
Overview of 1996

The seventh year in the history of the CSD was very successful. Our organization continued to grow in capacity, significance and international recognition.

The major highlight of 1996 was the SME policy initiative. Undertaken at the request of the local USAID representative, it resulted in the definition of an Action Plan addressing the policy and legal constraints that currently face small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) in Bulgaria, and proposing a set of measures to encourage the growth of this sector of the economy.

Some of the most distinguished Bulgarian experts were involved in this initiative under the auspices of the CSD. The resulting Policy Forum was a high-profile meeting attended by the President-elect, Mr. Petar Stoyanov, the deputy chair of the National Assembly, the ministers of trade and industry, the governor of the National Bank, along with other senior government officials and policy-makers. The CSD was successful in mobilizing bi-partisan political support for the policy agenda outlined in the paper and in receiving endorsement of its priorities by policy-makers from across the political spectrum.

Following the parliamentary elections in April 1997, the environment in Bulgaria is more favorable for economic reform. The political will needed to put into practice the policy recommendations contained in the SME Action Plan exists. Successful implementation of the policy recommendations will be a good testimony to their quality, and the expertise and hard work invested in the process.

Law-drafting has been one of the distinct cornerstones of the CSD's activities since its inception. 1996 was particularly fruitful in this respect. The draft Law on Registered Pledges, developed in cooperation with IRIS-Bulgaria, was passed into Law by Parliament in November. The Draft Law on Non-Profit Organizations, also developed by the CSD Law Reform Program, was approved and endorsed by the Ministry of Justice. As a follow-up, the Program is presently implementing a project to reform the tax framework for non-profit organizations.

In 1996, the CSD's efforts to facilitate Bulgaria's integration into the European institutions included a new initiative to promote the participation of NGOs in the process. In particular, the CSD initiated and hosted a series of meetings between Members of the European Parliament and Bulgarian non-governmental organizations with a view towards establishing a forum for dialogue with Bulgarian civil society representatives. This initiative has been highly praised on both sides and will continue in 1997.

Vitosha Research, the spin-off venture of the CSD_{HS} Sociological Program continued to engage in professional marketing research and consultancy. As in previous years, these activities have furthered the CSD_{HS} goal of long-term sustainability.

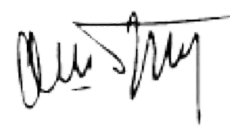
Considerable efforts and funds were invested during the year into the establishment of a modern telecommunications facility at the CSD. Internet access is now available to the entire staff. In December, the CSD established a presence on the World Wide Web and our page can now be accessed at <http://www.csd.bg>.

A lot of attention was devoted to the development of the CSD_{HS} human potential. The qualification of our staff is continuously being improved through participation in various training courses and programs in Bulgaria and abroad. The CSD also works with a highly experienced body of outside experts and consultants which has contributed to improving our institutional capacity for addressing complex policy issues and has raised the impact of our research and advocacy activities.

As in previous years, the CSD continued to provide a home to the Information and Documentation Centre of the Council of Europe and the MBA Enterprise Corps activities in Bulgaria.

The turbulent start of 1997 has brought new hopes for radical structural reforms which have been delayed during the past four years. With the new reformist majority in Parliament, there is enough political will, and broad public support, for this to happen. These developments will open new opportunities and create an added impetus to the CSD_{HS} work in support of the democratic reform process in Bulgaria.

Sofia, April 1997



Ognian Shentov
CSD President