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**FLGR MAILBOX - FEEDBACK FROM
THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW LOCAL
MANDATE**

The establishment of effective local self-government in Bulgaria is an irreversible process, with a clear vision for development. This is due to the following reasons:

- changing legislation, in line with the principles of the European Charter on Local Self-Government;
- professional and management experience, accumulated in the municipalities;
- successful steps towards constructive dialogue between local and central government;
- consolidation of the Bulgarian municipalities, united in their own national association;
- a network of partnership organizations and programs, encouraging democratic and effective local self-government;
- intense civil activity towards control and participation in decision-making at the local level;
- municipalities' involvement in international partnerships and the process of European integration.

Legislative priorities are being focused on making a distinction between the powers of and interaction between local and central government in the shared sectors of activity, clear definition of the rights and responsibilities of local authorities in their own sphere, financial and property independence of municipalities through expanding their tax authority and independence in the formation and management of municipal budgets.

The trend towards establishing a new governance style based on teamwork, efficient use of resources, improvement of service quality and pub-



Ginka Kapitanova,
Executive Director,
FLGR

lic-private partnership is growing. Many practices, which were innovations at the beginning of the last municipal mandate, are now considered a standard of good governance. Good examples of that are: municipal customer-service centers, business centers and incubators, municipal marketing for local economic development, the partnership between local authorities, civil organizations and businesses for community development.

Unfortunately, there is still lack of understanding that systematic constructive dialogue between local and central government is to the benefit of both sides. It is mostly local authorities that are active. It is them who seek and offer mechanisms for identifying the interests of municipalities and their citizens and for coordinating the policy for the country's development and the decisions taken at the central government level.

What is extremely important for local self-government in Bulgaria is the availability of a partnership network of indigenous organizations working in support of municipalities. These are the national and regional associations of municipalities, professional associations of municipal experts and the Foundation for Local Government Reform. They offer huge opportunities for information exchange, professional development and advice, formulate the policy for the development of local self-government and stimulate the process of decentralization.

Decentralization is not only a political process that modifies the matrix of power in society, but also a change of the political culture. The achievement of mutual trust and partnership between local government and the citizens requires legislative environment and procedures, favorable for consultation and citizens' participation.

We believe that the mayors and municipal council members from the new '2003 - '2007 local mandate in Bulgaria have a vision for policy making that is consulted with the community and implemented through transparent actions and responsible decisions. We believe that they have a vision of how to ensure continuity of the best practices as a criterion for maturity and management culture. They will have to continue the strengthening of European values in local self-government and the preparation of municipalities for Bulgaria's EU membership. ◆

On December 9, 2003, in Sofia, FLGR held a roundtable under the Local Economic Development and Marketing of Bulgarian Municipalities Project. At this forum, the mayors, municipal council chairs and local economic development (LED) specialists from the 14 municipalities working under the project were informed about the results at this stage. The participants also discussed the steps for the further implementation of the project through the end of Phase IV of the Bulgarian Technical Twinning Program. The attendees participated in training on the establishment of business advisory councils, facilitated by David Humphries, Economic Development and Planning Director, City of West Carrollton, Ohio, USA.

The meeting was also attended by: Debra MacFarland, USAID Bulgaria Mission Director; Gene Gibson, acting Democratic Programs Officer, USAID; Phillip Dunlap, Economic Development Director, City of Auburn, Alabama, USA; Garry O'Connell, City Manager, City of Charlottesville, Virginia, USA; representatives of the Bulgarian Foreign Investment Agency.

The Local Economic Development and Marketing of Bulgarian Municipalities Project is an element of Phase IV of the Bulgarian Technical Twinning Program. The Program is administered by FLGR/ICMA and is supported by USAID. Bulgarian municipalities that have implemented successful local economic development projects with their American partners during previous phases were invited to participate in this project: Blagoevgrad, Gabrovo, Dobrich, Karlovo, Montana, Pazardzhik, Panagyurishte, Pazardzhik, Pleven, Razgrad, Silistra, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Tryavna and Haskovo.

The project has the following goals:

- ❑ To prepare the Bulgarian municipalities to professionally meet the needs of existing businesses and prospective recruits;
- ❑ To establish institutionalized business development units;
- ❑ To develop a better understanding of municipal resources and business opportunities;
- ❑ To encourage pro-active economic development policies;
- ❑ To improve the business climate in the municipalities.

These goals will be achieved by:

❑ Development of a common marketing website: Funds in the amount of \$35,000 have been allocated for the implementation of this project. Information is being collected in each individual municipality and the website is expected to be launched in 2004.

❑ Training of LED specialists hired by the municipalities: Two one-week courses and 3 topical trainings have been organized; written materials have been developed for the individual trainings; FLGR has invested \$13,000 from its program budget, to match the same amount invested by the City of Auburn, AL, USA; 18 representatives of the participating municipalities have been trained.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - IN THE FOCUS OF PUBLIC ATTENTION

□ Analysis of municipal resources: The first self-assessments have been completed; the information on available resources and business opportunities is being updated; municipal profiles have been developed; there is readiness to fill in the reference for each individual municipality on the common website.

□ Identification of opportunities for direct contacts with potential investors: The municipalities were given the opportunity to participate in two Bulgarian-American trade and investment missions; an agreement has been reached with the Bulgarian Foreign Investment Agency to exchange information

about investors interested in Bulgaria; the municipalities will be represented at the Hanover Fair in April, 2004.

□ Implementation of business retention and expansion programs: existing business have been included in municipal analyses; profiles of major companies have been developed; a detailed database of companies in the individual municipalities is under development; ongoing contacts are maintained between municipal administrations and businesses; business would be recruited that complement existing industries instead of competing with them.

□ Development and implementation of 14 individual projects: The projects initiated in June, 2003, are related to: business retention and expansion programs; development of industrial parks; development of business incubators; establishment of professional LED departments within the municipal administrations; marketing of available lots and buildings; marketing of brownfield sites, etc.

□ Development/updating of local economic development plans: Consistent with municipal priorities; directly related to development strategies; for a period not longer than 3 years; linked to funding sources, identified individuals responsible for the implementation of activities; developed by observing the principles of publicity and public consensus.

□ Development of a network of specialists: Project participants exchange information and ideas at quarterly meetings; the project coordinators and the 9 American partner cities provide daily advice via email; successful practices are being replicated in other municipalities; the municipal LED specialists are discussing the establishment of their own professional association.

□ Development of marketing materials: Presentations, municipal profiles, company profiles.

□ Participation in trade shows and fairs: Organized representation of the municipalities at trade fairs and shows; participation in national investor conferences; events organized by the Ministry of the Economy; participation in shows during visits of foreign business delegations; participation in international fairs and shows.



