

PRESS RELEASE

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FIRST GRAY BOOK HIGHLIGHTING UNNECESSARY LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES RELEASED TODAY

NIS, LESKOVAC, GADZIN HAN, DOLJEVAC & MEROSINA GOVERNMENTS PLEDGE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH BUSINESS SECTOR TO BOOST LOCAL ECONOMIES

NIS – The first *Local Gray Book* recommending the modification or elimination of unnecessary administrative procedures affecting businesses in Nis, Leskovac, Gadzin Han, Doljevac and Merosina was released today by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED).

The *Local Gray Book* follows four editions of the *Gray Book* which addressed unwarranted procedures required by the central government.

In addition, the mayors of Nis, Leskovac, Gadžin Han, Doljevac and Merošina today signed a Local Government Code of Cooperation with the business sector pledging to enhance cooperation between municipalities and the private sector, improve the business environment, and attract new investments to their communities to create jobs and improve their citizens' quality of life.

“Today’s release of Serbia’s first Local Gray Book and signing of a Local Government Code of Cooperation between local municipalities and businesses will benefit the communities and the people of Nis, Leskovac, Gadzin Han, Doljevac and Merosina” said USAID/Serbia Mission Director Susan K. Fritz. “By reducing the red tape, these municipalities will enable businesses in their communities to grow.”

Representatives from several South Serbian companies recommended that 21 bureaucratic procedures be eliminated or modified. Most were laws and procedures required by state-level ministries and institutions. However, 12 were obstacles that local authorities could address and, by remedying, stimulate business expansion and attract new investments to the region.

South Serbian businesses recommended that local authorities set standard times required for the implementation of certain procedures, and establish penalties for non-compliance with the newly established limits. Business executives called for more transparency regarding the spending of funds collected from environmental taxes. They requested that local governments help businesses with the issuance of building permits, improve customer relations, and adapt their operating hours to better suit the needs of private businesses.

The Local Government Code of Cooperation that was signed today highlights the efforts of local businesses and municipalities to work together to create an environment where decisions are made jointly and transparently so their communities can succeed.

“By signing this Code of Cooperation with the business sector, these mayors and municipal leaders are demonstrating their commitment to a new way of communicating and collaborating with businesses,” said Jelena Bojovic, NALED’s Program Director for Regulatory Reform. “By applying the principles of this code, a new relationship with the business is being established characterized by predictability, inclusion, transparency, simplicity, and efficiency.”

The *Local Gray Book* presentation and signing of the Local Government Code of Cooperation was organized at the University of Nis by the USAID Sustainable Local Development Project in cooperation with NALED and the regional chambers of commerce of Nis and Leskovac.

The inter-municipal partnership between Nis, Leskovac, Gadžin Han, Doljevac and Merošina was formed in July 2011 with the support of the USAID Sustainable Local Development Project. These partner municipalities are working together to develop a regional solid waste management system, a Regional Agro-Industrial Center "Green Zone," and to complete the “Pusta reka” regional water supply system

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Since 2001 USAID has invested more than \$689.4 million to stimulate economic growth, strengthen the justice system, and promote good governance in Serbia.

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