First PROGRES Anniversary in Prokuplje

The European Partnership with Municipalities Programme celebrated its first anniversary on 10 June by a series of activities aimed at presenting the Programme to the residents of Prokuplje. President of the Republic of Serbia Boris Tadić, who was on an official visit to Prokuplje that day, visited the Programme stand and talked to the PROGRES staff and volunteers. The performance of 700 children from the kindergarten Neven, who in the late afternoon danced to children’s songs on the main square wearing T-shirts in different colours designed especially for the event, attracted the most attention among the residents of Prokuplje.

By posing for a photograph with the students of the primary school Radoje Domanović in the village of Kumarevo at Leskovac, Head of the European Union Delegation to the Republic of Serbia Ambassador Vincent Degert completed his two-day visit to South Serbia, during which he announced that two million Euros would be invested in small infrastructural projects in South and South West Serbia via the European Partnership with Municipalities Programme PROGRES. The Ambassador earlier visited a creative workshop within the Rome Education Centre, a project aimed at integrating Roma children in the education system and met with Leskovac Mayor Slobodan Kocić.

Two Million Euros for Infrastructure

The integration of good governance principles in PROGRES will hopefully bring citizens and public administration closer and increase the effectiveness of the public services.

Beatrice Mayer
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Director of the Office in Serbia

European Union and Government of Switzerland will finance with 1.9 million Euro implementation of 21 infrastructure projects in South and South West Serbia. Photo: Shutterstock.

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We, grade teachers, bring up new generations, form people, form humans.

Slavica Jovanovic, known to her colleagues as Dunja, has been working as a grade teacher in the Prokuplje primary school Ratko Pavlovic Cicko for twenty years now. Slavica has been devotedly helping a girl with impaired eyesight fit in the school system for three years now.

PROGRES: What do you like best about your job?

Slavica: I love working with children. It’s difficult sometimes, but when you realise after a number of years that you were an important figure and a milestone in someone’s life, you realise that you were born into this world to leave a trace, a trace that will remain visible for a long, long time.

PROGRES: A girl with impaired eyesight enrolled in your class three years ago. How did that seem at the time?

Slavica: Before 1st grade started, the school principal told me a blind girl had enrolled in our school. I agreed to teach her. I had rarely had the opportunity to even meet a blind person, and now I was to work with a blind child. How? My first step was to meet her mother, who told me that the girl, Danica, had a twin sister, Dragana, whose eyesight was not impaired. My impression of the mother, Sanja, was of a fighter, a courageous, devoted, persistent, enterprising, strict and demanding mother. I perceived her also as a good associate and a partner in our work. That is the key to success – when the cooperation between the parents and the teachers is strong. When the teacher and the parents think the same, you can’t miss, success is guaranteed. The mother shared with me important information about the girls and I was to meet them the next day.

Dear colleagues from the 25 cities and municipalities are you prepared to absorb EU funds?

Under the present system, Western Balkan states are granted insufficient EU pre-accession assistance and significant post-accession assistance, which they are often unable to absorb and use properly due to underdeveloped capacities and lack of project documentation.

For instance, Serbia has been granted around 200 million Euros a year in the 2007-2013 period. This annual assistance will be slightly increasing as Serbia draws closer to the EU, when it will rise to 1-2 million Euros a year, like it has in Croatia. Given that limited funds are allocated in this stage, Serbia and other Western Balkan states will be insufficiently prepared for EU accession in some crucial fields, such as infrastructure, agriculture, energy, environmental protection and human capital.

The European Commission and EU member states are currently debating the new EU financial perspective and budget for the post-2013 period. Assistance for Western Balkan states will be set during these consultations as well. Serbia contributed by preparing a joint document on the new financial perspective, which has been signed by the national IPA coordinators of the Western Balkan states and submitted to the European Commission for review.

The linear increase in IPA funds is one of the main ideas proposed under this joint document. Namely, such an increase would help the Western Balkan states prepare much better for accession by building the necessary institutions and investing in priority areas. They would simultaneously be better prepared for the absorption of funds upon accession to the EU.
The town of Prokuplje lies on Toplica River, 250 km from Belgrade and 31 km south-west of Niš. Located on the highway Nis-Pristina, it is the administrative centre of the Toplicki District. Though this town projects a modern flair, it has a rich history. According to some archaeological research, the remains of ancient civilizations are buried under the town.

History
Archeological excavations near Prokuplje have revealed remnants of ancient civilizations that suggest settlements existed here in seventh millennium BC. The Hisar Fortress is perched on Hisar Hill, which overlooks the town. This extraordinary monument dates back to when Prokuplje was known as Hammeum. A river surrounds this site on three sides. At one time, this natural barrier was critical to protecting the main road between the Morava River Valley and Kosmet.

The Jug-Bogdan tower is the only structure that remains of the fortress. According to historical records, it once supplied water to the town from Toplica. According to legend, the fabled Jug-Bogdan, his wife and their nine sons all hail from Prokuplje. That is the reason why many places in the town are named after him.

Economic development of the municipality
Economic development of the municipality
In the last decade, supported by many international organizations, the Municipality of Prokuplje has implemented a number of economic and infrastructural projects, which facilitate local economic development, strengthen Public-Private-Partnership initiatives and create good image of the town, which is becoming a suitable place for investment.

In 2009, Prokuplje had the biggest investment in South-east Serbia by attracting LEONI, a German manufacturer of automotive wiring systems for BMW car industry. So far, LEONI created 2000 jobs and invested 15 million euro in its production in Prokuplje.

Events
Every year, a number of traditional cultural and historical events are organized in Prokuplje. One of the most known among them is the celebration of the city feast day of St. Procopius (21st of July), which includes a number of sports and cultural events. International literary festival ‘Draincevi Susreti’ is organized in May for more than four decades, with the award for the best book of poetry in the previous year.

Each year at the end of July, Tourist/Sports Centre organizes a three-day festival “Beer Fest” in the premises of the city swimming pool, with a diverse music program which attracts many visitors.

Athletes from this region are very active and therefore many international sports events are organized in Prokuplje - an international tennis tournaments for women, football, table tennis and basketball tournaments.
The European Partnership with Municipalities – PROGRES, is a €18.1 million Programme of the European Union, the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Serbia, aiming to assist municipalities in the South and South West Serbia.

Good Governance

Providing support to municipalities to enhance the respect of principles of accountability, transparency and efficiency in their work and to increase citizens’ participation in the decision making.

Municipal Management and Development Planning

Working on improvement of the quality of services that municipalities provide to their citizens and business community, and providing expert assistance for preparation of planning documents.

Infrastructure

Co-financing implementation of municipal and intermunicipal infrastructure projects, and providing support to local self-governments for the development of technical documentation.

Public Awareness and Branding of Areas

Promoting the potentials of South and South West Serbia and raising public awareness of socio economic challenges and ways to tackle them.

we are planning...

► Public call for preparation of detailed regulation plans
► Beginning construction of Citizen’s Assistance Centres in Bosilegrad, Crna Trava and Trgoviste
► Contracts signing for financing 14 infrastructure projects
► Second public call for financing implementation of municipal infrastructure projects
► Beginning of implementation of seven infrastructure projects in Toplica District
► Start of the Good Governance campaign
► Beginning of work of Citizen’s Advisory Services in Novi Pazar and Zitoradja

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The Programme is funded by the European Union, the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Serbia and it is implemented by the UNOPS, in partnership with 25 municipalities of the South and South West Serbia.

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