Detelina Nikolova,
Mayor of Dobrich Municipality:

In the upcoming years of the term, I'd like to see a significant improvement of our city's infrastructure. This problem was identified as top priority by the Dobrich residents in a poll. We have made great improvements to street lighting and intend to continue to do so. I hope I'll

be supported by the municipal council, as investment recruitment is impossible without adequate infrastructure. As we are all municipalities committed to local economic development, today's roundtable provides us a wonderful opportunity to exchange experience, to hear new ideas and discuss local economic development tools. We in Dobrich have some ideas. At the end of this week, we'll have meetings with local business people who can both help us and be part of the overall economic development of our city. I support the idea for the formation of business advisory councils to the municipalities, an idea that was a part of my election program. I firmly believe that such an advisory council would be established in Dobrich.



Emil Kabaivanov, Mayor of Karlovo Municipality:

The business advisory council idea was one of the most successful concepts incorporated in my election platform. Today we're discussing the ways and forms of structuring and operating such councils, regardless of whether to

the mayor of the municipality or to the municipal council. This comes to indicate that we're thinking over the same lines. Our plans are ambitious. First, to encourage the expansion of existing businesses. Second, to aggressively promote the investment opportunities in the municipality. And third, to improve the quality of municipal service delivery. In the second year of the term, I intend to initiate a procedure for the certification of the municipality under the European service quality standards, ISO:9000.

The investment market has remained open for several years and in 2004 will be expanded by the new EU funds and programs. It is obvious that the funds allocated for infrastructure projects in our general budget will be scarce. The competition between municipalities will be greater and there's nothing wrong with that. Those municipalities that manage to recruit more would achieve better development, which poses a great challenge to the mayor and his team.



Naiden Zelenogorski, Mayor of Pleven Municipality:

First of all, I'd like to thank ICMA and FLGR for making us a part of this interesting and very useful to the Bulgarian municipalities project. I expect that by the end of my second term as a Mayor of Pleven we would be able to seriously reduce unemployment.

Four years ago, the unemployment rate was 17%, today it's 9%. I hope that by the end of this term it won't exceed 4%. Of course, this would be hard to achieve without the support of foreign investors. With our partner city under the Bulgarian Technical Twinning Program, the City of Charlottesville, USA, we're working on the following topic: foreign investment recruitment and development of a new tourism development

strategy for Pleven. Both projects are extremely important to us. We also have several very specific projects for the establishment of a business information center. Our counterparts from Charlottesville have very successful experiences. They are currently visiting Pleven for the second time and together we'll try to find solutions to the most important issues: economic development, infrastructure, reduction of unemployment. We'll try to recruit US businesses to Bulgaria and Pleven.

Charlottesville is a wonderful city, one of the 10 cities selected as best places for living and awarded the „World Class City“ award. In this respect, they provide a high standard that we would aspire to achieve. For this reason, we'd try to implement their experience in our reality: to attract more tourists to Pleven, to better present what we have in terms of cultural and historic heritage.

Todor Popov, Chair of Pazardzhik Municipal Council:



Today was my first encounter with this project and it was sufficiently interesting to attract my attention. During the last term, I was a municipal councilor and I more or less have an understanding of real politics in Pazardzhik. I believe that what was achieved so

far was very useful and I would insist for continuity and completion of all projects initiated. We'll focus our attention on two important aspects. These include active participation in all programs and projects related to our accession to the European Union. For this purpose, we'll invest in human resources, as having trained professionals working on these projects is critical. The second aspect is the creation of good regional conditions in the municipality, in order to recruit foreign investment.

The idea for a business advisory council is very interesting, as it has produced direct results that our US counterparts presented. It would be reasonable to think about implementing it in our country as well.



Marko Mechev, Mayor of Municipality of Panagyurishte:

The meeting is extremely useful as no other single issue is more important for the overall development of a municipality than local economic development. The basics of life include providing a job to all citizens of the municipality, fair utilization of their labor for adequate remuneration. The approach to this issue is one of the most important ones for any municipal management willing to meet the needs of the people that have elected it. Based on my experience, I believe that a lot of imagination is needed in investment recruitment. However, this is only the first step. A lot more needs to be done after that: meetings, conversations, proving reliability, openness for the opportunities presented, as without it no partnership is possible. We'll continue to organize the Invest in Panagyurishte forum; our successes indicate that we're on the right track. ♦

BULGARIAN MUNICIPALITIES - COMPETENT PARTICIPANTS IN THE ABSORPTION OF EU FUNDS

Conference Conclusions

Marina Dimova

*Program Assistant,
FLGR*

A „Bulgarian Municipalities - Competent Participants in the Absorption of EU Funds“ conference was held on November 27 - 28, 2003, in Sofia. The conference was the final event under the project with the same title, which was implemented during the past one year by FLGR with support from the Open Society Foundation, Sofia.

On one hand, the conference provided all participants up-to-date, comprehensive information on funding opportunities for municipal projects under the EU accession funds PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD. On the other hand, it provoked a discussion on whether the Bulgarian municipalities are ready to absorb EU funds and on the difficulties and challenges they face at present. The conference was attended by more than 110 representatives of ministries, municipal and regional govern-

ments, non-governmental organizations and experts. During the discussions they shared different points of view, depending on their experience and the institution they represent. What actually happened was that representatives of the national government and of local governments discussed together current problems and shared information, thus demonstrating their willingness to work in partnership that to a great extent would define our country's accession to the European Union.

Municipal representatives stated that there is a definite need for long-term specialized training for both municipal leadership and municipal experts involved directly in the development of projects targeting financing under the EU accession funds. They also expressed their belief that actions at the national level are needed to provide training and to implement adequate measures for the improvement of local governments' capacity in local planning and programming. Another critical problem is the impossibility for municipalities to provide the required co-funding when submitting their projects.

The municipalities also presented successful projects, both completed and in implementation phase, funded under the three accession funds - PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD. The experience shared indicates that the municipalities face real challenges and that the successful implementation of a project requires in-depth knowledge of application procedures, project cycles and language skills. Best practices at the conference were presented by Madan Municipality (under PHARE), Topolovgrad Municipality (on sustainable development in rural areas), and Targovishte Municipality (on the construction of a waste water treatment plant under ISPA).

There was a general consensus among participants that a wider information campaign is needed at local and regional level on the overall vision and policy of Bulgaria's accession process. Project development and implementation is an element of this process and a tool for its successful completion. In order to achieve this result, however, a more comprehensive understanding is needed on behalf of all participants in the process, a clear idea of what needs to be done in both the short and the long run, a vision of the overall picture and not just of individual parts.

The smaller municipalities face greater problems, as they don't possess sufficient human resources to be able to increase their capacity as a whole and to be equal partners in developing, gaining and implementing projects.

