



## USAID Separation of Powers Project

August 2013



Photo: USAID/Serbia

Acting Vršac Court President Cveta Kajević-Grubišić discusses the reduction of case backlogs.

### Project funded by:

U.S. Agency for International Development; USAID/Serbia

### Project implemented by:

East-West Management Institute

### Key counterparts:

Ministry of Justice and State Administration; High Court Council; Judicial Academy; and National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

### Where we work:

Belgrade; Cacak; Nis; Novi Pazar; Sremska Mitrovica; Subotica; Uzice; Vranje; and Vršac.

### Project duration:

August 2008 to August 2013

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### BACKGROUND

The five-year USAID Separation of Powers Project (SPP) was launched in 2008 to help Serbia move closer to European Union accession by strengthening the judicial and legislative branches of government.

### ACTIVITIES

- Increase judicial and legislative independence; and
- Improve court administration.

### RESULTS

- The SPP partner courts – the Basic Courts from Subotica, Vršac, Niš and Vranje, and the High Courts from Belgrade and Novi Pazar – reduced their combined backlog by nearly 50 percent;
- Published a Best Practice Guide for Backlog Reduction and Prevention for Courts in Serbia, which provides practical guidance for improving case and court management. The guide chronicles lessons learned and successes achieved by the Basic Courts in Uzice, Subotica, Vršac, Niš, Sremska Mitrovica, Vranje and Čačak, and the High Courts from Subotica, Belgrade and Novi Pazar;
- Several of the backlog reduction and prevention techniques recommended by SPP were incorporated into the new civil and criminal procedure codes;
- Developed a draft National Backlog Reduction Strategy for all Serbian courts, which was presented to the High Court Council in July 2013. Following the timeline of the National Judicial Reform Strategy, the strategy calls for an 80 percent reduction of backlog cases in five years, under the supervision of a National Working Group;
- Established the first Court Manager position, resulting in Serbia's first seven Court Managers being appointed;
- Successfully worked with the Court Managers to reduce the enforcement backlog. At the Belgrade First Basic Court, Infostan, the largest utility company, entered into payment agreements with 80,000 debtors with multiple enforcement actions against them, resulting in the removal of 600,000 cases from the system;
- Assisted Assembly Members and staff establish budget and long-term planning systems, including the adoption of a Five-Year Strategic Plan, so Parliament can be more responsive to Serbia's citizens;
- Helped the High Court Council adopt a three-year Strategic Plan, which will pave the way for judiciary reform; and
- Supported the establishment of the High Court Council Budget Office so Serbia's judges can assume more control over their own affairs, track the income and expenses of courts more closely, boost their efficiency, and make court operations more transparent and responsive to the needs of court users.