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Bi-weekly newsletter

Junior Achievement Launches New Partnership between Vocational School and the Ministry of Economy

On November 27, Junior Achievement Bulgaria (JAB) opened a new center for entrepreneurship at the Hristo Botev High School for Construction, Architecture and Geodesy in Sofia. Economy and Energy Minister Rumen Ovcharov and USAID/Bulgaria Mission Director Michael Fritz addressed the students gathered for the opening. The new center, called Student Company, is a pilot project of the Ministry of Economy and Energy, implemented by JAB and the high school. The center will work to develop entrepreneurial skills and culture among students, as well as promote contacts between students and businesses related to the school's fields of study. Two 17-year-old students have already started their own companies: Future Art, a company that plans to focus on organizing photography exhibitions to raise money for the renovation of historic buildings in Sofia; and JA Experts, which will produce overalls and multifunctional tool belts. USAID launched its Young Entrepreneurial Spirit (YES) program with JAB in 2003. YES introduces business principles to students so that Bulgaria can maximize the social and economic benefits of its next generation of innovators and business leaders. With USAID assistance, JAB continues to increase awareness of their activities throughout the local business community and the Bulgarian Government, attracting more donors and supporters. ❖

USAID Labor Market Project Opens New Career Center

On November 27 Sofia's University of Architecture, Construction and Geodesy joined the growing network of university career centers in Bulgaria, an initiative of the USAID Labor Market Project. Mission Director Mike Fritz joined the university administration in inaugurating the new center, which will establish relationships between students and businesses in fields such as engineering, construction, urban planning, transportation, and architecture.



Career Development Center Counselor Iva Tsalovska and Emil Ivanov, chairperson of the Bulgarian chapter of AIESEC, a global organization focused on higher education and leadership issues

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The center will be staffed with a career counselor, and will be located in a highly accessible location near the university main entrance. ❖

Documentary Series Highlights Diverse Human Stories within Bulgaria

A USAID-supported documentary series featuring stories of people of different ethnic backgrounds and their achievements premiered on Bulgarian National Television (BNT, Channel 1) on November 27. The series, "Faces from Bulgaria," is produced by the Broadcast Training Center (BTC) ProMedia and presents human stories of people of different ethnic backgrounds living in varied social conditions. The stories, which will air every Monday morning for 25 weeks, are based on activities carried out by the USAID Ethnic Integration and Conflict Resolution Program implemented by Partners Bulgaria Foundation. Journalist Plamen Assenov and a BTC ProMedia film crew traveled to some of the most remote villages and poorest neighborhoods in Bulgaria in search of stories of human achievement and successful models of ethnic integration and tolerance.



Faces from Bulgaria

The series includes profiles of a youth cycling club in Ispernih that has fostered friendships between Bulgarian, Roma and ethnic Turk teenagers; a Turkish woman who initiated extra-curriculum activities for children in Kurdzhali's poorest district; and a Bulgarian woman living in a Roma neighborhood in Assenovgrad who established a computer club for local children. ❖



USAID Supports First Ever National Conference of Magistrates in Bulgaria



The opening was honored by (from left to right): Roumen Nenkov, Deputy SCC Chair and moderator of the opening, President Georgi Purvanov, US Ambassador to Bulgaria John Beyrle, Liuben Kornezov, Deputy Chair of the National Assembly, Minister of Justice Georgi Petkanov, SCC Chair Ivan Grigorov, and SAC Chair Konstantin Penchev

Over 1,500 Bulgarian magistrates – judges, prosecutors and investigators – assembled on 17-18 November, 2006, at the National Palace of Culture in Sofia for the first ever National Conference of Magistrates in Bulgaria. Opened by Bulgarian President Georgi Purvanov and U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle, the Conference included leaders of each branch of the judiciary and representatives from the National Assembly and the Prime Minister’s Office. The theme of the Conference was “Strengthening the Judiciary,” and the conference included twenty working sessions focused on pressing topics in the judiciary, from the everyday work of magistrates to new national legislation and its application. The forum sought to further strengthen the rule of law by providing a medium for all magistrates to publicly address both achievements of the judiciary and outstanding problems that still need to be resolved.

The National Conference was developed by USAID in collaboration with the Supreme Judicial Council, and the US Department of Justice. The Conference provided a means for the voice of judicial professionals to be heard by all stakeholders and partners, and demonstrated that the magistrates are ready to face the challenges and new legal aspects of Bulgaria’s European Union membership starting January 1, 2007.

Conference co-organizers included the Supreme Court of Cassation, Supreme Administrative Court, Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, National Investigation Service, and the National Institute of Justice. It was modeled on the two National Conferences for Judges held in 2004 and 2005 which were organized and funded by the USAID Judicial Development Project in 2004, and its successor the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative in 2005. ❖

Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents Creates Public Dialogue with Business

One of USAID/Bulgaria’s key new local partners, the Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents, conducted a public Round Table with Bulgarian business. Attended by representatives of businesses, law firms, local media, and the Ministry of Justice, including Deputy Minister of Justice Sabrie Sapundjieva, the Round Table focussed on building an effective supervision system for the new profession of private judgment enforcement agents.

Private judgment enforcement is a recent, but significant, reform promoted by USAID through its Commercial Law Reform Program. Business representative organizations played a leading role in passing the reform last year. The Chamber and the Ministry of Justice recognize that businesses, which constitute primary end-users of the new system, should continue to play a major role in the reform’s implementation. As Gene Gibson, Chief of the Mission’s Democracy and Local Governance Office, mentioned in his opening comments, “Businesses should feel comfortable and safe, knowing that the profession is monitored by the Ministry of Justice, as well as by the Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents. It is also in the best interest of the profession to be carefully supervised and ensure stability of the new system.”



Deputy Minister Sabrie Sapundjieva opens the Round Table

After healthy discussion of experiences in the opening months of the new private enforcement agent profession, participants in the discussion agreed to institutionalize the Round Table and turn it into a semi-annual event for regular dialogue between business and the Chamber. They expect to establish close interaction, exchanging ideas and supporting joint positions and initiatives for the growth of the new profession. ❖