Conference participants also discussed the role of non-governmental organizations, such





as the Foundation for Local Government Reform, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Institute of Public Administration and European Integration, as well as the need for coordination and targeted efforts in improving the dialogue between national government and local authorities and creating favorable opportunities for access to information, institutional strengthening of the municipalities and improvement of their administrative capacity.

At the final conference session participants put forward and reached a consensus on the following proposals, ideas and recommendations:

1. There is a need at local level for more information campaigns and discussion forums on Bulgaria's accession to the EU and on local governments' specific role in this process.

2. Each municipality needs to do its best in building the capacity of its employees and to establish within its administration a unit on European integration and project development.

3. Elected officials and municipal employees need targeted training on specific topics of EU accession financial instruments and on the nature of each accession program, consistent with the relevant government or expert level.

4. There is a need for improved access to information on funding opportunities and transparency of applications during the submission, evaluation and approval of projects. Timely and precise feedback is needed on behalf of national institutions with regard to the observation of the administrative timelines.

5. The municipalities need access to all regional strategic planning documents, which would provide them a framework and guidance in local planning and programming.

6. More partnership initiatives and actions are needed on behalf of the Foundation for Local Government Reform and the National Association of Municipalities, in order to improve the dialogue between the national government and local au-

thorities and to establish more favorable conditions for access to information, institutional strengthening of the municipalities and improvement of their administrative capacity.

7. The Foundation for Local Government Reform should continue to expand its best practices database, especially with regard to the implementation of projects funded under the EU accession funds. The database should be used to encourage the exchange of ideas between local governments.

8. FLGR should continue to provide expert assistance and trainings on European integration and project development, based on its existing training modules and consistent with the changing needs of the municipalities.

9. Municipalities need to be more pro-active in encouraging the participation of all local stakeholders and interested parties in the local planning and programming process.

10. The model existing in central government administration should be used to encourage the implementation of administrative twinning programs between Bulgarian municipalities and international partners.

11. Information and training initiatives are needed to educate the municipal councils on the accession process and the challenges faced by the municipalities in this process.

12. The Foundation for Local Government Reform should continue to use its printed and electronic publications to provide up-to-date and timely information on funding opportunities available under the EU accession funds. ♦

IMPROVING MUNICIPAL SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Nikoleta Efremova

**Training Coordinator,
FLGR**

On a proposal by the Foundation for Local Government Reform, an *Improvement of Municipal Social Service Delivery* study tour was organized from November 15 to 29, 2003. The twelve participants included representatives of the Social Assistance Agency, municipal employees from the municipalities of Dolni Chiflik, Provadia and Vulchidrum and representatives of non-governmental organizations from Sliven and Dryanovo. The training, supported by USAID and organized by World Learning, Bulgaria, was held in Tallahassee, Florida, USA, and Budapest, Hungary.

The purpose of the trip was to acquaint the participants with successful models of interaction between national and local authorities and non-governmental organizations aimed at delivering quality social services to citizens. In both countries visited, the focus was on the activities of local NGOs working on social programs funded both by the national government and the local authorities.

Here are some of the most interesting organizations that the Bulgarian group visited during the study tour in Tallahassee, Florida:

- Child and Family Department, Florida, Homeless Office;
- Elderly Citizens Department, Florida;
- Community Human Service Partnership (CHSP);
- Elder Care Services (ECS);
- Habitat for Humanity.

In Hungary the Bulgarian group visited the Malta Charity Service in Budapest, the Local Roma Self-Government Inanch and the Civil Round Table in the city of Eger.

As a result from the study tour in the United States and Hungary, the participants brought back home many best practices and materials that could be used to enhance or complement the current Bulgarian legislation with regard to social activities. Specific ideas were developed for implementation in different parts of the country. The group would focus its efforts on providing coordination between the national and local government bodies and the non-governmental organizations, in order to improve the delivery of social services. ◆



WHAT WILL THE NEW MAYORS FACE WITH REGARD TO BULGARIA'S EU ACCESSION IN 2007? WHAT SHOULD BE THEIR PRIORITIES, WHAT SHOULD THEY EXPECT?



■ **Lachezar Rossenov**
Chair of the Board,
FLGR

European integration was one of the most discussed topics in the last election campaign for mayors and municipal councilors in Bulgaria.

There is hardly any minister, Member of Parliament, mayor or councilor candidate who has failed to mention in their election speeches and addresses that the local government representatives elected for this local term ('2003 - '2007) would prepare the municipalities and would govern at the time of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007.

We are only three years away from this long-awaited event which inspires so much hope. Much has been done to accelerate the negotiations and successfully close the chapters. Unfortunately, very little has been done towards Bulgaria's real preparation, and specifically, towards the preparation of the Bulgarian municipalities. Given the fact that, as estimated by the EU, 70 percent of the texts in some way concern the local authorities, it becomes clear that a lot of work needs to be done over the remaining short period of time. The experience of EU member countries indicates that local authorities have the responsibility not only to make the infrastructure, environment and municipal activities consistent with EU requirements; they also need to prepare the citizens for the consequences of EU membership, as well as for the delivery of a positive vote in the national accession referendums.

The analysis of the work completed until now provides two basic conclusions. The government does not include local authorities in the negotiations and in the activities associated with the country's readiness for accession. On the other hand, the local authorities have not yet included the country's preparation for EU accession in their agendas. That doesn't come to say that nothing has been done but that it's often done formally or is focused only on accession funds.

What are the basic problems?

- Lack of necessary materials and information

The documents are extensive; the terms are new and specific. In Bulgaria, some of the problems treated have not been

realized as a necessity so far. Many documents, as well as the comments on their enforcement and best practices, are in English and French. The local authorities, municipal councilors and municipal administrations, especially those in smaller municipalities, are unaware of the EU institutions, the decision-making process, the ways of interaction between member countries and the reasons behind the existence of the many European rules and regulations.

- The tasks have not been rationalized and defined

Local authorities' attention with regard to EU is focused only on the accession funds and the various funding programs. To a great extent, this is due to the attitude established by Bulgarian statesmen and politicians, that accession is a horn of plenty that would pour its riches upon us very soon. The country's preparation for EU membership requires each of the government levels to be acquainted with its tasks, to have them clearly defined, to identify the resources for their implementation, to prioritize them and link them to timeframes.

- Lack of relevant institutions

Unlike many other public areas, including trade unions and the academia, the Bulgarian local authorities don't have their own institutions established specifically for the purpose of getting ready for accession. The need for such institutions arises from the global changes that would have to be effected in the municipalities, the scale and the complexity of the tasks faced by both mayors and municipal councils. At one of its last meetings, the Board of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) took the decision to establish a Council on European integration. The purpose of the Council is: to coordinate the participation of local authorities and national Eurointegration bodies in the work groups on accession chapters; to develop programs, goals and issues associated with local governments' preparation for accession; to provide methodological assistance to the municipalities and their organizations. The Council would have a Secretariat of full-time employees knowledgeable of Eurointegration issues, fluent in English and French, and would also work with experts from other organizations involved in the accession negotiations. One of the first objectives of the Council would be to review the closed accession chapters and realize the local government responsibilities arising from them.

