

# From Dictatorship to Democracy

*On August 19, 1991, leaders of the Soviet military sent hundreds of tanks rolling through Moscow's streets, seizing strong points throughout the city and declaring a state of emergency. From the Kremlin, the new Soviet leadership banned protest meetings and closed independent newspapers as it moved to reestablish hard-line control.*

*The events were all too familiar to people who had lived through the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968. But this time, something very different happened. After three days of huge protest rallies and civil disobedience, the people prevailed, pushing the region forward into a decade of historic, political change.*

*For more than 40 years, dictatorships dominated by the Soviet Union ruled most of the people of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Elections were a sham. Parliaments had no real power. Basic democratic freedoms—free speech, the freedom to assemble and organize, the right to form independent parties did not exist. Governments trampled human and civil rights. Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa and other opposition leaders*

*were harassed or imprisoned. Since the fall of the Berlin wall, new political parties have sprung up, wooing voters in elections in 18 countries. Independent television stations and newspapers have allowed dissenting voices to be heard. New nongovernmental organizations have helped citizens press their governments for change. Independent judiciaries have strengthened the rights of private citizens. Local governments have developed new powers and responsibilities. A new generation has been coming to power in many countries in the region. Despite considerable progress, however, moving from dictatorship to democracy has not been easy, especially in nations that have no history or tradition of democratic rule. Setbacks and reversals continue to hinder progress, especially in Eurasia and Europe's Southern Tier.*

*Still, the overall political trend in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia has been toward increased freedom and democratic practices. U.S. government agencies, working with a wide range of organizations in the region and the United States, as well as with international institutions, have supported these changes and the*

## USAID Programs

- *Democratic Elections & Process*
- *Nongovernmental Organizations*
- *Independent Media*
- *Transparent Legal Systems*
- *Anticorruption Initiatives*
- *Local Governance*

*people who made them. During the past decade, USAID has been in the vanguard, forming lasting linkages with courageous people to sow the seeds of a democratic, civil society.*

## CITIZENS IN ACTION

*To survive and succeed, democracy needs civil society—a broad base of active citizens able to influence decisions that affect their lives. Citizens must be able to choose their political leaders at the ballot box, hold their elected governments accountable, and exert pressure on their governments to shape policies that meet the people’s needs and priorities. Democratic societies need vibrant political parties and a free and independent media to engage in public debate of issues and policies. They need strong nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working for social, economic, and political change. As these citizen groups flourish, they provide vital services to their constituents and become advocates for reform. In a region with little history of democratic practices and institutions, USAID worked with individuals, groups and governments to develop the skills, traditions and institutions that put the people in charge. Since 1989, more than 500,000 NGOs have been created across the region*

“If you want to know why democracy works in some places and not others, de Tocqueville was right . . . it's the strength of civil society.”

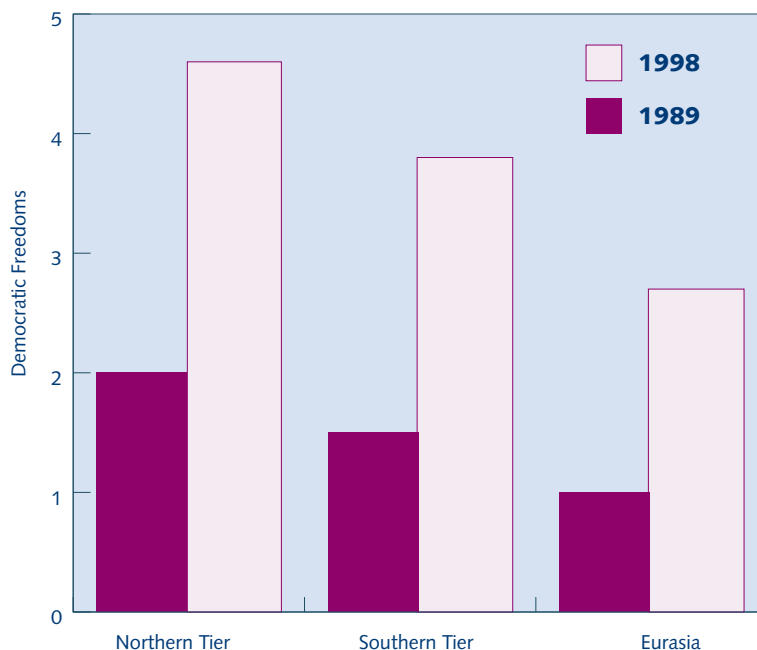
— Russ Edgerton, President,  
American Association for Higher Education

