



BULGARIA OPEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE PROJECT



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OGI Expands Activities and Begins Working with Municipalities

To Our Readers

The Open Government Initiative Project (OGI) has successfully created a place in the Bulgarian public framework as a key element in the process to achieve more open and transparent government and bring the issues related to this process to public debate. During the past months, OGI has developed technical and training activities with the counterparts, raised the level of awareness of the project in the public sector community, and introduced a municipal, as well as national focus to our activities. Various committed and active committees at both the national and municipal level are working with our staff.

Numerous new activities are underway. We are pleased to announce an agreement between OGI and the Ministry of Energy to improve internal controls and procurement practices in that important institution. Our work with the National Audit Office has resulted in pilot projects being established in the areas of auditing political parties and public procurement. We are working to support the Anti-Corruption Commission of the Council of Ministers, an important initiative that will have broad impact. At the municipal level we are starting to work with municipalities in Blagoevgrad, Velingrad, Rousse, and Dryanovo on procurement issues and the municipalities of Veliko Turnovo, Sliven, Tundzha, and Stara Zagora on making internal controls more uniform.

We are happy to announce the appointment of Marc Cassidy as the new Chief of Party for the OGI project. Marc is an outstanding professional with extensive experience here in Bulgaria working with the National Assembly. I will continue to serve the project through periodic visits. It has been a privilege to serve as an Acting COP of the OGI project during the past six months.

*Robert W. Page Jr.
Acting COP and DPK Principal*

OGI Initiates Project Activities at the Municipal Level

OGI is expanding project activities to the municipal level. An initial workshop was held on the Municipal Systems of Internal Controls on May 20 in Stara Zagora in cooperation with the Foundation for Local Government Reform. The event was attended by chief accountants, financial controllers, and managers from 12 municipalities. Pilot municipalities were selected to create uniform internal controls and an operational manual which eventually will be distributed to municipalities nationwide.



Workshop in Stara Zagora

Public Procurement News: Pilot Activity Commences at Ministry of Energy

OGI and the Bulgarian Ministry of Energy have entered into an agreement to cooperate in establishing models of best procurement practices. The agreement was signed as a result of a meeting between USAID Director, Debra McFarland, and Minister of Energy, Milko Kovachev. A joint working group has been formed and an action plan drafted. Work has commenced with the collection of available bidding documents, assessment of their quality, selection of best examples, and design of unified documents and procedures for use by the numerous companies that form the Ministry of Energy.

Supreme Audit Institutions Fight against Corruption

OGI, the EU British twinning project, and the National Audit Office co-hosted a conference on “The Role of Supreme Audit Institutions in Combating Fraud and Corruption” on February 25-26, at the Sheraton Hotel in Sofia. The conference received extensive press coverage and was attended by high government officials such as Ognjan Gerdjikov, Chairman of the Parliament, and Anton Stankov, Minister of Justice. A very forceful speech was delivered by Mr. Roderick Moore, US Deputy Chief of Mission. The conference was attended by more than 70 participants. The conference served to raise the profile of the important role the audit institutions play in the fight against corruption.



OGI Acting Chief of Party, Robert Page, meets with the President of the NAO, Dr. Nikolov, and the Director of PIFCA, Ms. Draganinska, at the Conference

IT Training for PIFCA and NAO Auditors Continues

OGI has continued its commitment to provide critical IT training for auditors. For the Public Internal Financial Control Agency (PIFCA), four courses were offered in Sofia followed by training in smaller cities where people have less access to training resources. Training has been given to 100 auditors from Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Pleven, Pazardjik, Lovech, and Gabrovo. Training for 140 more auditors from another ten cities is planned. The evaluations received indicate that the courses are perceived by the trainees as very useful and well-timed.

For the National Audit Office, OGI has scheduled high-level IT training for 20 system administrators and 20 auditors to help them successfully manage the new audit software, ACL and SPSS.



OGI training course for PIFCA employees in Varna

Discussions on the Law for Publicity of Assets of Persons Occupying High-Status Positions

A workshop on the Law for Publicity of Assets of Persons Occupying High-Status Positions was organized by OGI on March 25, in the National Assembly building. Opening speeches were delivered by Ms. Debra McFarland, USAID Mission Director in Bulgaria, Dr. Georgi Nikolov, NAO President, and Mr. Kosta Kostov, Chairman of the Parliamentary Anti-Corruption Commission. Participants discussed the proposed changes to the Law. OGI published the findings of the workshop and will use the recommendations to focus work on strengthening public disclosure of assets by officials.

Workshops on Innovative Practices in the Area of Local e-Governance and Municipal Information Centers

A Foundation for Local Government Reform and OGI joint workshop on Innovation Practices in Local e-Governance took place in Veliko Tarnovo on April 24-25. It was attended by representatives from nine municipalities, the Ministry of the Regional Development and Public Works, the National Association of Municipalities, and USAID.