- Lack of financial, human and administrative resources

Pressured by budget restrictions, centrally-imposed downsizing of staff and a growing number of obligations im-

posed by newly adopted legislation, the Bulgarian local authorities do not have, and cannot allocate, the resources needed for the accession preparations. Some municipalities identified and hired employees to develop projects; however, this is once again related only to the accession funds and funding programs. Of course, we're not talking about establishing special institutions that would deal with Eurointegration while the rest of the administration would continue to function as before. The issue is to transfer the European requirements with regard to the delivery of administrative services, to involve all employees. Some municipalities have established one-stop shop customer service centers, which is a proof of the flexibility and the speed by which the Bulgarian local governments are able to meet the European challenges.

However, this is the lesser problem. The funding of the suffering municipal infrastructure remains the biggest single critical issue. We can't really speak of meeting European standards if our streets, lighting, sewer lines and landfills remain in their current condition. The total withdrawal of the national government has continued for years; the negotiations between NAMRB and the Ministry of Finance have been going on for years, with the Ministry demonstrating total relentlessness and reducing, instead of increasing, municipal infrastructure funds. The access to accession funds is hindered. The lack of legislation on municipal borrowing, combined with the restrictions imposed by the International Monetary Fund, make it impossible for the municipalities to seek alternative funding sources.

„The local infrastructure, such as streets, water and sewer lines, school buildings, etc., is still in unsatisfactory condition, as the municipalities have no sufficient funds for investment, due to the fact that fiscal decentralization has just been initiated“ (2003 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress in the Accession Process).

In such an environment, the identification of the tasks faced by the municipalities in the accession process, their prioritization, the identification of the resources necessary to meet EU requirements, might be the decisive arguments in favor of having the national government and Parliament allocate more funds.

- Lack of interaction with the national level

It is true that commitments from such an interaction were assumed in the contract signed on December 11, 2001 by NAMRB and the national government; however, these commitments remained on paper only. The involvement of Bulgarian local authorities in accession negotiations is limited to the participation of several representatives in individual Eurointegration bodies and in the work group on Chapter 21 of the negotiations. The municipalities were isolated from the negotiations and so far have no clarity on their obligations arising from the closed chapters. At national level, there is no understanding of the great potential existing at local level. The huge amounts paid to advertising agencies to implement the national government's communication strategy have a very

„Bulgaria's administrative capacity for the enforcement of the *acquis* needs special attention and the government has made important decisions to strengthen the national bodies at regional and central level. Further actions should be undertaken towards improving the training of existing and newly hired personnel. **These actions should be combined with local level initiatives, especially in the municipalities, where the staff and the financial resources are restricted and the knowledge of European environmental regulations' requirements is poor.**

Significant investments are needed to provide the mid-term enforcement of the *acquis* on environment. Bulgaria should focus its efforts on the planning, identification and provision of financial resources. Steps need to be taken towards the restructuring of administrative institutions, i.e. the establishment of a new unit to replace the National Environmental Protection Fund, not hindering public co-financing. **Also, the management of financial support funds, including ISPA, needs to be improved.**“ (2003 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress in the Accession Process).

dubious effect on the citizens. By using their channels of influence, the municipalities and their organizations could achieve much more for less money.

- The preparation for the accession is not a priority

A quick look at the municipal plans, the topics discussed by municipal councils and the decisions made would reveal that the Eurointegration is not a concern for local authorities; the preparation for the accession either lacks or is not a priority for the municipalities. This can be easily explained by the fact that over the last several years the Bulgarian municipalities had to struggle for their survival and for the preservation of activities, schools, kindergartens and cultural institutions.

The same is observed in the functioning of local authorities' organizations, including the National Association of Municipalities. The topics of Eurointegration and the preparation of the municipalities for the accession are insufficiently covered both in their managing bodies' agendas and in conferences, trainings, printed and electronic publications.

As there are too many tasks assigned at national level and we shouldn't expect someone to prompt us, we ourselves need to identify this task as our topmost priority. The preparation for the accession is complex by type, it concerns all areas of municipal operations. Therefore, we need to make our goals and indicators consistent with European requirements and require the national government to provide the resources and the conditions needed for their implementation.

And what should the newly elected mayors and municipal councilors do until we manage to organize our efforts in a national aspect?

The partnerships with municipalities from EU member countries, the information available on Internet and the foreign experience would all help the preparation for the accession and Eurointegration to become a priority for every Bulgarian municipality. ◆

MUNICIPALITIES SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF ECOTOURISM

Marina Dimova
FLGR

The development of National Strategy on Ecotourism began in 2002, as a joint initiative of the Ministry of Environment and Waters and the Ministry of the Economy, with the financial support of the US Agency for International Development. Under the expert coordination of the Biological Diversity Preservation and Economic Growth II Project, the efforts of experts and representatives of interested parties resulted in presenting the draft of a 10-year National Strategy on Ecotourism in February, 2003.

The next logical step that led to the development of a practical mechanism for the implementation of the national strategy, was the development of a National Action Plan on Ecotourism. The approach utilized a decentralized, bottom-up process and the development of twelve Regional Action Plans on Ecotourism. At a later stage, these were to be integrated into a National Action Plan.

The Foundation for Local Government Reform was involved in the process at regional and local level. Its main task was to involve the local governments, to secure their understanding and participation in the development of the regional action plans. In partnership with the partners from the Biological Diversity Preservation and Economic Growth II Project, the facilitators in the individual ecoregions and the local partnering organizations, FLGR participated in the individual stages for the identification and assessment of local ecotourism resources, identification of priorities, development of regional action plans and public presentation of the action plans.

FLGR's team mainly worked towards involving the municipal managements and specialists in the development of the action plans, considering the key role of local authorities in the identification of local priorities and in strategic planning as a whole. Of course, the involvement of the municipalities from the different ecoregions was different: in some places, the local authorities responded and participated actively, while in other places they weren't as active. This could be partially explained by the fact that the development of the regional action plans coincided with the 2003 local elections, which created both positive and negative prerequisites for the success of this initiative.



The positive effects may be divided in two groups: on one hand, the local authorities identified ecotourism as a potential economic development opportunity (in those areas where real conditions for its development exist); on the other, local governments realized the need of having clear and realistic goals, planning and work in partnership with all interested parties at local level, including business and civil society. This is a critical condition in providing continuity of local policy, despite the fact that local elections may result in municipal management changes.

