

# Civil Society

*A strong civil society engaged in a diverse range of public activities is an essential element for a healthy democracy, enabling Bulgarians to articulate their concerns to all levels of government. Civil society also increases the accountability of both central and local governments to their constituencies. An optimal stage of civil society development is achieved when a broad spectrum of politically active non-governmental organizations (NGOs) represents largely diversified groups of citizens who receive fair and objective news from an independent media. In Bulgaria, USAID fosters this state of civil society development through building the professional capacity of the broadcast media, as well as through institutionalizing NGOs' capabilities to obtain political access, to provide services, and to fund raise. USAID programs are also creating sustainable mechanisms for effective participation of minority groups in local communities, increasing voter participation in general elections, and keeping political parties focused on social and economic reform.*

## NGO Sector Support

### Approach:

- Improving the legal/regulatory environment for civil society organizations
- Building more advocacy coalitions to increase citizens' participation in government
- Strengthening NGO capacity and sustainability

The *Democracy Network Program (DemNet)* was initiated in 1995 to provide funding, training and technical assistance to grassroots NGOs in Bulgaria. During the first phase of the program (1995-1998), NGOs from throughout the country received small grants to implement various activities, as well as training and technical assistance to build their organizational capacity. Projects ranged from

democracy building and economic development to social safety net and the environment. The second phase of the DemNet Program (1998 - to present) focuses on strengthening the ability of indigenous institutions to develop civil society. USAID competitively identified thirteen promising NGOs to become "support organizations" to provide technical and financial assistance to the civil society sector after USAID assistance has ended. USAID has extensively assisted civil society organizations working on enabling legislation by helping them review legislation, and educate citizens and lawmakers on related issues. In addition, USAID works with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law on providing policy assistance for improving the NGO legislation in Bulgaria.

### USAID FACTS:

- More than \$1.2 million provided during Phase I for 124 projects of 111 NGOs across Bulgaria
- Progressive NGO Law passed in 2001
- More than 1,600 representatives from more than 160 NGOs trained
- Over 600 NGO staff across the country have received specialized training in the areas of NGO-media relations, advocacy, financial management, volunteer recruitment, project design and development and resource mobilization
- \$1 million of direct grants to support organizations

## Independent Broadcast Media Support

### Approach:

- Improving the legal framework for electronic media



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➤ Raising the professional level of media staff

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➤ Increasing the effectiveness of media associations

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Initiated in 1997, the *Professional Media Program (ProMedia)* has achieved considerable success in developing independent broadcasting in Bulgaria. The program has assisted professional journalist and independent media associations in advocating for the passage of two major pieces of media legislation: the Radio and Television Act and the Telecommunications Act. As a result of ProMedia's successful association building activities, the Association of Bulgarian Broadcasters has emerged as the most advanced independent media association in the region, recently elected to chair the newly formed regional network of broadcaster associations from nine countries in South Eastern Europe. Support has also been provided to the Bulgarian Media Coalition to enable the adoption of the Access to Public Information Act, the first legislative package providing for citizens' access to public information. In 1999, the first Broadcast Training Center was established with USAID assistance. As the only facility providing practical professional TV and radio training in the country, the center plays a key role in creating the new media environment through training a pool of highly qualified radio and television professionals.

#### USAID FACTS:

- \$450,000 to equip and conduct training at the only Broadcast Training Center in Bulgaria
- Over 500 radio specialists trained nationwide in radio management and radio programming
- Over 300 professionals from 20 national and local TV stations trained in news reporting, news production and video journalism

### Support for Ethnic Integration

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#### Approach:

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- Building sustainable institutions to promote inter-ethnic and inter-sectoral cooperation
  - Increasing effectiveness of minority groups to improve their socio-economic situation
  - Improving the capacity of institutions and organizations working with minority groups
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Initiated in September 2000 as a pilot project, the *Ethnic Integration and Conflict Resolution Program* has gained momentum in creating a model of positive inter-ethnic cooperation and community development. Under the program, USAID has helped the establishment of two cooperative planning groups to work on initiatives for educational advancement and economic development of the Roma minority.

#### USAID FACTS:

- More than 120 local stakeholders – municipality, labor bureau, social services, local hospital, schools, businesses, police, and Roma minority – are active participants in this project
- 30 innovative proposals for improved Roma education and employment opportunities developed
- Each of the cooperative planning groups consists of 25-30 participants, 8 to 10 of which are Roma leaders

A Conciliation Commission was created as an impartial citizen forum to engage in urgent problem solving and local conflict resolution. The program's uniqueness is contained in the "inclusiveness" of its activities: instead of focusing on and for the Roma population alone, the program has united the whole local community – NGOs, businesses, local government, and regular citizens – in a cooperative effort to address priority issues of the Roma community. A Roma Leadership Institute is also now in place to train Roma leaders on how to effectively manage their organizations, develop specific projects and seek resolution of common problems. In view of the successes recorded so far, USAID is currently replicating the program in the cities of Vidin and Kyustendil.

### Strengthening the Political Processes

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#### Approach:

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- Improve political parties' connection to, and communication with, their constituents
  - Increase parties' capacity to represent the population and be responsive to its demands
  - Develop "in-house" capacity to provide professional support to parliamentary committees and political groups
  - Train political parties in campaign management and development of campaign messages
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### Elections Support

To foster political dialogue, as well as strengthen public understanding of the future course of the reform program, USAID helped the major Bulgarian political parties prepare for the June 2001 parliamentary elections. Assistance was focused on improving the parties' understanding of voter concerns, addressing these concerns in issue-oriented campaigns, developing effective strategies to communicate their platforms, and reaching out to voters at the grassroots level. In addition, a Voter Education and a Get-Out-the-Vote Campaign was conducted to increase voter participation in the parliamentary elections, improve civic and political involvement of the population at large, educate voters on electoral procedures and voting techniques, and encourage voter turnout in the parliamentary elections.

### Parliamentary Support

USAID is in the fore front of international assistance to the newly elected 39th National Assembly with a Legislative Strengthening Program aimed at improving Parliament's internal rules and procedures, as well as providing orientation and education to the newly elected Members of Parliament on their roles and responsibilities. In 1999, the Agency initiated a Parliamentary Internship Program providing first quality legislative research services to the National Assembly through assigning projects to university students serving as volunteer legislative assistants.

#### USAID FACTS:

- 67% voter turnout at the June 2001 Parliamentary elections
- 66 student-interns working at Parliament
- 25 legislative research projects completed