### *Slovakia and Croatia Turn Toward Democracy*

In the fall of 1999, Juraj Mesik, Pavol Demes and Peter Huncik, each the head of an NGO in Slovakia, were honored by USAID and the German Marshall Fund of the United States for putting themselves and their organizations on the line for free elections. The year before, democracy in Slovakia was under siege. Although elections were scheduled, the authoritarian government in power was using strong-arm tactics to bully opponents and consolidate control. With USAID support, Mr. Mesik, Mr. Demes, Mr. Huncik and the leaders of eight other NGOs formed a coalition, Obcianaska Kampan (OK 98), to campaign for free and fair elections.

The campaign coordinated almost 60 separate activities, carried out by hundreds of pro-democracy Slovaks, all designed to encourage people to stand up and vote. In the face of repeated attacks from the state-controlled media and other attempts at intimidation, OK 98 triumphed. On election day, the people voted the autocrats out and put Slovakia on the path to reform.

**Democratic Freedoms Have Increased  
During Ten Years of Reform**



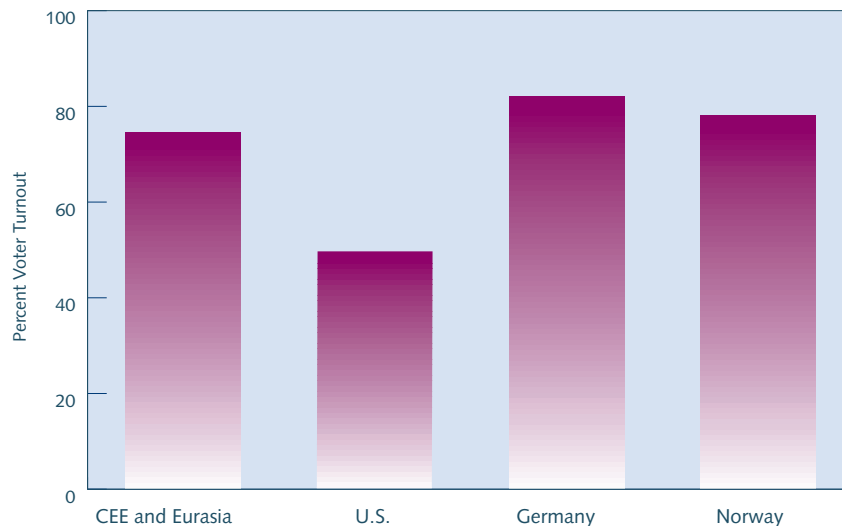
Democratic freedoms include political and civil liberties. Ratings are from 1 to 5, with 5 representing the greatest freedoms.

Freedom House, Freedom in the World (1999)

In early 2000, USAID activities contributed to a similar result in Croatia. The entrenched ruling party, which had a firm grip on power during the 1990s, was ousted by a resurgent coalition of democratic opposition parties. This was the culmination of five years of USAID assistance to reform-minded groups in Croatia. A broad network of organizations and citizens formed a NGO to monitor voting and ensure transparency in the election process. In a parallel effort, 140 NGOs and trade unions organized a massive get-out-the-vote campaign. The energy and enthusiasm of so many citizens made a difference. The thoughts of Croatian volunteers were captured by one election monitor, Teuta Krasniqi, a student from Split: "I want to volunteer because I want to build a just country."

### Political Participation

Voter turnout in recent elections is, on average, 16 percentage points higher in the region than in the United States, but trails other Western countries.