The FLGR team were involved in the following ecoregions: Northern Black Sea Coast and Dobroudzha, Central Balkan - south, Central Balkan - north, Western Rodopi, Southwest and Strandzha and Southern Black Sea Coast. To a great extent, the successful development of the regional action plans was a result of the expert involvement of more than 65 municipalities. We would like to thank these municipalities for their commitment, understanding and responsible attitude. Involving

regional associations of municipalities was useful, as they contributed to the successful development of the plans and established themselves as a key factor in rendering support to the municipalities in the future with regard to the updates of their municipal development plans (as incorporated in the regional action plans).

As a result from the common efforts of all participants and stakeholders, all 12 regional action plans on ecotourism were presented in Sofia on November 4, 2003.

As I already mentioned above, the action priorities identified for the ecotourism regions will be incorporated in the 5-year National Action Plan. The completion of the National Strategy and the development of the National Action Plan are happening at the same time at national and regional level. At national level, the National Strategy is being improved by experts working on topics, such as ecotourism financing, utilization of geographic information systems, development and marketing of ecotourism products, the role of local authorities in ecotourism development and entrepreneurship development. The final products - the improved National Strategy and the Action Plan - will be discussed in January at the Second Na-

tional Ecotourism Forum and will be submitted for adoption by the National Tourism Board and the national government.

In order to provide for the successful implementation and institutionalization of the goals incorporated in the regional plans on ecotourism, the latter should be integrated in the municipal development plans of those municipalities that have real potential for the development of ecotourism. Thus, real prerequisites for the implementation of a common policy on ecotourism will be created, both at local and regional level, while at the same time accounting for the interests of the local community and securing its support. In the long run, this would contribute not only to strategic planning at local level but would also provide a real basis for the implementation of the measures identified through the implementation of specific projects under EU PHARE's Bulgarian Ecotourism Development Program. The program is expected to be initiated in the beginning of 2004.

FLGR's specific commitment would be to mail the respective regional action plan on ecotourism to all Bulgarian municipalities, in order for the plan to be considered when municipal development plans are updated. ◆

SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE PARTNERSHIP FOR BETTER LIVING ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM OF FLGR/USAID

Kalipetrovo



In February, 2003, the Foundation for Local Government Reform initiated the Partnership for a Better Living Environment Program. The program is being implemented with the financial support of the US Agency for International Development. The purpose of the program was to consolidate the efforts of citizens, non-governmental organizations, local governments and other institutions and businesses towards the improvement of the living environment.

The program's top priority was to encourage a local-level discussion aimed at solving pressing problems of the living environment in small communities. It was expected that the projects would provide solutions as a result from conversations and discussions among a wide circle of citizens, local businesses and local non-governmental organizations. The funding requirements included a large own contribution of the community, community involvement in the

identification of the project idea, its prioritization and implementation.

169 organizations from all over the country submitted proposals; of these, the project fund managed to finance the top **24 ranked** organizations. The projects were mostly implemented during the summer and, despite the heat in most places, the locals completed their commitments in time. The projects focused mostly on recreation places, playgrounds and children's development. Some local communities have identified the improvement of small infrastructure sites and utilities as a priority. The specific results included: reconstruction, restoration and construction of 6 parks; construction of 12 playgrounds and sports fields; construction of 3 daises; repairs and renovations in 1 school and 1 school yard; construction of an indoor market with crafts section. Two less traditional projects were also implemented: the renovation of a church


Teteven



yard and the construction of an inter-city bus stop. Playgrounds and sports fields were built in Kalipetrovo, Kirkovo, Teteven, Plovdivtsi, Elhovets, Lyutibrod, Smolyanovtsi, Rakovski, Petrich, Kresna and Ivailovgrad, mainly in areas inhabited by young families, thus creating excellent sports and gaming conditions for the youth. As a result of the implementation of the Marinopoltsi Park project, the central section of the Marinopoltsi Hill in Pavlikeni, which until recently was overgrown with wild vegetation and impenetrable, became an attractive recreation place for citizens of all ages. The BGN 14,821 granted to the Bratstvo Popular Community Center in Pavlikeni, were used to create developed areas with kiosks, benches, green areas and a playground. The project was implemented jointly by the community center, a wide circle of private companies, schools, civic organizations and the Municipality of Pavlikeni; as a result, own contribution in the amount of BGN 20,500 was gen-



erated. Similar projects were implemented in Chepelare, Bluskovo, Antonovo and Lehchevo. In Koprivshtitsa, the Hadzhi Nencho D. Palaveev Community Center implemented its project, „Transforming the Community Center's Backyard into a Cosy Koprivshtitsa Yard for Recreation and Amusement of Children and Youth“. The total value of this project was BGN 15,810, of which the FLGR/USAID grant amounted to BGN 10,705. As a result, the community center's yard was redeveloped into a summer garden with 120 seats in two amphitheatrically situated levels, with a light roof, a small stage, a dancing stage and a children's corner. In Suvorovo, a stage was built in the yard of the old school and is being used for cultural events. A similar project was implemented in Nikolaevo. In Novo Lyaski, the local community wanted to renovate the yard of the local church, built in 1995 with mostly on funds and efforts. An inter-city bus stop was built in Oryahovets. In other places, the people preferred to help their schools with repairs and renovations. Such projects were implemented in Iskra and Beloslav. Zamfirovo now enjoys its new indoor market with its 6 craft shops.

The funding allocated to the organizations for the implementation of their ideas totaled almost BGN 300,000. On the other hand, the organizations managed to provide own contribution of services, materials or funds totaling more than BGN 250,000, or 80% of the FLGR/USAID funding. More than 500 individuals provided voluntary labor to make sports and recreation facilities and conditions for cultural events available to their communities. FLGR's team strongly believes that this would result in real living environment improvements in these small communities. 

BULGARIAN MUNICIPALITIES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH COLLEAGUES FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

A training trip to Bulgaria was organized for representatives of six Bosnia and Herzegovina municipalities (Srebrenik, Zvornik, Shamak, Odzhak, Derventa and Prijedor) on September 1 - 6, 2003. The trip was arranged under Actions In Support Of Local Government, an international project implemented by the Foundation for Local Government Reform and the Local Government Initiative, Budapest.

The delegation was headed by Silvio Koshich, municipal coordinator at one of the six pilot municipalities that would provide one-stop shop services to their citizens. Each of the municipalities, with populations varying between 20,000 and 150,000, was represented by two individuals.

The purpose of the visit was to present leading Bulgarian municipalities' and administrations' experience in establishing conditions for the delivery of quality services by means of municipal citizen information centers. The agenda included visits to the municipalities of Botevgrad, Montana, Gabrovo and Veliko Turnovo, and to the Gabrovo Regional Administration.

