
**Environmental Action Programme Support Project
Contract DHR-0039-C-00-5034-00
United States Agency for International Development**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A
PUBLIC OUTREACH AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGY FOR THE
MUNICIPALITY OF STARA ZAGORA-S COMMISSION ON CONCESSIONS**

**Submitted to:
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**Submitted by:
Chemonics International Inc.**

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A. Background

The Municipality of Stara Zagora (MSZ) in Bulgaria has begun to divest its interest in the joint venture with Overgas Ltd. for development and operation of the natural gas distribution system within the municipality and will assume the role of utility regulator to protect public interest and safety. Since a municipality serving as a utility regulator is unprecedented in Bulgaria, information about MSZ's new role needs to be disseminated to the municipal council and staff and the public.

In accordance with article 70.1 and 70.2 of the Municipal Property Act, the MSZ officially established a utility commission, the Commission on Concessions, on June 6, 1997. The commission has authority to regulate business activities including:

- \$ Organizing the granting of concessions (including negotiating concession agreements)
- \$ Providing oversight and control in implementation of concession agreements
- \$ Developing its own procedures and bylaws, subject to city council approval

The commission is comprised of the following members: an electric engineer, a water sewer engineer, a natural gas expert, a lawyer, two city council members, and a tender specialist.

B. Recommendations

1. Integrate public outreach and participation requirements within the structure and functions of the commission and the concession agreement.

In forming commission procedures and bylaws and developing the concession agreement, there are opportunities for institutionalizing public outreach and participation goals. Encouraging integration of public outreach and participation in commission structure and function will help foster a long-term, sustainable approach to public information and involvement. During a commission meeting on its possible roles and responsibilities, several initial ideas were expressed both verbally and in writing (see

Annex A). Since the commission places a premium on technical support, it is recommended that these ideas be advanced as an integrated part of EAPS/LGI technical support to the commission and that personnel in technical roles (e.g., Ray Allen and Dayan Kavrakov) reinforce these ideas and participate in outreach planning sessions, as appropriate and practical.

2. Ensure that the commission and Overgas are aware of one another's public information initiatives and that both parties present accurate information.

Overgas plans a citizens-awareness campaign for late September/early October to include broadcast of a 20-minute educational video on a local television station. It was implied that the video is the same as one aired last year. If so, the video is seriously outdated and includes segments on Overgas/MSZ as a joint venture. The commission should be encouraged to follow up and coordinate with Overgas regarding the public information campaign to ensure that misinformation is not presented. Since the MSZ Press Office is not represented on the commission, a commission member should initiate the contact and ensure coordination between all parties.

3. Utilize the talents of the MSZ and its press office to develop and implement the outreach campaign. Conduct a planning seminar to develop a communications action plan.

As USAID's project support will wind down next year, to ensure sustainability, the MSZ will need to take ownership of the outreach campaign and public participation process. Therefore, it is important that MSZ be an active participant in defining objectives and implementing the campaign. In addition, there may be resistance if the campaign and public participation process are heavily dictated by USAID. The municipality is proud of and perhaps slightly defensive about its public outreach accomplishments. For example, it recently held an interactive call-in broadcast on the Stara Zagora downtown revitalization project, encouraging viewers to submit proposals with their ideas. The effort received 30 calls during the broadcast and subsequently about 70 proposals. The event was viewed as a positive step; however, according to several outside sources, there is room for improvement (e.g., one caller that asked a controversial question was ignored; no effort was made to respond to or acknowledge proposals).

No one assigned to the commission has a communications background. During the working session with the full commission, it was strongly suggested that a commission member be assigned the role of promoting information dissemination and public participation and coordinating efforts with the municipal press office. Inviting the press office to all commission meetings would be helpful in this regard.

The MSZ has a two-person press office that has been working actively to further municipal press relations and disseminate public information. According to Tatiana Gancheva of the MSZ Press Bureau and Public Relations Office, the municipality now keeps a file of all press clippings, holds weekly press briefings, provides explicit press releases for significant activities, and disseminates a calendar of scheduled meetings. (Film crews were observed at several meetings.) In addition, the MSZ press staff were as competent if not more so than any organization encountered in Stara Zagora. In a joint brainstorming session, press staff were able to differentiate their public education roles and responsibilities from that of Overgas and to identify public education needs, timelines, and specific products and activities. They are particularly interested in (1) developing an informational video, to be followed by an interactive call-in session, and (2) holding a product fair for citizens to learn about conversion equipment.