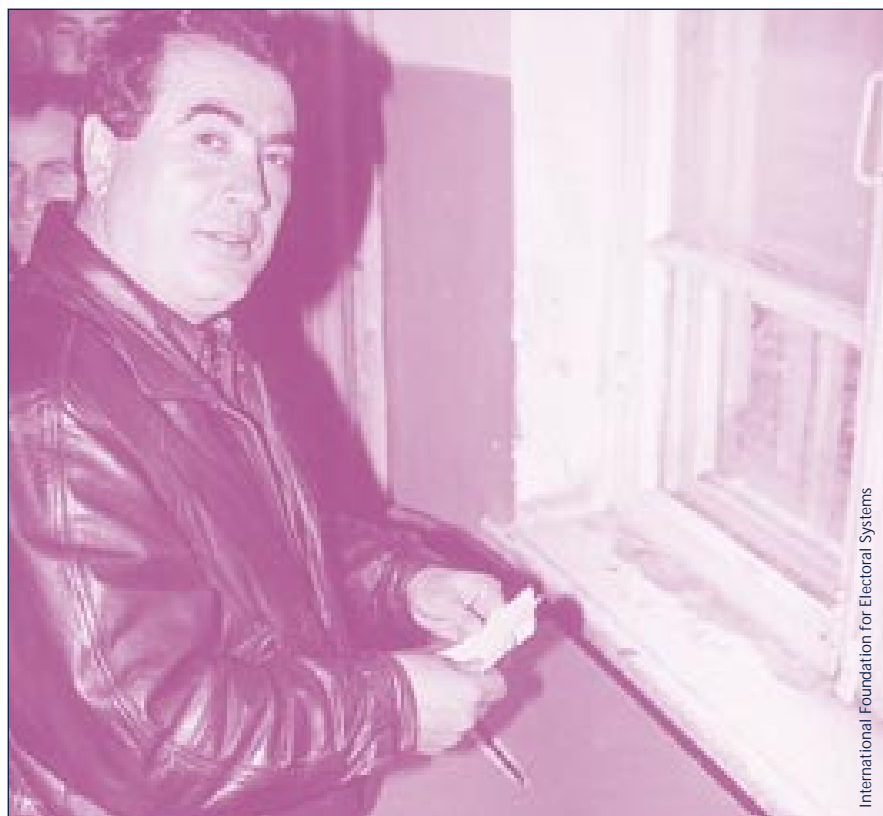


Note: Data are not available for Belarus, Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Turkmenistan.

Sources: Elections Around the World website; The Center for the Study of Public Policy website.

### USAID Grantees Support Democratic Elections

The National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute have trained political party activists in the region in campaign techniques, voter education and election monitoring. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems has strengthened the capacity of election commissions at national and local government levels. Due to these and other efforts, 18 countries held multiparty elections by the end of 1999. More than half the countries in the region conducted elections characterized as generally free and fair by international observer organizations.



International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Voter casts ballot in first-ever local elections in Georgia.

## *An NGO Fights for Azeri Women*

The women of Azerbaijan have been hit much harder than men by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many more women are unemployed, and men continue to hold a large majority of the country's higher-paying jobs. Women have also lost social benefits, and the country is staggering under the burden of tens of thousands of refugees displaced by a bitter conflict with Armenia. Novella Djafarova is trying to help. She chairs the Women's Rights Protection Society of Azerbaijan, an NGO devoted to

meeting women's needs. In 1997, she came to the United States to attend the Development of Women NGO/ PVO Leadership program. The USAID-funded program provided training and gave Azeri activists the chance to meet with American NGOs focusing on women's issues. For Ms. Djafarova, the program gave her a broader vision of what her organization could accomplish. Once home, she organized training programs for other women and pursued grants for new women's rights activities. Most recently, she received funding from the Canadian Embassy to continue her activities in support of women in Azerbaijan.

With help from USAID, the Eurasia Foundation has invested in citizens throughout the former Soviet Union. From 1993 to 1999, it made over 4,700 small grants, totaling \$94.5 million, in support of civil society, private enterprise development and public administration and policy.

## *A Resource for Russia's NGOs*

In 1995, the Agency for Social Information (ASI) was just a small bulletin that Elena Topoleva and her husband, Andrei Topolev, published through the news agency where they worked. Then ASI acquired a grant from the Eurasia Foundation. That crucial support let the Topolevs hire correspondents and

expand the range of their bulletin. It also helped them attract funding from other donors. By the end of the decade, the bulletin had grown into a major source of information and public relations support for Russia's burgeoning NGO community.