In Botevgrad, the participants got acquainted with the services delivered by the Municipality under Bulgarian legislation, and with the software used. Some of the key aspects of the presentation included information on municipal activities and services, the channels and means for communications with the citizens (internet, electronic media, brochures, feedback surveys, etc.), as well as the delivery of services to marginal groups and minorities.

In Montana, the delegation was informed about the team-building efforts in the implementation of the citizen information center project, the specific steps undertaken, the utilization of modern information and management technologies in service delivery and the ongoing training of municipal employees aimed at improving the quality of municipal services.

In Gabrovo, the focus was on encouraging citizen participation through access to public information and assistance rendered by the Municipality for the development of small and medium-size businesses. The Municipality's idea for an Entrepreneurs' Desk has been further developed by the Gabrovo Regional Administration, which demonstrated local level co-

operation by means of electronic exchange of information and documents between the local and national institutions within the region. FLGR's training module, Friendly Service Delivery, was also presented.

Veliko Turnovo was the last municipality visited by the delegation. Here, the guests learned about the services provided by the citizen information center to other institutions, the Municipality's partnership with businesses and the certification of the Municipality under ISO 9001:2000.

The guests from Bosnia and Herzegovina made the best use of the opportunity to solicit expert opinions on certain issues. They also shared their views on how they would improve the delivery of municipal services to the citizens of their municipalities on the basis of the experience accumulated in Bulgaria.

The Foundation for Local Government Reform would like to sincerely thank the partner municipalities in this project for their great hospitality and warm reception of the Bosnia and Herzegovina guests.

Silvio Koshich, Municipal Coordinator, Municipality of Odzhak:

The one-stop shop service delivery concept was completely foreign in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The opportunities for our colleagues to see how such centers function in Bulgaria is exceptional: space utilization, lighting, equality of municipal employees and clients who sit side by side (a model that significantly differs than the Austro-Hungarian one). The transparency of work as a means of battling corruption is also critical, as the citizens are separated from the employee who makes the decision on their claims or applications. The municipal employees need to be convinced of this new way of service delivery, as their salaries are funded by the taxes paid by the citizens. The numbers that were presented to us in Bulgaria further confirm that the implementation of this service delivery model has resulted in a significant increase of municipal revenues.



Ismet Shiljich,
Municipality of Srebrenik:

From Botevgrad to Veliko Turnovo, the organizers did their best in presenting centers at various stages development. I was impressed the most by the citizen information center in Veliko Turnovo, by the organizations of both space and functions and by the exceptional work with the clients.

As far as my municipality is concerned, one of the problems that we'll face in the implementation of this idea would be related to the financial capabilities of the Municipality. Also, our municipalities employee individuals who have served in the administrations for many years; these people have their own approach to work and it would be very difficult for us to change that. One of the obstacles that I envision in our municipality is that the municipal employees need to have a vision about the project we plan to implement. The employees have not demonstrated sufficient trust in the project we've initiated. Our job is to transfer the positive practices and the experience accumulated in Bulgaria to our employees. We would have to change a relatively rigid mindset.

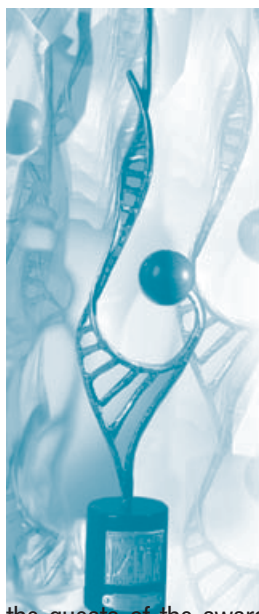
Sanja Maleshevich, secretary,
Municipality of Derventa:

I would like to underline FLGR's exceptional support, cooperation and dedication to the municipalities with regard to the implementation of the project initiated in Bulgaria. The bilateral cooperation between FLGR and the municipalities is critical. The work of the Innovative Practices Team is exceptional. I was thoroughly impressed by the great enthusiasm of the municipal leaderships in the implementation of the projects, as well as in their everyday efforts to improve and enhance municipal services.

The FLGR training module on friendly service delivery that was presented to us is very useful and our employees need to learn about it as well. The service delivery needs to be improved and the citizens need to be treated as customers. ♦



SLIVEN IS THE INNOVATIVE MUNICIPALITY OF THE YEAR 2003



On 10 September, 2003, at an official ceremony in the MATI'D Hall of the National Palace of Culture in Sofia in the presence of over 100 guests the Foundation for Local Government Reform gave its Annual Innovative Municipality Award. Among

the guests of the award ceremony and reception were Mr. Dimitar Kalchev, Minister of State Administration, Ms. Marina Dikova, Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Local Self-Government, Mr. Kiril Kiryakov, representative of the US Agency for International Development, Henry Minis, Local Government Initiative Program Director, many municipal mayors, chairs of municipal councils, representatives of ministries, regional and municipal administrations, international donor organizations, local government associations and non-government organizations.

It is for a second consecutive year that the FLGR gives its national award for innovation in local self-government. FLGR recognized the municipalities, whose administrations and local civic organizations have turned in for dissemination through FLGR the biggest number and various in topics good-quality innovative practices in the period from 1 October 2002 to 31

August 2003.

Six years already FLGR consistently encourages, collects, publishes and widely shares in print and electronic form innovative practices that promote resourcefulness and the exchange of experience in local self-government via its unique Innovative Practices in Bulgaria Project, supported by the Open Society Institute - Budapest and the United States Agency for International Development. The statistics for the current local mandate (1999 - 2003) show that, overall, 476 innovative practices from 105 municipalities have been contributed to the Innovative Practices Database on FLGR's website and published in 27 booklets. The innovative practices describe how their authors - municipalities and other organizations - have solved issues of public importance in a non-traditional, but successful way. This has led to increased effectiveness, easier access to information, saved time and resources. The practices can be easily replicated by other municipalities or organizations in Bulgaria without requiring expensive funding or unique circumstances.

In the past two years the Foundation for Local Government Reform held six topical calls for innovative practices. The topics and the winners respectively have been as follows:

1. European Integration and International Cooperation - Sliven



Municipality;

2. Municipal Marketing - Haskovo Municipality and Silistra Municipality;

3. Sustainable Development - Dobrich Municipality and Etropole Municipality;

4. Electronic Government - Dobrich Municipality as winner (two awards);

5. Social activities - Miziya Municipality and Center for Independent Life, Sofia;

6. Transparent governance - Veliko Turnovo Municipality that was awarded only hours before the annual award ceremony.

In 2002 the Foundation inaugurated the Annual Innovative Municipality Award. Its first winner is Silistra Municipality. **Overall, 207 innovative practices from 49 local governments were submitted for the national competition of 2003.** This time, too, the competition for the annual award was very keen.

