

Country

Serbia and Montenegro

Implementation period

2001-2002

Funding

EU €4.5 million

Montenegrin government €1.2 million

Results

Restoration and modernisation of municipal buildings and services. Reinforcing local self-government.

Coordinator

European Agency for Reconstruction
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Public services receive upgrade

Montenegro

Revamping outdated municipal services

Local government in Montenegro has been operating for a number of years under a centralized, party-driven system. Many essential public services are inadequate and citizens have had little or no role in local government. In a bid to improve the situation, the European Agency for Reconstruction, in coordination with the Montenegrin Ministry of Finance, launched a €4.5-million programme in 2001 to improve infrastructure and services in four municipalities: Podgorica, Bijelo Polje, Mojkovac and Kolasin.

Following a needs assessment survey by an EU consulting firm, the programme funding was allocated to individual municipalities according to their specific requirements. In Podgorica, this has translated, among other activities, into the complete overhaul of its fire-fighting service.

Building a new fire station

Fires are a constant hazard in Montenegro, but particularly during the hot summer months. Over the summer of 2003, the fire station in Podgorica received 1,338 call-outs alone. Its firemen are expected to fight fires with outdated equipment and many of them have never had any formal training in fire-fighting. Moreover, owing to a lack of formal links between Montenegro's fire departments, the Podgorica fire brigade can only rely on good relations to ensure cooperation with other municipalities. Its 300 employees, and inevitably the local community, are suffering as a result of these difficult working conditions.

With €1 million from the EU and €1.2 million of its own funds, the Municipality of Podgorica has now started a programme to reform this crucial public service. As a first step, it has helped to coordinate the design and building of new fire station. A local architect and construction firm have carried out the work and the site is now open. Recently, the fire brigade relocated to the fire station from its previous headquarters of some years - a disused factory warehouse.

Fire fighters learn new skills

The increased capacity of the new station offers the firemen the opportunity to train in dealing with 'real' situations on site. Furthermore, the municipality has ordered new equipment for the brigade under a separate contract. These changes, combined with a rationalised and reorganised service based on recommendations made by an Italian contractor, means that the service can now operate more efficiently. The fire brigade's morale has been boosted, and there is greater confidence on the part of the public in the service.



Reviving cultural and community life

Elsewhere in Montenegro, more municipal rehabilitation projects have been undertaken. In Kolasin - population 14,000 - a local historical building and former cultural centre dating from 1903, has been restored and refurbished through the EU's municipal investment programme. The restored cultural centre, which already houses a cinema, theatre and library, will also be home to a local radio and television station, confirming its place as a focal point for the municipality.

Says Mayor Mileta Bulatovic: "We hope to revitalize cultural life in the town, and provide young people with access to facilities to other young people across Europe." Kolasin's funding has also been put towards other public concerns, such as the resurfacing of local roads and improving the town's sewers.

At a less visible level, the programme provided support to local self-government in financial management and planning, and delivered computer hardware to several public institutions. An integral part of the development of the municipal rehabilitation projects is raising the efficiency of the local public authorities which manage them.