In 1999, the bulletin went to over 500 regional media outlets, promoting the work of NGOs across the country. ASI hosted NGO conferences,



These citizens demonstrate the spirit of NGO volunteerism at Fun Fair 2000 in Yerevan, Armenia.

published reference guides about NGO activities for the news media, organized press interviews for NGOs and arranged meetings between NGOs and government officials with radio and TV coverage. Explains Ms. Topoleva, "We are trying to get people to look beyond the state and do something for themselves by showing them what other people are doing."

### East – East Visit Yields Helping Hearts

The campaign "Generous Heart" started on a rainy April day in Ruse, a town of 200,000 people on the Danube River. The rain did not stop the 150 volunteers committed to raising funds for the local hospital. The campaign resulted from a USAID training course which took the Bulgarian organizer, Jordan De Meo, to Poland, where he witnessed a nationwide campaign gathering funds for children with kidney disease. Hundreds

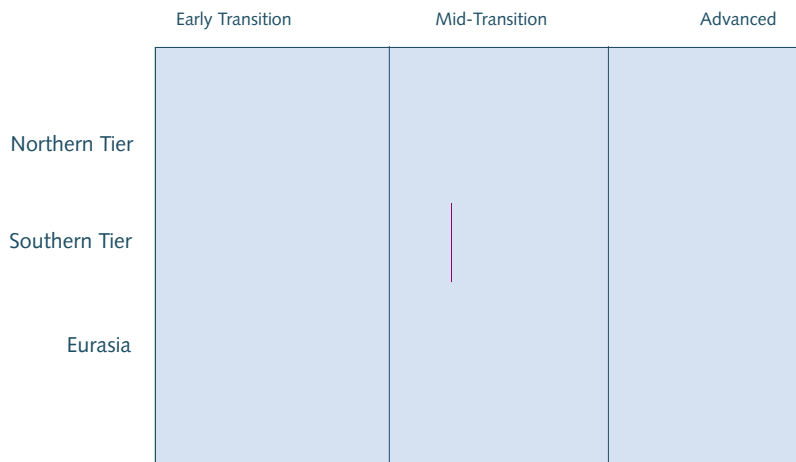
of volunteers crisscrossed the streets of Warsaw, presenting those who gave even a small amount of money with a big red heart. Jordan was so impressed he promised to repeat the campaign in Ruse, his hometown, on one of the biggest Bulgarian holidays, Tsvetnitsa, the day of the flowers.

Despite the poor weather, 5,000 people wore paper hearts that day, and 12,000 lev were collected and donated to the local hospital. Four NGOs helped organize the event, and two Ruse businesses donated stickers, special

shirts, and collection boxes for the volunteers. With the donations, the local hospital leased life-saving medical equipment. The first public fundraising campaign in Bulgaria was covered by regional and national media and touched the hearts of many Bulgarians. Jordan, who is president of the "Forum for Democratic Revival," a Ruse NGO, and a member of a volunteer advisory board to the USAID Democracy Network program, is full of hope and eager to repeat the fundraising event with even greater success.

#### NGO Sustainability in 1999

USAID tracks progress in civil society development throughout the region. Sustainability is a composite measure of seven dimensions of the NGO sector: legal environment, organizational capability, financial viability, advocacy, public image, service provision, and NGO support organizations.



Source: The 1999 NGO Sustainability Index.

"Heroic is the word that comes to my mind when I try to describe the efforts of local NGOs. They are operating out of dilapidated buildings, personal apartments, and with little to no office equipment. Most receive no salary—they are simply volunteers..."

— USAID staffer, from a field visit to World Learning Sub-Grantees in Russia



## INDEPENDENT MEDIA

*Before 1989, governments controlled the newspapers their people read, the radio broadcasts they heard and television programs they watched. In the 1990s, the newly independent media were some of the most powerful voices for and protectors of reform. And it's no surprise that those who wanted to bring down democracy put the media squarely in their crosshairs. USAID has spent a decade supporting people who fought to keep the media independent and effective.*

### *Taking on Terrorism in Bosnia*

In 1999, one of Bosnia-Herzegovina's leading independent daily newspapers in the city of Banja Luka, Nezavisne Novine, published articles detailing local war crimes. On October 22 of that year, a bomb went off in the car of the paper's editor, Zeljko Kopanja, costing him both legs and nearly killing him. To prevent the horrific incident from intimidating investigative journalism, USAID sponsored a conference in Banja Luka on the protection of journalists shortly after the attack. Representatives from all over Bosnia-Herzegovina, along with representatives from international organizations supporting reporters, came to protest the terrorism. A USAID-funded organization provided Kopanja with a laptop computer so he could keep writing from his hospital bed in Vienna. Nezavisne Novine kept publishing.