The award-giving ceremony began by acknowledgement of the municipalities in FLGR's Honorary List of Municipalities with Considerable Contribution of Innovative Practices:

❑ Svishtov Municipality - 9 practices;

❑ Razgrad Municipality - 8 practices;

❑ Sofia Municipality - 5 practices;

❑ Valchedrum Municipality - 4 practices;

❑ Varna Municipality - 3 practices;

❑ Gorna Oryahovitsa - 3 practices;

❑ Dolna Mitropolia Municipality - 3 practices;

❑ Stara Zagora Municipality - 3 practices.

These eight municipalities received diplomas of honor from FLGR's Executive Director, who thanked them for the readiness, energy and activeness, with which the representatives of their municipal teams and civic organizations shared their innovative achievements.

The contribution of small municipalities to the innovative practices has grown considerably during the past one year. They have become more confident in describing their achievements. An example of that is the third-place winner. The Foundation for Local Government Reform awarded the **Municipality of Mezdra** as a third-place winner in the annual Innovative Municipality competition. With its annual contribution of 17 innovative practices Mezdra is ahead of many big municipalities in the award competition. FLGR's third-place certificate of





honor was given to the Mayor of Mezdra, Mr. Ivan Asparuhov.

The second-place winner is an example of a very strong and forward-looking municipal team, as well as extremely active local civic and business organizations. This is a municipality that has won so far three FLGR awards in the topical calls for innovative practices and has initiated valuable practices, which are already applied by many other local governments. FLGR awarded the **Municipality of Dobrich** as a second-place winner in the competition for the Annual Innovative Municipality Award - 2003 for the impressive annual contribution of 35 practices. Lachezar Rossenov, Mayor of Dobrich, received the second-place certificate of honor.

Finally, the time came at the ceremony to recognize and award the first-place winner. The Innovative Municipality Award '2003 went to a local government, whose innovative practices not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of quality reflect the targeted efforts of the municipal team to work step by step for achieving the community vision in the name of and together with its citizens. These practices encompass all topical categories and complement one another. They demonstrate the beneficial partnership between local authorities and civic organizations, among which the contribution of many youth organizations should be noted. There is certain symbolism in the fact that this year's winner has been the first winner of FLGR's topical award for innovative practices in European Integration and International Cooperation. First-place winner with annual contribution of 45 practices in the 2003 Innovative Municipality competition is the **Municipality of Sliven**. The unique prize-statue and the first-place certificate of honor of FLGR were officially handed at the ceremony to the Mayor of Sliven, Mr. Ivan Slavov. The special gift for the winner - two flight tickets for European destinations - was awarded by Lachezara Rousseva, representative of the sponsor agency Carlson Wagonlit Travel, wishing Sliven representatives - one person from municipal administration and one from a local NGO - that will use the tickets for participation in international events, to bring back with them a suitcase full of innovative ideas. ◆



ACCESSION BY TWINNING

■ **Diana Bebenova**

**Chief Expert of International Programs
and Cooperation,
Municipality of Silistra**

To many Bulgarians, Greece is the symbol of an attractive tourist destination, while to others it provides jobs for a good salary. To local government representatives, it's an example of active and effective submission of investment projects to the EU structural funds. To me, Greece became an example of what we could achieve in the development of our municipalities, should we identify realistic goals, plan the steps towards achieving them in the accession process and clearly realize the trade-offs.

I happened to visit our Balkan neighboring country during the tourist season:

A seminar on the twinning of European cities was held in the city of Kilkis, Greece, on July 6 - 10. The seminar was organized by the Union of Local Authorities in the Prefecture of Kilkis and funded by the European Union. Municipal representatives from Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic were invited to attend. The Municipality of Silistra was also invited. The trip was completely funded by Carlson Wagonlit Travel, under an agreement with FLGR, as a part of the 2002 Innovative Municipality Award won by the Municipality of Silistra. Silistra's Chief Architect, Antonina Ogneva, a representative of Silistra Chapter of the Bulgarian Women's Union, and me, Diana Bebenova, Chief Expert International Programs and Cooperation, had the honor of attending this event.

The seminar participants from the EU member countries (Greece), future member countries (Czech Republic and Cyprus) and applicant countries (Bulgaria and Romania) consolidated around the idea that the twinning might solve some problems associated with EU accession, and that it would definitely result in better understanding between the European nations.

Greece can be an example in this respect. At the time of its accession to the EU in 1986, it faced many problems. An underdeveloped Balkan country with infrastructure was mostly focused on tourism, within 30 years, Greece managed to build modern roads, buildings, tech parks and airports. Our Kilkis counterparts believe that the success was due to the attitude

of both governmental and non-governmental organizations towards effective utilization of the EU accession funds and intensive relations with Central European countries. A good example to both us, the Bulgarians attending the seminars, and our Czech and Romanian counterparts.

Athens's mayor, Dora Bokoyani, made an impressive statement.

Her confident behavior and straightforward messages won the audience. She said that over the last years more and more local governments and citizens, including Greek ones, become aware of twinning's real potential. It contributes to the understanding that the things bring us closer are more than those that separate us.

Mrs. Bokoyani encouraged the mayors of small municipalities to seek opportunities to establish and develop useful relations with cities in Eastern and Southern Europe, thus stimulating local economic development. The attending mayors responded to this challenge by asking for a more just distribution of national budget grants between the municipalities. Such a dialogue sounded painfully familiar to the Bulgarian participants.

The participants discussed in detail the opportunities to use the twinning to increase local government capacity both in EU member countries and in the newly acceded countries, in order to solve problems related to unemployment, environment, racism or cultural heritage.

The organizers encouraged the twinning between the attending local government representatives by stating that approximately 8,000 partnerships have been established between local and regional authorities, some of them in Greece. Many of these partnerships had already proven their effectiveness.

In this respect, France and Germany have a very important role: they have established more than half of the twinings, a fact that has contributed to the peaceful coexistence of these two countries in the post-war period. The Committee of Regions and Local Authorities is also investing considerable efforts in encouraging the twinning in peripheral countries on the continent: Scotland, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece.

The following conclusions were made at the seminar:

□ Following decades of separation between European countries, the 15 member states would accept the Central European applicants. For this reason, the twinning of local



authorities may play an important role in having both old and new member states open to each other in a political, social, economic and cultural aspect.

❑ Even after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which provided an opportunity for the implementation of common policies in various areas, there is still a lot to be done to make the Europeans feel like citizens of Europe.

❑ The experience of the local government in EU member countries indicates that in the twinning process local government representatives share best practices. Thus, the communication between them results in increased government capacity and better adaptation to EU requirements.

