



CONNECTING CITIZENS TO THEIR MUNICIPAL COUNCILORS



Avonet: Addressing issues
-Press conference, (Sep. '04)

The Municipal Committee on Policy and Finances in Ferizaj/Urosevac, Kosovo, opened for the public as a result of advocacy efforts by AvoNet, a group of NGOs representing 350 youth and people with disabilities in this municipality. Assisted by USAID through the National Democratic Institute (NDI), AvoNet monitors government actions and aims to increase communications between citizens and their legislators. In 2004, AvoNet produced three monitoring reports with specific recommendations to the Municipal Assembly on ways to be more responsive to citizens' concerns. This led to the Municipal Government's decision to open its meetings to the public. In addition, the Municipal Assembly began publishing voting records of assembly members to show citizens where each councilor stands on the issues, and followed citizens' request by rejecting a earlier assembly proposal to paint over an existing town mural. Recently, the assembly also appointed a youth officer who will work with youth groups on their concerns. All of these actions demonstrate the Ferizaj/Urosevac assembly's increased sensitivity to constituents' views. In 2005, AvoNet will continue to monitor the local government and advocate for the formation of committees for youth and people with disabilities.

HELPING THE GOVERNMENT SOLVE YOUR TRADE PROBLEM

Preparing for and negotiating trade agreements was the topic of a one-day session organized by USAID's Kosovo Cluster and Business Support (KCBS) on January 27 with support from the Economic Policy and Institution Reform project. The workshop trained participants on how to find information needed for making a decision related to international trade, and addressed the differences between the government's role and its economic interest, and Kosovo's economic interest and international trade rules. Representative from Kosovo's business community attended along with government institutions such as Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The workshop reviewed the role of industry advisors in guiding negotiators to craft agreements that assure a fair and beneficial trade environment for local suppliers. In addition, the workshop focused on the rules and restrictions under which trade negotiators must work, and how advisors can provide supporting evidence to justify trade restrictions or oversight. At the end of the session, workshop facilitator Irving Williamson, USAID/BearingPoint advisor to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, used a case study to familiarize participants with an actual negotiation issue, so that KCBS partners could learn how to effectively represent their members' interests, for example, in the upcoming negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Macedonia and with other regional countries in future.

WORKSHOP EXAMINES TRANSITION OF KOSOVO'S JUSTICE SYSTEM

On February 14, USAID-supported Advocacy Training & Resource Center (ATRC) organized a one-day workshop on "How does the Government Work: The Justice System." Workshop sessions offered specific information and guidance on issues for participants. Break-out sessions addressed issues such as the structure of the justice system, problems the system faces, planned reforms, and activities of NGOs in this field. Each of the sessions was followed by discussion which led to the group's conclusion that the justice system faces transitional problems so that it will be a long process in transforming it into an independent and optimal justice system.

A follow-up workshop will be organized in March focusing on the Kosovo Police Service, a crucial player in the enforcement of rule of law in Kosovo.

ADDRESSING THE "MILLENNIUM DISEASE"

Three new HIV/AIDS Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) centers recently opened in Kosovo. The centers are important for Kosovo, where half of the population is young with a high risk of infection, and an undeveloped public health sector. VCT services are a vital "entry point" for prevention, care and support, say the centers' founders. The centers are located in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Prizren, and Peja/Pec, three major municipalities, thus increasing the number of VCTs in Kosovo to six. The opening of these centers is part of the Kosovo HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan for 2004-2008, a result of years of effort by Kosovar and international professionals. At the early stages of the VCTs' establishment, USAID provided extensive technical support to VCT service development in Kosovo resulting in trained counselors, trainers, and comprehensive site operating procedures.

WHERE THE RUBBER HITS THE ROAD

Demonstrating US interest in Kosovo business development and privatization, US Office in Pristina Chief of Mission, Phil Goldberg, toured Ballkan rubber and chemical factory during a trip to Suharekë/Suva Reka municipality on February 16. Ballkan, one of Kosovo's socially owned enterprises (SOEs), is on the list of SOEs to be privatized, with final bids due in April. Ballkan supplies the mining industry in Europe with conveyer belts and produces fan belts for Slovenia's "Sava," a well known brand owned by Goodyear. USAID's Economic Policy and Institution Reform project advisors are working on privatization within the Kosovo Trust Agency (KTA).



Chief of Mission Goldberg inspects one of the product samples during a tour of the Ballkan factory with company managers

RECOMMENDATION MADE TO SUPPORT INCREASED LOCAL PRODUCTION

Under the "Working Together towards Economic Development" banner, the Community Business Development Center (CBDC), an NGO based in Gjakovë/Djakovica presented a lengthy analysis of the business situation in Kosovo. The report highlights several issues; the decrease in the number of businesses and reasons why, the low level of business ownership among women and different age groups, and the small number of enterprises engaged in producing goods, and the amount of money being invested in production enterprises compared to the income generated by those types of businesses. The report indicates that raw material imported at a higher cost due to the lack of trade agreements with countries in the region, customs taxes and other payments add to the variable costs, thus reducing business profits and cost competitiveness which may result in closure of production companies. A crucial recommendation refers to the reduction or removal of the customs tax for the raw materials that are processed locally to facilitate development of local products. The recommendations from the report will be presented to Kosovo's government institutions no later than the end of February. CBDC was established through the USAID-funded Kosovo Assistance Program, an umbrella grant in 2001-2004. CBDC has provided its consulting services to many small and medium companies. This report was supported by a grant from the the Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP), through Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI), a partner of USAID and East-West Management Institute.

Upcoming Events

February 24-25, USAID/Kosovo will host a delegation of Congressional Staffers during their visit in the region. The staffers' trip is being arranged by the Balkans Trust for Democracy.

February 24, Ken Yamashita, USAID/Kosovo Director will dedicate a sewerage system in Xërxe/Zrze, Rahovec/Orahovac Municipality

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