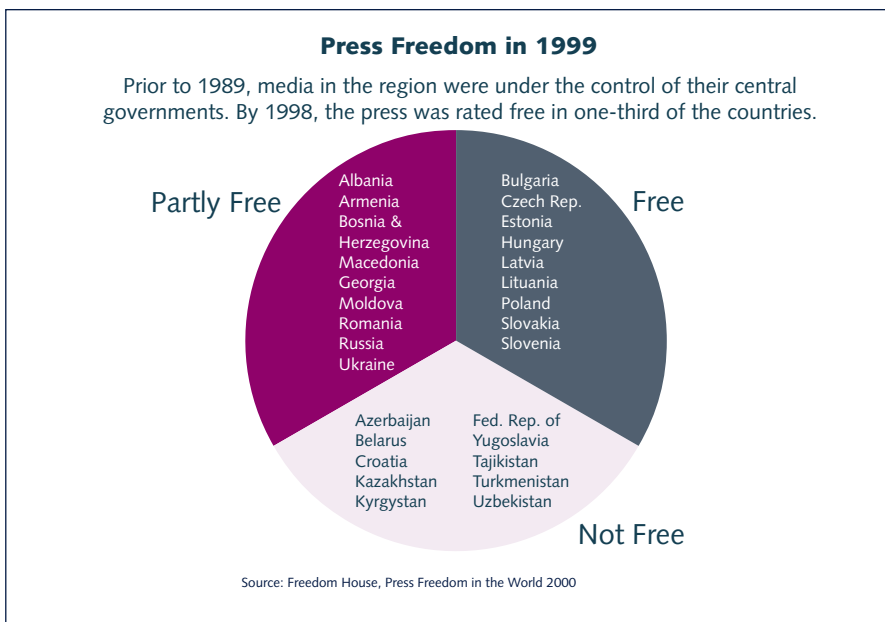
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*More than 10,000 media professionals from the region received USAID training in objective, fact-based reporting.*

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Young journalists develop skills in electronic research at the Information and Press Center in Kiev, Ukraine.



### *A TV Choice in Croatia*

Some 85 percent of Croatian adults get their news from television. Until 1999, the only news was government propaganda from the state-controlled Croatian Television. But the government information monopoly has been broken. As part of a USAID-funded program, media experts in Croatia worked with an association of local independent television stations to form a new network, the centerpiece of which is Vijesti (literally, “news”), an independently produced evening news program. Since its debut in December 1999, Vijesti has received critical acclaim and provided Croatian viewers with alternative viewpoints. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe called Vijesti the most credible source of broadcast news available in Croatia.

### *The Power of the Eco-Press*

In 1994, a group of independent journalists in Moldova had an idea that would have landed them in jail during Soviet times: start an independent magazine about the environment and raise the alarm about threats to the air, land and water. The magazine, *Gazeta Natura*, won small grants from USAID to buy printing equipment and expand the magazine’s reach to Romania and Ukraine. *Natura* quickly proved that it was a new breed of magazine. In 1995, its reporters uncovered an explosive story: Moldova’s government had secretly drafted a contract to sell 7,000 hectares of the Silva forest to a foreign firm. *Natura*’s editors rushed the story into print. The government threatened to shut *Natura* down, but it was too late. Citizen groups bombarded the government with demands for public hearings and a parliamentary

investigation. The public pressure worked. The sale was canceled, and the old growth forest was preserved.



A regional television station airs a panel discussion on the role of environmental reporting, as part of National Journalists’ Day in Ukraine.

