

## Legal Reform: *Judicial Strengthening Initiative in Bulgaria*

Beginning in 1999 and concluding in 2007, the East-West Management Institute (EWMI), with funding from USAID, worked to strengthen the judicial system of Bulgaria. By building long-term relationships with both governmental and non-governmental partners and using innovative approaches such as institutional development indices and court improvement plans, EWMI was able to assist Bulgaria create a judiciary that is better educated, more efficient, and more transparent, thereby contributing to Bulgaria's accession to the European Union. EWMI's work focused on the following areas:

### COURT ADMINISTRATION

In order to improve the efficiency and transparency of the court system in Bulgaria, EWMI launched an innovative **Model Court** program, under which courts, selected following a competitive process, agreed to adopt and implement **Court Improvement Plans**. The Court Improvement Plan developed by EWMI is a template or menu of 26 core standards that the courts would undertake to implement, with EWMI assistance, addressing such matters as introduction of random case assignment, using new case filing mechanisms, and establishing public information centers. EWMI also developed a second level Plan to assist courts with more advanced reforms. Some 32 courts participated in the initiative during the course of the project. Bulgaria's Supreme Judicial Council adopted the Model Court and Court Improvement Plan approach, and will be continuing to use it to further the process of judicial reform throughout the country.



### COURT AUTOMATION

EWMI designed and installed in the Model Courts an automated **Case Management System** that was used to facilitate the scheduling of hearings and the tracking of case files, as well as to ensure that cases were heard and resolved on a timely basis. In order to provide for the verbatim recording of hearings, essential to improving transparency and trust in the system, EWMI also designed and installed an automated **Verbatim Recording** system in each of the Model Courts. EWMI also provided extensive assistance with website development to improve transparency and public access to court information.

*Working in partnership with grass roots groups, local governments and international organizations to build just, prosperous and democratic societies.*



*The entrance to the Supreme Judicial Council, one of EWMI's key partners in Bulgaria.*

## JUDICIAL EDUCATION

EWMI oversaw the transformation of judicial education and training in Bulgaria from an ad hoc and donor dominated affair to the establishment of the **National Institute of Justice** as a fully government supported and institutionalized process. EWMI assistance in the areas of institutional development, curriculum design, teaching methodology, and monitoring and evaluation have contributed to establishing the NIJ as the leading judicial training center in South East Europe. EWMI also created and institutionalized local court training programs to create a culture of self-improvement.

## LEGISLATIVE REFORM

In collaboration with its Bulgarian counterparts, EWMI was instrumental in drafting the National Judicial Reform Strategy and Action Plan that was adopted by the Government of Bulgaria and endorsed by the European Union. EWMI experts assisted in implementing its provisions, including the preparation of amendments to the Judicial System Act (to prepare the legislative environment for meeting the Strategy's objectives), the introduction of Codes of Ethics for magistrates and court staff, and the preparation of new regulations governing the operations of the courts.

## GRANTS & OUTREACH

EWMI also administered an extensive grants program that provided support to numerous Bulgarian NGOs working on innovative judicial system improvements such as remote electronic access to court services, a child-friendly interrogation room, juror education, court information centers, legislative drafting initiatives, educating the public concerning its rights and the functioning of the court system, and working with journalists to improve the quality of media coverage of the courts.

EWMI developed training programs for court media spokespersons and for journalists, and undertook repeated initiatives to improve public trust and confidence in the Bulgarian court system. Extensive national polling demonstrated the successful impact of this organized outreach to the public.

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