



GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONS

Improving Municipal Finances Subject of Local Government Conference

Municipal public finance, strategic planning, recommendations for reforms in local finance, proposed local finance legislation, own source revenue generation, and changes to the budget system of Kosovo in 2006 were discussed in a conference for local government officials.

One-hundred twenty people attended the "Fiscal Policies and Local Finances" conference jointly organized by USAID's Local Government Initiative and the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA). In addition to 50 municipal officials including CEOs and directors of finance departments, representatives from the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG), Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MFE), United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), World Bank, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and several USAID project experts participated.

USAID's Local Government Initiative also established mechanisms for ongoing public finance discussions and the dissemination of good practices in municipal governance during 2006. Exploratory discussions were held on the establishment of a public finance professionals association.

The Ministry of Local Government Administration in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Finance, will analyze questions on municipal budget problems and execution submitted by municipalities during the conference. A working group to draft proposed language for a law on local finances was also established, which will additionally be discussed in the working group on local finance. This new group consists of representatives of MEF, MLGA, three municipal CEOs (from Pristina, Shtime/Stimlje and Rahovec/Orahovac) and directors of three municipal finance departments (Pristina, Istog/k and Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje), USAID and other representatives.



Judges and attorneys discuss about ethical conduct

Need for Judicial Ethics Emphasized by Visiting ABA President

Ethical conduct of legal practitioners and cooperation between judges and attorneys were discussed at two roundtables hosted by Michael Greco, president of the American Bar Association (ABA) on December 14.

Greco shared his experience on ethics and enforcement in the United States, including lawyers' awareness of their ethical obligations, principles of behavior of lawyers, and procedures for filing and handling complaints and professional violations. "There is nothing more harmful in a society than seeing people violate laws and ethics every day," Greco said.

Dr. Ken Yamashita USAID/Kosovo Mission Director, emphasized that "the independence of judiciary is non-negotiable."

The aim of the roundtables was to promote the development of capable lawyers and judges who contribute to the development of new laws and public institutions, and foster ethical and effective access to justice. Participants included attorneys, prosecutors, local and international judges. The events were organized by the USAID-supported Professional Legal Development Project implemented by the American Bar Association/Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI).

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Pensioners discuss pension problems

Senior citizens received answers to many questions about pensions during a roundtable discussion on December 14.

Organized by the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) in cooperation with KODI, a local research organization, the roundtable brought together senior citizens with pension service providers such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Kosovo Pension Savings Trust (KPST), Banking and Payments Authority of Kosovo (PBK), and the Independent Pensioners Trade Union, to address their problems with pensions.

Although the main concern for pensioners is low pensions, other issues concerning pensioners, such as delays in receiving pensions and a requirement that pensions can only be directly collected by the individual at the bank were discussed. The discussion helped participants by offering explanations and information they needed.

The roundtable is part of a public debate cycle organized by the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) and the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI), partners of the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) in implementing USAID's Kosovo Civil Society Project.

New Organization Aims to Involve Citizens in Government Decision-Making

A new non-governmental organization to promote civil society engagement in political processes announced its establishment on December 1. The organization, Kosova Democratic Institute (KDI), consists of people with experience in civil society development gained under USAID's Political Processes Strengthening program implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI)

KDI explained at the launch event that it will play an active role in Kosovo's political processes by introducing new practices of citizen participation in decision-making. It will aim to enhance the transparency, accountability and responsiveness of governing institutions through "empowerment" of non-governmental organizations and citizens.

*USAID/Kosovo staff wishes you
all the best in 2006,
peace and prosperity, health and
happiness.*

U.S. Agency for International Development
Arbëria (Dragodan), Ismail Qemali st., nr. 1
Phone: ++ 381 38 243 673
Fax: ++ 381 38 249 493

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