



Increasing Government Transparency and Accountability through Electronic Access to Information

Access to Information Programme (AIP) started the implementation of the eponymous project, financed by the UNDP Democratic Governance Trust Fund (DGTF).

The beginning of activities was marked by a meeting on March 23, 2007 in Montana joining representatives of local and regional government, as well as media. AIP presented the results of a specialized survey which looked at the websites of Bulgarian public institutions. A discussion highlighted national access to information legislation and the conditions for its proper implementation: designation of civil servants in charge of access to information, obligations for active provision of information, as well as electronic requests for information.

One of the objectives of the new project is to demonstrate the benefits of ICT in the implementation of the Access to Public Information Act (APIA) and thus to improve practices for provision of information by the institutions.

In the framework of the project, AIP will make assessments of the institutional websites in Bulgaria from the point of view of the Access to Public Information Act. The results from the 2007 survey will be compared with those of the survey conducted in 2006 in order to find out if there are developments in regards to the content of institutional web-sites pursuant to the effective Freedom of Information legislation. The survey will be followed by recommendations and presentation of good models for publication of information on institutional web-sites. The results from the assessment of the institutional web-sites and the possibilities to improve practices for active provision of information over the Internet will be discussed in a series of six meetings around the country. The meetings will be attended by civil servants from municipal and regional administrations, responsible for putting into practice the APIA and for active up-loading of public information online. Forthcoming are meetings in Razgrad, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Bourgas and Plovdiv.

The effect of these meetings will be assessed in 2008 on the basis of the same indicators - obligation for active disclosure of information under the effective access to information legislation.

Another objective, which will be achieved through a National Awareness Campaign, is to increase public knowledge about the APIA, as well as citizens' opportunities to seek and receive information electronically. Within the implementation of the project AIP and its country coordinators will prepare, publish and disseminate annual reports on access to information in Bulgaria. They will organize and hold the annual Awards Ceremony on the International Right to Know Day (September 28), an event that will be widely covered by the media. Thus, the project will contribute to increasing government transparency and accountability, facilitating the



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interaction between the institutions and the public, and enabling the effective exercise of the right to information as one of the basic human rights.

The project **Increasing Government Transparency and Accountability through Electronic Access to Information** is due to continue until December 2008 and is financed by the Democratic Governance Trust Fund and UNDP Bulgaria (USD 125,000).