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ACTIVITY BRIEF

NGO Legal Reform Initiative

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Regional Services Center



*Conference on "Financial Sustainability of NGOs – Philanthropy and Taxation",
Skopje, Macedonia, January 2005.*

Partners:

International Center for Not-For-Profit Law and the European Center for Not-For-Profit Law

Geographic Targets:

ECNL Headquarters in Hungary. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro with lessons learned shared with all NIS, CEE and non-presence countries.

Project Duration:

05/01/2001-12/31/06

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U.S. Agency for International
Development

Activity Background

After the fall of communism in 1989, one of the key challenges to building civil society was the lack of a legislative environment to support non-governmental organizations. Independent NGOs scarcely existed and risked disbandment for subversiveness. Meaningful independent associational activity was nearly impossible. The fledgling NGO sector not only struggled with a lack of funding, but also had a need to establish credibility and legitimacy because of the legacy of forced volunteerism under communism. USAID supported ICNL throughout Eastern Europe to establish a legal framework where NGOs could operate freely, and private philanthropy could grow.

Core Interventions

- Provide technical assistance on legislation affecting NGOs
- Support the fair, consistent, apolitical implementation of the new legal framework
- Empower local lawyers and practitioners to address NGO legal issues in each country
- Create strong sustainable networks of individuals and institutions committed to NGO law reform

Activity Results

- ICNL has contributed to the passage of over 45 laws supporting NGO activity and sustainability.
- Countries outside Eastern Europe have turned to ICNL to share lessons learned, including Iraq, Afghanistan, China, Turkey, and Pakistan.
- ICNL has expanded an education network that integrates civil society law into the curricula of higher education institutions throughout the region. As a result, 16 Universities in 8 countries in CEE and NIS are educating over 400 students a year on NGO law.
- ICNL has created a regional knowledge base for civil society law through a web-based legal library, publications and research on areas such as tax laws affecting NGOs, public benefit issues, and economic activities.