

Democratic Governance

Activity Title: Governance Reform and Sustainable Partnerships (GRASP)

Implementation Timeframe: October 2002 - September 2007

Objective: To improve local government performance and strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to influence democratic changes.

Description: GRASP is an innovative local level governance and civil society program that targets towns, municipalities, and counties in Romania over the next five years. GRASP aims to: build participatory policy-making processes at the local level; improve quality and cost-effectiveness of local service delivery; strengthen local government capacity to address citizens' needs; build citizens' capacity to oversee local government actions; and reinforce the rule of law at the local level.

GRASP will consolidate and improve reforms that have already taken place but need fine-tuning or completion, taking into account the entire picture of decentralization including municipal services, social services, credit reform, and tax reform. Civil society assistance will strengthen citizen-government relations and support the development of public interest coalitions involving NGOs, business associations and other groups acting on local needs and economic interests. GRASP will engage communities in local problem-solving efforts and will link communities to government through grassroots organizations.

In addition to improving local government performance and strengthening civil society capacity, the program will address transparency and accountability within the Romanian public sector. GRASP will deal with transparent contracting and procurement procedures, citizens' ability to view public expenditures and operations, equal treatment for all tax payers, appeal systems for citizens' grievances, organizational structures that enhance internal control, implementation of internal/external audits, civil society organizations' (CSOs) capacity to monitor public authorities' performance, and citizens' access to public information.

The first round of assistance was provided in the following counties: Arad, Arges, Bihor, Braila, Dolj, Giurgiu, Harghita, Iasi, Neamt, Olt, Salaj, Suceava, and Tulcea. Assistance will continue into 2004 when another group of 13-15 counties will be selected. A total of three rounds of technical assistance over the course of five years is planned.

Implementing Partner: Consortium led by Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI)
Web Page: <http://www.grasp.ro>

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Activity Title: Opening Politics By Acting Locally-OPAL

Implementation Timeframe: May 2002 - August 2007

Objective: To engage civil society organizations (CSOs) and local political parties in activities that will increase political participation and promote the reform of political processes.

Description: America's two major political party institutes, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), implement similar programs in different parts of Romania while collaborating on political reform efforts at the central level which will encourage greater local input. Through the OPAL program, IRI and NDI work with CSOs and local branches of the major, democratic political parties to help them engage in activities that increase citizen participation in community life. OPAL promotes participatory decision-making and more issue-based, demand driven political processes. Through training and consultations provided to local political party branches, IRI and NDI help party branches expand community outreach and reduce dependence on central party structures in order to become more internally democratic and responsive to community needs. Through training provided to CSOs, the institutes encourage greater political involvement and interest articulation. Through all its activities, OPAL will also help citizen use more effectively the new freedom of information law.

During the first program year, OPAL activities will be implemented in the following counties: Suceava, Timis, Constanta, Hunedoara and Tulcea (OPAL-NDI) and Arad, Bihor, Maramures, and Sibiu (OPAL-IRI). Both IRI and NDI will provide assistance in Bucharest focusing on helping political leaders implement democratic reforms to party procedures.

Implementing Partners: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI)

For more details please visit <http://www.ndi.org> and <http://www.iri.org>

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Activity Title: Rule of Law Program

Implementation Timeframe: June 2003 – May 2005

Objective: To build sustainable partnerships that contribute to sustained democratic and transparent legal systems and institutions promoting the rule of law.

Description: The main purpose of the program is to increase the independence and integrity of the Romanian judiciary. Through the Rule of Law program, ABA/CEELI works with the Superior Council of Magistrates and the Ministry of Justice to reform judicial performance and evaluation standards, and increase the transparency and objectivity of the judicial evaluation process. The program provides ethics training for judges, develops a code of ethics for court clerks, develops and conducts a specialized training for judges who hear access to information cases, and helps courts establish public information offices.

Implementing Partner: American Bar Association, Central and Eastern Europe Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI)

For more details visit: <http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/countries/romania/home.html>

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Activity Title: East and Central European Scholarship Program (ECESP)

Implementation Timeframe: October 2003 – October 2006

Objective: To provide medium and long term academic, post-university U.S.-based training, in order to enhance young executives and the ability of public officials to support Romania's transition to a democratic market economy.

Description: Organizes training courses at seven U.S. universities for Romanian decision-makers, that can impact on the overall reform process implemented in Romania. Participants gain knowledge and skills to improve business environment, public administration policies and legislation, education system and political practice.

Implementing Partner: Georgetown University, program funded by USAID/ Regional Bureau

For more details please visit <http://www.georgetown.edu>