



Macedonia Court Modernization Project



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To Our Readers

We are pleased to report solid progress. The sounds of nails and hammers are now heard in five Basic Courts where construction projects are under way. In May the project completed its first such improvements in the Basic Court – Struga. Now work is ongoing in the Basic Courts in Tetovo, Kochani, Kriva Palanka, Shtip, and Prilep. The goal is to improve public access and modernizing administrative functions: public information and waiting areas, civil intake of cases, and courtrooms. The changes are not cosmetic, but are aimed at increased ability of the courts to serve the public.

We can also report that the winds of change are blowing in at least one vital area of legislation: enforcement of judgments. A Ministry of Justice Working Group has moved toward establishing a system of independent bailiffs to enforce court and other judgments. The Project has supported the Working Group with a team of experts from the Netherlands with considerable experience in establishing such bailiff organizations. Although the drafting process may well continue for another six or nine months, there are reasons to hope for eventual dramatic improvement in enforcement of judgments in Macedonia.

The Project also completed a Feasibility Study on the future of judicial branch education in Macedonia. The study was conducted by three outstanding, impartial international experts. The area is important and not without political and financial difficulties. Still, it is hoped that the study will find a ready audience and play a constructive role.

Work continues! We look forward to an increased pace of progress in the months ahead.

Administrative Progress at the Court Budget Council

The Macedonian Court Modernization Project continues to work with the Court Budget Council (CBC) and its Administrative Office to refine the judicial branch budgeting process.

The Macedonian judiciary made great strides by establishing the legal framework for judicial independence through the Court Budget Act. Unlike court systems in some other countries, by creating a budget council with broad representation from the courts, the judiciary has ensured a stable basis for instituting significant budgetary and financial reforms.

The CBC, Administrative Office and MCMP are now developing the underlying structures to promote effective judicial branch budgeting and responsible fiscal management. In January, the CBC requested and received approval for 14 staff members for the Administrative Office and has hired the Director, an Auditor and an Accountant. In the first quarter of 2004, the CBC and the Administrative Office addressed increasing the amount of funding available to the judiciary, developing an automated financial system for the Administrative Office, and allocating funding in centralized areas such as capital planning, computerization, and education for judges and staff, among other issues.



Ms. Tina Breclj, County Court Ljubljana

In March 2004, the MCMP organized a three-day study tour to Slovenia and a two day strategic planning workshop for members of the CBC, the Director of the Administrative Office, and selected Presidents of the Basic Courts. The MCMP was assisted in this effort by Kate Harrison, a Court Budget and Management expert and Richard Hoffman, a specialist in Strategic Planning and Court Administration, both from the United States.

Strategic planning can help the judiciary to identify and link budget requests to strategic priorities, a linkage now required by the government. The CBC, AO and MCMP are also hard at work addressing significant fiscal issues, including managing past debt incurred when the courts were under the Ministry of Justice, distribution of court revenues, the level of spending flexibility to be allowed the judiciary, and training of court financial staff.

In early July, Ms. Tina Breclj of the Ljubljana, Slovenia, District Court traveled to Macedonia under the auspices of MCMP to assist the CBC and AO with planning for the 2005 fiscal year. The CBC will be issuing its budget circular to the courts shortly, providing direction for next year's budget, including linkage to broad strategic goals. With the MCMP's assistance, the CBC is also considering developing performance standards to evaluate how efficiently, quickly and effectively cases are adjudicated.