While these two initiatives appear to be reasonable and valuable, it is recommended that a comprehensive communications planning seminar be held to develop a full strategy that matches goals to program design and includes measurement, evaluation, and improvement. As this is of mutual interest and importance to EAPS and LGI, it is recommended that the session be conducted jointly by Becky Gadell (Research Triangle Institute), Dileana Simeonova (MTK Konsult), and Maureen McNamara (Chemonics International). Due however, to the immediacy of public education needs for the gasification project, the focus of the planning session should be on the gasification project; divestiture from the joint venture with Overgas; and the respective roles of the new commission, Overgas, and citizens. The planning process would however be introduced as a tool for integrating multiple communication initiatives.

It is recommended that the following individuals be invited to attend the seminar (asterisks indicate those considered essential):

- \$ Tatiana Gancheva*CMSZ press bureau and public relations officer
- \$ George Simeonov*CInternational relations officer, MSZ
- \$ Nediako Anguelov*Ccommission chairman
- Other commission members: Peter Bogdanov, Rosalina Gradinarova, Katia Vancheva, Eng. Peter Stamov, Eng. Krasimir Veleov, and George Georgiev
- \$ Diana IskrevaceAPS
- \$ Dayan Kavrov*CMTK Konsult
- \$ George ChevdarovCEAPS

4. Ascertain the level of USAID financial and resource allocation for the outreach effort and associated terms (clearance, reviews, timelines) before the communications planning session.

To appropriately guide MSZ during the communications strategy seminar and to develop a concrete plan of action, it will be important to (1) know the level of financial assistance including manpower that USAID will allocate to the public outreach effort, (2) have tentative approval for developing certain products and initiatives, and (3) know what approvals and reviews will be required by USAID and approximate clearance timelines. The following are specific products and initiatives for consideration:

- \$ Employee education seminar
- \$ Education program for beneficiaries (schools, hospital, etc.) about gasification and the commission. (See also recommendation 5.)
- \$ Brochure on the commission and the gasification project
- \$ Video on the new commission and gasification project (e.g., how gasification occurs), followed by an interactive call-in broadcast for Q&A about gasification and the commissions= role as regulator
- \$ Citizens= trade fair for conversion equipment

It would be particularly important to know whether USAID would provide funding for video production and the citizens= fair, as these are of great interest to the commissioner and the MSZ Press Office.

5. Initiate a student education program.

A program to educate students and faculty of schools that will be gasified could be implemented concurrently with the MSZ campaign. Diana Iskreva would be an appropriate resource/lead for such a program as she is a teacher at one of the first high schools (Romain Roland) to be gasified.

Curricula might include information about gasification and gas safety, democracy and the new commission, simplified cost-benefit calculations, and environmental benefits. It is suggested that Ms. Iskreva work with George Chevdarov on financial and environmental analyses. Also, depending on the status of the school-s computer acquisition, an Internet Web site could be developed and posted on the Stara Zagora-s Economic Development Agency home page, which is USAID-supported.

Ms. Iskreva-s students are already highly motivated about energy efficiency and the environment. Two of them, Ventsislav Stanev and George Nikolov, are trying to initiate an energy efficiency program at the school. They founded a club, Students for Energy Efficiency, that subsequently became a youth section of EcoglasnostCthe only predominantly volunteer-supported NGO encountered during the trip. It is recommended that the club document its proposal and make initial resource estimates to move its project forward. Their proposal, which was received subsequent to the visit, is provided in Annex B.

6. Track media coverage of the project; collect newspaper clippings and TV footage.

Although the MSZ Press Office has a system for collecting news clippings, whether it is accessible and comprehensive is unclear. As this is a critical time in the project, a system for independently tracking media coverage and disseminating press clippings would be helpful. By reviewing coverage, corrective action can be suggested. In addition, TV footage may be integrated into the video as appropriate or may feed into a future national education campaign if the Stara Zagora regulatory structure is successful.

C. Initial Targets, Timelines, and Themes

While it is premature to recommend a strategy independent of the communications planning session, potential targets, timelines, information, and resource needs are summarized in the tables below.

Target Audience Pool
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Municipal staff \$ Project beneficiaries (i.e., employees and students of municipal buildings that will be converted) \$ Potential commercial end users (e.g., brewery, new developers) \$ Citizens of Stara Zagora \$ Other municipalities in Bulgaria \$ USAID \$ MDBs \$ Other ENI countries \$ International equipment vendors
<p>Target audiences should be defined for all products and initiatives. It is also important to ascertain the public relations beneficiaries (e.g., the mayor, local businesses.) In particular it will be important to get a sense of USAID's public relations needs, before the communications strategy session.</p>