Institute for Sustainable Communities

# FIGHTING CORRUPTION AND ESTABLISHING THE RULE OF LAW

*A strong democracy requires a strong rule of law, both to protect individual rights and personal freedoms and to combat corruption. Rights and freedoms are the essence of representative government, while corruption corrodes public support for democracy and breeds cynicism and apathy. USAID programs have reached out to support parliaments as they strengthen their capacity to conduct open hearings and enact new laws responsive to the needs of their society. USAID has been a significant resource in strengthening judicial understanding of market economy and democratic principles, modernizing court administration, and joining with people in every country who are willing to fight corruption.*

## Simple Justice in Georgia

Kibar Kalbashi is the manager of a company that distributes household products in Georgia. In October 1999, one of his trucks was involved in a traffic accident with the driver of a new Volkswagen Golf. The Golf was damaged beyond repair, but all witnesses agreed it was the driver's fault. Nevertheless, the driver was a well-connected Soviet-era lawyer, confident that bribes and connections could extract a huge financial settlement from a company.

Kalbashi took his case to a young lawyer who had received training under a USAID grant with the American Bar Association's Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI). The lawyer

succeeded in getting the case transferred to the capital, Tbilisi. There, a judge who had recently passed the judicial exams administered by ABA/CEELI, presided over the hearing. The newly qualified judge heard the arguments and threw the VW driver's case out of court.

## Lessons from Mississippi

Kairat Ospanbekov, an attorney fighting to establish due process and individual rights in Kazakhstan, calls it a "defining moment." Thanks to USAID-sponsored training through the Academy for Educational Development, he was part of a delegation of lawyers from former Soviet countries who were dinner guests at the Mississippi home of Unita Blackwell, a lawyer who was active in the civil

rights movement of the 1960s. "She won 26 cases and set 26 legal precedents," said Mr. Ospanbekov. "She showed me how an ordinary person can change the system."

Back in his home town of Almaty, Mr. Ospanbekov changed the system by mounting a campaign against government officials who were using public posts for private gain. He says he learned an important lesson from

## USAID Attacks Corruption on Many Fronts

- Reducing government regulations and licensing
- Training lawyers and judges
- Training business, government and legal associations on ethics
- Developing investigative journalism
- Teaching NGOs to monitor government and fight corruption
- Opening government to citizen involvement
- Supporting anticorruption public education and advocacy
- Helping establish clear and fair tax codes



Carl Mabbs-Zeno, USAID

Hungarian Parliament building now houses a democratic legislature.





Participants take written test as part of the judicial qualification examination process in Tbilisi, Georgia.

American civil rights veterans: “Kings and czars will not give you rights. History is made by ordinary members of society who fight for them.”

### *A Whistleblower in Trouble*

In 1995, the captain of a Ukrainian cargo ship in the Azov Fleet blew the whistle on several fleet officials who allegedly were embezzling funds to their private bank accounts outside of Ukraine. The officials turned these allegations around, accused the captain of wrongdoing and took him to court. The court sentenced him to five years in prison, confiscated his assets and fined him.

From prison, the Captain contacted the USAID-sponsored Citizens Advocacy Office, an independent source of legal support for people with grievances about corrupt officials. It provides free legal advice, representation and

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*USAID has trained over 7,500 judges, academics and legal professionals from 22 countries.*

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research help. Lawyers from the advocacy office reviewed the captain's case and successfully appealed it in October 1999; the allegations against the captain were dismissed entirely, and all previous sentences against him were canceled. The Citizens Advocacy Office then began working to build a case against the fleet officials.

### *Anti-Corruption Efforts Produce Results*

"Zero tolerance for corruption" has become an important theme in Bulgaria. In December 1999, ten out of 16

Bulgarian cabinet ministers were removed from office, thanks to the efforts of Coalition 2000, an anti-corruption alliance of government organizations and NGOs. The coalition raised public awareness through a sophisticated campaign that included regional and municipal Anti-Corruption Councils, a national media campaign, telephone hot lines, public meetings and a wide range of books, newsletters and brochures.

Coalition 2000's small grants to community-based NGOs have made a clear impact. Local initiatives have resulted in investigations and prosecution of corrupt practices in public service provision. Independent media has helped raise public awareness of the issues by making corruption a frequent headline topic. The Coalition's Quarterly Monitoring Surveys are now demonstrating that public tolerance of corruption has decreased significantly.

## COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

*Democracies grow from the ground up. To survive and develop they need vigorous local governments where citizens and organizations can participate in decisions that affect their lives. USAID programs have fostered working relationships between local governments, citizen groups, and the business community to expand economic opportunity, mobilize local resources, deliver municipal services, and address social welfare issues. These relationships have produced innovative approaches to solving problems at the local level. At the national level, USAID has helped lay the foundation for intergovernmental relationships, including revenue sharing and local tax authority.*

### *A Voice in the City Budget*

Until 1995, the people of the Romanian city of Piatra Neamt had never had any say in their city's budget. Then the town's mayor, Gheorghe Ocneanu, decided to get citizens involved. With the help of USAID and the International City and County Management Association, he organized the first community meetings on the budget and opened up the budget process to citizen review.

The mayor and other city officials prepared extensive documents and detailed presentations that explained the city finances to residents. When the meeting opened in February 1995, the residents who attended didn't need much prodding to become actively involved. They suggested 11 new city-funded projects and clamored for more public meetings. That first meeting and the ones that followed have changed the political culture in the city, opening a

new era of citizen involvement while strengthening local government. Today, most major cities in Romania have organized public hearings to debate municipal budgets.



Regional Conference brings local government practitioners together to discuss municipal development issues and share lessons learned

### *Empowering Local Governments*

Municipal governments need the ability to generate revenue if they are to carry out their responsibilities. USAID has helped establish the legal framework for revenue sharing, local tax authority, and the development of municipal credit systems. In some instances, USAID forms strategic alliances with other donors in preparing the conditions for municipal sector loans. This was the case in Romania, where USAID helped formulate policy changes in municipal finance as conditions to EBRD's loan for municipal infrastructure improvements. The new laws established transparency in Romania's fiscal transfer system and gave greater taxing authority to local governments.

## Community Development in Armenia

In Armenia, local governments lacked the resources to meet their communities' needs. USAID responded by initiating the Community Development Project. Through a small grants program managed by Save the Children, rural towns and villages come together to discuss problems, set priorities and determine a course of action.

The 185 inhabitants of Ltsen—a small village in southern Armenia—have learned the importance of community action. Although located in an agriculturally rich area, the people were unable to farm because they lacked irrigation. With a community development grant in hand, the village bought 2,500 meters of pipeline in 1996 and provided the labor to dig ditches in order to tap into the irrigation system of a neighboring village. The new water system allowed farmers to grow new crops, increasing average household income by \$100 per year. Two years later, the people of Ltsen joined together again to rehabilitate a local health clinic and establish a revolving fund to ensure adequate stocks of common drugs at the health facility.

## Technology Makes a Difference

Ninety percent of Hungary's towns and villages are small, rural communities where unemployment was high in the early 1990s, and local



Young students take their turn at the computers in the Internet room at Debrecen Refugee Camp in Hungary.

governments struggled to provide such basic services as education and public health. With help from USAID, however, Hungary's villages got a new tool—called telecottages—to help economic development, education and local NGOs.

A telecottage is a community office run by NGOs and a cadre of volunteers, equipped with Internet-connected computers, a copier, a fax machine and often a small library. Telecottages offer tremendous help to the unemployed. As one staff member said, "In villages, people didn't even have a private phone to get information on jobs. If they saw an ad in the local paper, they had no way to make a call, write a resume or fax it in. Telecottages provide all these possibilities." Students use telecottages to learn computer and Internet skills. Local NGOs use them as a meeting place

or to publish newsletters. This technology makes it possible for rural people to telecommute.

USAID funded 37 telecottages from 1995 to 1998 through the Democracy Network program. They were so successful at reinvigorating rural communities that Hungary's government stepped in to continue support. By 2000, the number of telecottages had grown to more than 100.

Telecottages also have helped refugees. At the Debrecen and Bekescsaba refugee camps in Hungary, USAID sponsored a public-private partnership to set up telecottages. The technology provides refugees access to newspapers in their own language, allows them to search for lost relatives, and improves their language and job skills. The U.N. High Commission on Refugees was so impressed with the results, it is supporting the effort and looking for ways to replicate telecottages elsewhere.