represent a modest improvement of the existing policies and procedures, as well as a systematic and fundamental change of things. It could already exist in other institutions, municipalities or regions, but be a novelty to the respective location. When we select the innovative practices, we look for results already accomplished. It is important to have a practice that was already implemented successfully and has clearly brought about improvements like increased effectiveness, access to information or cooperation with other sectors; saved funds, resources or time. In addition, it should not require expensive technologies of big funding.

There are many interesting and exciting examples. I would point out the last three most popular topics on which we collected many interesting and successful practices. One of the topics was „European Integration and International Cooperation“ and our winner in November 2001 was the Municipality of Sliven, which has created with its own resources a Municipal Center for European Integration, performing a wide range



On 31 October 2002, the Bulgarian National Radio broadcast the seventh monthly Municipal Radio-Forum Program, produced in cooperation with the Foundation for Local Government Reform with the goal of raising wide public awareness about local government issues, achievements and problems. The



October program was on Innovation in Local Self-Government, where FLGR posed the following major questions: What qualities should the innovator possess? What motivates people (in local government) to become innovators? What are the leading examples of innovations from Bulgarian municipalities? Program participants, including mayors, NGO and business representatives, addressed the questions and shared their views and examples. Following is an abstract from this radio discussion.

of activities. Another hot topic has been „Municipal Marketing“, i.e. presenting the capacity of the municipality in a way that would help attract investment. On the topic of „Sustainable Development“, we also encountered very good examples. I would point out the Municipality of Etropole, which managed to initiate a wide cooperation within the community by creating its own Sustainable Development Council and conducting a range of activities.

The analysis of the practices shows that in the innovative organization there exists strong support on behalf of the leadership. Innovation is seen throughout the entire organization - flexible structures are created, as well as cooperation between the different departments. The job descriptions are broadly formulated and give an opportunity for going beyond one's specific responsibilities. Innovation is being encouraged at all levels, regardless of whether we talk about a small municipality or village, a department with many or just a few staff members. The variety of viewpoints is greatly appreciated, because this is the source for new ideas. The willingness to experiment, assess and work in partnership with the community is the other important key to innovation.

Christian Tanev

Human Resource Department Director at Orbitel Inc.:

Nowadays, innovative thinking is the key to survival of any business. Innovation should be a feature of every company, as well as of the non-for-profit organizations. People are motivated to be innovators, if the things they do are noticed, even when the result is not up to our expectations. People should not feel threatened to try to experiment. This is the driving force of innovative thinking.



FLGR MAILBOX

„I received for the first time the newsletter of FLGR and I found it very interesting and informative about what's happening in Bulgaria in terms of Urban Management & Governance. I am surprised how we all share similar challenges of urbanization. I'd like to receive newsletters and publications from FLGR and wish you the very best of success.“ - *Piyush Ranjan Rout, Coordinator, City Managers' Association Orissa (CMAO), Bhubaneswar, India, December 2002*

„Greetings and thanks to FLGR for the weekly electronic bulletin and everything you do for local governments, non-governmental organizations and Bulgaria. The existence of your foundation, the activities of your team and your e-weekly are my light in the tunnel, my opportunity to have a choice, my hope that there will be more and more professionals like you, who do their job properly in our country.“ - *Nadya Mochkova, Balkan Youth Forum Association, Svishtov, Bulgaria, December 2002*

„One of the most important results from the projects, we have implemented so far, are the wonderful partnerships that charge me and my colleagues with new energy. Beyond any doubt, FLGR's team, we worked with this past summer, is an example of such partnership. Thank you!“ - *Nikola Kolev, Director, Konstantin Velichkov School, the village of Patalenitza, Pazardjik Region, Bulgaria, November 2002*

„A few years ago, we had the pleasure of meeting some of your staff here in Washington. Since that time, we have been receiving your publications, and have retained an interest in your activities. Thank you for sending your excellent publications.“ - *Robert Learmonth, Executive Director, Planning Assistance, Washington, D.C., USA, October 2002*

„I would like to thank FLGR for publishing the Project Cycle Management Manual. The material is a valuable instrument in project management and is completely targeted at systematizing and facilitating the work of organizations.“ - *Stanka Angelova, Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Razgrad, Bulgaria, October 2002*

„We express our utmost gratitude to the team of FLGR for the assistance and partnership throughout the years, which we consider to be at the basis of our achievements.“ - *Emilia Marinova, Executive Director, Youth Cultural-Information Center, Gabrovo, Bulgaria, August 2002. The center is a second-place winner of the Council of Europe's „Young active citizens“ Award*

„I would like to take this opportunity to thank the FLGR having done a wonderful job in organizing the recent LGI-funded study tour on regional policy. Several of the participants have commented to me that the tour was very useful and well organized. This experience demonstrates, once again, what an effective partner the FLGR is and how professionally your staff undertake their responsibilities“ - *Henry P. Minis Jr., Director, Local Government Initiative Program of the USAID, Sofia, Bulgaria, August 2002*

FLGR'S 2002 PUBLICATIONS

- „The Local Self-Government Reform“ Monthly Newsletter
- Innovative Practices Bulletin (bi-monthly)
- „For Local Government“ Weekly Electronic Bulletin
- Bi-Annual English Newsletter 2/2001 Digest
- Bi-Annual English Newsletter 1/2002 Digest
- 2001 Annual Report
- 2001 Innovative Practices Annual Collection



- Innovative Practices 2002 English Collection
- The European Social Charter (revisited)
- Handbook on Drafting and Implementing Municipal Development Plans for Maintenance and Reconstruction of Municipal Roads
- The Secrets of Public Administration
- Manual on Municipal Customer-Service Skills
- Project Cycle Management Manual
- International Cooperation of Municipalities - Methodology and Practices Handbook
- Commentary on the Spatial Planning Act, second edition