Event	Timeline	Public Interest
General roles of the new commission determined	August/September	Medium to high
Divestiture decision reached	August	Low
Winning bid(s) for first conversions announced	August	Low
Pipeline construction	Ongoing	Medium
Concession agreement signed	September (?)	Low to medium
Gas turned on in municipal buildings	October 15, 1997	High
Extended residential availability	October 1998	High
<p>These events will generate varying degrees of interest from the community. The MSZ will need to develop products and initiatives with them in mind.</p>		

Potential Information

<p>Why did MSZ divest from its joint venture with Overgas?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Municipal Property Act ➤ Conflict of interest
<p>What is the role of the Commission on Concessions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Structure and function ➤ Ensuring public safety and interest ➤ Not currently charged with regulating pricing (regulated at the national level) ➤ Fostering continued private sector involvement in utility infrastructure ➤ Linkage of the commission to the gas project ➤ When to make use of commission services, when to call Overgas ➤ The role of the new commission in advancing democracy ➤ How citizens can get involved
<p>Why wasn't the gas concession competitively bid?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Legal basis in the Municipal Property Act
<p>Why natural gas?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clean ➤ Reliable ➤ Cost-effective for many buildings/consumers (manage expectations)
<p>What are the benefits to the community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Distribution network and reliable source of energy may help attract new business to the area ➤ Municipal services (e.g., day care, schools) can remain open during peak heating season ➤ Energy savings can be used by the municipality for other important community services
<p>How does gas reach consumers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explain distribution network
<p>Is gas safe?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explain safety features of natural gas distribution network, differentiate from propane ➤ Explain what to do if odor is detected ➤ Explain what to do in case of emergency (advertise emergency numbers)
<p>Who is eligible for gas hook up? When?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Schedule of conversions, schedule of gas line expansion (particularly low pressure lines) ➤ Will there be construction in my neighborhood? When? Who do I call if there are complaints or safety concerns? ➤ How can I find out how much it will cost to convert my residence, business, or apartment building? (Provide vendor information and rule-of-thumb parameters [e.g., Aif your building has a functioning centralized boiler and energy consumption in excess of X during the winter heating season, you may want to consider...@].)
<p>Information conveyed will depend on target audience, timeline, and product.</p>

<p>Potential Resource Needs</p>
<p>\$ Employee education seminar about the role of the new commission. The municipality felt that this could be handled in-house and that employees would participate on their own time after hours. Would ideally occur in early September.</p>
<p>\$ Beneficiaries (schools, hospital, etc.) education program about gasification and the commission. Would require manpower for curriculum development and some supplies for developing audiovisuals and worksheets. Might require Internet software. Would ideally occur throughout the fall. Brochure if developed could be relevant.</p>
<p>\$ Press releases. Generated as needed independently by the MSZ as is current practice. EAPS should track outcome.</p>
<p>\$ Brochure on the commission and the gas project. Could be developed as a two-sided brochure, either English/Bulgarian or gasification and commission information. MSZ could provide initial text with EAPS/USAID review. Would require graphic design and printing support. Would ideally be ready by late September or early October.</p>

\$ **Video on the new commission and gasification (e.g., how gasification occurs).** Followed by an interactive call-in broadcast for Q&A about gasification and the commissions- role as regulator. The municipality will receive free air time but would need assistance with video development. Would require joint MSZ/EAPS storyboarding, video animation (to explain gasification), and video production support. Would ideally be ready by October 15.

\$ **Citizens- trade fair for conversion equipment.** Would require assistance in advertising the fair outside of Bulgaria and possibly within Stara Zagora. Embassies may be helpful for disseminating information. Presumably this could be held at the municipality. MSZ may also want to develop a simple database of supplier information. Its capabilities in this regard is unclear.

D. Local Resources

To the maximum extent practical, local (Stara Zagora) talent should be accessed. To date, no particular individual or firm in Stara Zagora was identified as having all the talent needed to direct the full campaign and product development. Since there will be a learning curve for anyone involved, it is recommended that the investment be in the MSZ commission and press office, which already have significant relevant experience and talent. There are, however, discrete talent and services available within in Stara Zagora. The following firms are recommended subject to formal reference checks and price quotes:

- \$ Rainbow Ad Company Crecommended for printing only, not graphics
- \$ Media Studio Cgraphics and video animation
- \$ Free Information Surveys, Ltd. Cmarket research

There are no video production firms in Stara Zagora. Most of the Sofia-based advertising and public relations firms provide concept design and storyboarding and outsource filming and production. Lazar Slantchev/Triera Studio, which has done work for the PHARE Energy Program, may be another potential resource.

Annexes C through F contain information or samples from the following companies: Rainbow Ad Company, Media Studio, Free Information Surveys, Ltd., and Lazar Slantchev/Triera Studio. A list of contact information is provided in Annex G.

ANNEX G
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