Participants in the workshop in Veliko Tarnovo

Study Tour to Prague

OGI, with the support of World Learning, organized a study tour to Prague for members of the Bulgarian Association of Internal Auditors. The tour took place the week of May 19th. The Bulgarian delegation visited the Czech Institute of Internal Auditors. The Czech Institute provided regulations for its work, the strategic plan for development of the Institute, financial statements, and other useful materials. The goal of the study tour was to provide guidance to the Bulgarian delegation for becoming an official affiliate of the Institute of Internal Auditors, to get insights on how to operate the association professionally, and to increase the level of audit professionalism throughout Bulgaria. OGI will work with the participants to achieve this goal.



Bulgarian auditors meet with their Czech colleagues

Working with Business Associations on Procurement

OGI co-sponsored a roundtable on public procurement issues for small and medium sized businesses with the Bulgarian Association for Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME). Participants identified unclear and problematic areas in the Bulgarian procurement framework, highlighting barriers for the SMEs and business in general. The comments made at the roundtable have been incorporated into the draft of modifications in the Public Procurement Law that OGI is developing to submit to the drafting committee. OGI will continue to work with the small and medium-size business community through ASME during the drafting of secondary legislation and regulations to ensure that their voice is heard in the drafting process.

Training Needs Assessment for Public Procurement Carried Out

In April and May, the OGI team carried out an extensive training-needs assessment of two main sources of public contracts – municipalities and ministries. OGI evaluated the necessities in 35 municipalities and six ministries.



OGI seminar in Russe, moderated by the Mayor, Ms. Eleonora Nikolova

Expanding e-Government

OGI held a productive meeting with Mr. Christo Traikov, Director of the Coordination Center for Information, Communication, and Management Technologies to the Council of Ministries. The meeting resulted in a commitment from OGI to support the program for Bulgarian e-Government development. The major areas of support will include public events sponsorship, organization of workshops, study visits to European countries, consultancies for transfer of know-how, and technical assistance for the e-Procurement pilots in two ministries and several municipalities. The first event was the OGI participation in the international conference “State Administration Reform and Collaboration: e-Government and e-Municipality” held in Sofia on May 29-30. OGI invited e-procurement experts from Hungary and Iceland and co-sponsored the participation of the Romanian Minister of Communications and IT. Further exchanges with Romania will be carried out in the next few months to take advantage of their positive experiences in e-governance.



Bulgarian Minister of State Administration, Dimitar Kalchev, Romanian Minister of Communication and IT, Dan Nica, and OGI Acting Chief of Party, Robert Page, chairing the Conference

Political Parties Financing

OGI co-sponsored a conference on political party and election campaign financing in Southeastern Europe with the Bulgarian Chapter of Transparency International. The event took place on April 4-6 in Borovetz. As a follow up, OGI organized a second roundtable on the Law on Financing of Political Parties in Bulgaria, to discuss audit practices under the current law and draft recommendations to strengthen that law. The event took place on June 6 and was attended by MPs and representatives from NAO, PIFCA, international institutions, NGOs and media.



Training on Audit of Political Parties

Trainings on Grant Management and Investigative Reporting Held

In February OGI organized training on Grant Management, Reporting and Internal Policies for Bulgarian NGOs, which are recipients of large USAID grants facilitated by the international consultant Richard Solloway. OGI also organized a four-day training in investigative reporting techniques for OGI grantees, together with IREX/Promedia.

Small Grants Program

OGI small grantees are proceeding with their programs to investigate cases of corruption. Different organizations are working in the areas of education, municipal property management, and concession contracts. One group, the ACCESS Foundation, is monitoring how the media reports on corruption cases. They have established an Anticorruption Pressure Group to select cases reported in the media for further investigation, and notified the judiciary, state, and local authorities on cases that they are monitoring. For the first three months of the project, ACCESS analyzed 66 publications and issued 20 formal notifications to the respective authorities, including the Bulgarian Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission to the Council of Ministers. Although cases are processed slowly, ACCESS will continue to give these matters publicity, thus making the Bulgarian society more sensitive towards corruption issues.

Access to Information Program

OGI is carrying out activities with the Access to Information Program (AIP). A workshop was held in Sofia and attended by representatives from NAO, PIFCA and the Ministry of Energy. The goal was to make public officials aware of the requirements of the laws on access to public information, classified information, and personal data. Lecturers from AIP presented international standards in the area as well as their practice with Bulgarian institutions and court cases. Two judges from the Supreme Administrative Court were invited to answer questions and present practical issues. Six similar roundtables and workshops will be held in Sofia, Russe and Sliven.



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