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**MACEDONIA**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Mayors Join Forces for Efficiency

### Three mayors push through a joint administration plan



Photo: USAID/Teresa Albor

Georgi Manushev, Nikola Andov and Slave Hristov, the mayors of three small towns in southeastern Macedonia joined forces to prove that three heads are better than one.

***“This is our own pilot project,” says Nikola Andov, the mayor of Novo Selo. “We are excited, but we are aware of the challenges ahead. Breaking the ice is not easy, but we shall succeed.”***

For Georgi Manushev, the mayor of Bosilovo, July 1, 2005 was both an opportunity and one of the most challenging days of his life. On that day, local municipalities in Macedonia took on greater responsibility for governing as a result of a national decentralization effort.

“I was excited, but not sure if my team would be able to cope,” said Manushev. “We’re a small municipality with a population of 14,500 and limited administrative resources.”

Recognizing that there’s strength in numbers, Georgi approached two other mayors from nearby villages in southeastern Macedonia, Slave Hristov from Vasilevo and Nikola Andov from Novo Selo, and proposed sharing responsibilities and resources through limited joint administration — something that had never been tried in Macedonia.

Nonetheless, the three mayors, who had learned about the concept at a USAID workshop, convinced the Civil Service Agency to endorse their plan to form joint administration units to oversee property tax, city planning, and inspections. By working together, the mayors hope to increase tax revenues through more efficient collection while also saving taxpayer money: joint administration is expected to reduce payroll expenses.

Municipal staff from the three villages have already started working together. They have conducted a joint real estate survey to gather data for upgrading the property tax database and the joint team has already started issuing building permits.

To help municipalities take on their new post-decentralization roles, USAID helped produce two practical working manuals that were reviewed at the workshop. “At first I thought it was going to be an ordinary, run-of-the-mill training,” says Manushev, “but it turned out to be the most valuable training session I have ever attended.”

Through training and assistance, USAID is helping local governments overcome the growing pains of decentralization, improving efficiency, and keep costs down. And that’s good news for everyone — mayors, residents, and taxpayers.