❑ The twinning process and the related activities may be funded by personal contributions from the participants in the exchanges, membership dues of the municipalities on the Twinning Committee, sponsorship or partially by the municipal budgets.

❑ Thanks to the European Commission's grant facility that provides financial assistance on behalf of the Union, twinning has been made possible not only for cities in neighboring countries but also for relatively remote municipalities. Of course, the projects in this regard should be very specific, should provide more people access to the activities should have good PR and produce real results. Otherwise, the residents of a municipality may not find a satisfactory answer to the question „so what if we are twinned?“ and might decide that municipal funds are not being spent effectively.

❑ It would be good if our municipalities revise their twinning policies to encourage not only the exchange of folk groups but to seek local capacity improvement with regard to meeting EU requirements, as well as improvement of our skills in developing competitive projects.

Thanks to the fact that the Municipality of Silistra won the 2002 Innovative Municipality Award of the Foundation for Local Government Reform, we managed to expand our knowledge and understanding of the interaction between local governments in the European Union. Having established many useful contacts, we will focus our efforts on opening our municipality to the EU cities. ♦



BULGARIAN MUNICIPALITIES AND THE FOUNDATION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

WE ARE PROUD OF THE RESULTS WE ACHIEVED
TOGETHER
THROUGH OUR PARTNERSHIP
DURING THE 1999 - 2003 LOCAL MANDATE

Dialogue and Consensus

22 discussion fora with 2134 participants and 170 recommendations to the legislators

We encouraged partnership and effective dialogue between the different government levels, a dialogue that reflects the point of view of local governments as well. We reached public consensus on the legislative changes needed in key areas, such as regional development, territorial development, municipal property and economic development.



Professional Development

4000 municipal employees trained in 158 workshops

We identified municipal specialists' pressing needs for training. With the assistance of practitioners as lecturers, many of them employed as municipal experts, we provided opportunities to both elected leaders and specialists in different fields to be trained in interactive modules and programs.



Information Exchange

Over 100 publications and more than 350 innovative practices

We described and widely disseminated up-to-date information and professional experiences. The Bulgarian municipalities provide two-thirds of the materials published in FLGR's monthly newsletter. The City of Dobrich is the municipality that has contributed the greatest number of innovative practices during the entire mandate. The Innovative Municipality Award for the 1999 - 2002 period was awarded to the Municipality of Silistra, and the 2003 winner is Sliven Municipality.



Projects Implementation

150 municipal sites built with grant funding

We addressed pressing needs of the citizens and solved important community problems in the municipalities by the implementation of:

- ☐ 88 public works projects;
- ☐ 17 infrastructure improvement projects;
- ☐ 37 customer service centers;
- ☐ 5 tourism and development centers;
- ☐ 3 regional development strategies;
- ☐ 3 municipal marketing campaigns;
- ☐ projects developed by 18 regional and professional associations of municipalities.

Donor assistance at the amount \$2.84 million was invested on a competitive basis in the implementation of projects of 65 local governments and 161 non-governmental organizations, whose total own contribution amounted to \$539,600.





International Cooperation

Effective international models in 26 municipalities

Together, we developed sustainable international co-operation models for the municipalities. The direct partnership of 13 Bulgarian municipalities with American cities resulted in the implementation of 26 projects to the benefit of the community and local development. The replication of successful projects in a wider circle of Bulgarian municipalities proved international cooperation as a source of innovative practices borrowed from foreign experience and adapted to the Bulgarian environment in the following areas: local economic development and marketing of municipalities, public infrastructure management, solid waste management, urban development, park reconstruction and development.



Sustainable Partnership

Direct and useful interaction

Local government representatives and FLGR employees worked together in an equal, mutually-beneficial professional cooperation. The expert knowledge and experience of a wide circle of municipal specialists formed the basis of all FLGR activities and programs throughout the term. When working on specific municipal projects, municipal internships, site visits and meetings at the FLGR offices, the Foundation's employees used their skills to contribute to the strengthening of local government's capacity.



FLGR MAILBOX

FEEDBACK FROM ELECTED AND RE-ELECTED BULGARIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW LOCAL MANDATE, NOVEMBER 2003

I am happy of the fact that my very first working meeting on vital local self-government issues was with the representatives of the Foundation for Local Government Reform - the most respected independent organization in Bulgaria, supporting local democracy eight years already. During that time the Foundation has taken care of the capacity and effectiveness of local governments and, thus, also of their self-confidence.

*Todor Popov,
Chair (newly elected),
Pazardjik Municipal Council*



Your support and assistance appear to me at this moment as a strong promise for successful work and good perspectives for our cooperation to the benefit of our citizens' prosperity. I am glad that we shall continue to work together for achieving this goal.

*Ivan Karayonchev,
Mayor of Mladost District,
Sofia Municipality*



I greatly appreciate the support you delivered to Silistra in the past four years. Thanks to your assistance, the team of Silistra Municipality not only managed to build important sites for our citizens, but also to make a significant step in the mission of any leader - regaining people's confidence in the municipal institution.

*Ivo Andonov,
Mayor (re-elected),
Silistra Municipality*



I am convinced in the extremely beneficial partnership of Valchi dol with the FLGR, which eight years already proves the necessity of its operation in support of Bulgarian local authorities through complex information, expert, financial and technical assistance in various spheres.

*Vesselin Vassilev,
Mayor (newly elected),
Valchi dol Municipality*

I will work for the continuous development of Rousse as an attractive European city, keeping its crucial position among Bulgarian municipalities. I am confident that with a reliable partner such as the Foundation for Local Government Reform this will happen.

*Eleonora Nikolova,
Mayor (re-elected),
Rousse Municipality*



The assistance you have given us in the implementation of projects has greatly contributed to the choice our citizens made at local elections.

*Krasimir Mirev,
Mayor (re-elected),
Targovishte Municipality*

FLGR'S 2003 EDITIONS

In past one year the Foundation for Local Government Reform published

34 print and 41 electronic editions in support of Bulgarian local authorities



„The Local Self-Government Reform“ Monthly Newsletter

Quarterly Information Pool Insert to the Newsletter



Innovative Practices Bulletin

„For Local Government“ Weekly Electronic Bulletin

Bi-Annual English Newsletter 2/2002 Digest

Bi-Annual English Newsletter 1/2003 Digest

2002 Annual Report



Collection of European Charters (related to local self-government)



Commentary on the Spatial Planning Act (and its 2003 changes)

Handbook on Common Property Management in Apartment Block Buildings

Manual on Funding Programs in Support of Local Authorities

Collection of Training Materials on the Pre-accession Financial Instruments of the EU

50 ideas on How to Serve Citizens Better Booklet

Various brochures and flyers, reporting on the achievements of FLGR's programs and promoting its activities



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