The EU PROGRES team has been working hard in the South and South West Serbia for two years, making a steady advance towards Programme’s key goal: to create conditions for socio-economic development. Simply said, this means new jobs, better infrastructure, transfer of knowledge to municipalities how to attract investments, equal opportunities for all people, creating better image of the areas...

We already know that several economic projects, supported through the EU PROGRES will facilitate investments worth over 7.5 million Euros, and open around 1,250 jobs in the coming years. The environmental and communal infrastructure projects should result in additional 100 employment, while support to small civil society projects by now created 40 temporary and permanent jobs for women and for people with disabilities.

The work we’ve done on gender, with our partner municipalities and civil society, has shown impact: after May 2012 elections, women representation in local assemblies in municipalities in the South West and in Toplica District is on average 29% - this is 11% more than after 2008 elections. The Citizens Assistance Centres in Novi Pazar, Prokuplje and Žitorađa provided free legal aid for about 600 citizens. Having in mind that more than one third of all clients sought support for obtaining identity documents – a basic precondition for exercising any other civic rights – it is clear how big and positive this social change is.

Municipalities have always been most interested in infrastructure. In addition to creating new jobs and facilitating further investments – by preparing technical design for infrastructure projects that could bring about investments of 40 million Euro - through local social infrastructure projects, 680 children from the kindergartens’ waiting lists should be accommodated and energy efficiency for 4,500 pupils and staff in schools will be improved. The local communal infrastructure projects will create adequate hygienic conditions for 3,500 households, including some 800 Roma families in the settlements in Novi Pazar, Surdulica and Vranje. The local environmental infrastructure projects are expected to improve sanitary conditions and reduce health hazards for 5,000 citizens living in the vicinity of unregulated rivers and save on energy bills of up to 15%.

The Government of Serbia and the EU PROGRES donors – the European Union and the Government of Switzerland - have always placed the
sustainability of the Programme’s projects in the spotlight. That’s why the EU PROGRES provides support in capacity building of all direct beneficiaries to take ownership in project implementation while it maintains a monitoring and advisory role. This is good governance in practice, which is crucial for sustainability of actions. The excellence in implementation was acknowledged within the UNOPS, which implements the EU PROGRES, and the Programme was selected among four best projects globally.

It would be unfair to say that this has not been a challenging year. The severe weather conditions and the elections caused delays in implementation and in some cases almost brought all activities to a standstill for a couple of months. Lack of planning and technical design documents is also an obstacle to accelerated development. But, we are sure that with the partnerships created on the national level with the Ministries, on regional and local levels with development agencies, municipalities, civil society organisations and other similar programmes, the EU PROGRES will continue to mark good results, for the benefit of the entire population of the South and South West Serbia.

Graeme Tyndall
EU PROGRES Manager

EU PROGRES GRANT METHODOLOGY (FIG 1)
The grant methodology, which gives grantees the ownership over implementation of projects already gave good results: it “encouraged” respect of relevant Serbian laws, in the field of public procurements and constructions; it improved understanding of donors’ demands with regard to financial assistance; it introduced some international practices, such as the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC) contract modality; it helped municipalities to recognise the importance of the planning and technical documentation; it improved grantees’ project management skills.

INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT APPROACH (FIG 2)
Whenever appropriate, EU PROGRES applies integrated approach to development. This implies coordination and partnerships, within and outside the Programme, and implementation of a comprehensive set of activities, all with the aim to ensure rational use of resources and achieve stronger and more sustainable effects of interventions. Good example of this approach is Leskovac: EU PROGRES supported, in partnership with the City and relevant ministries, a range of projects, from development of planning and technical documentation, and infrastructure, to those enhancing governance and facilitating investments.
We believe that sustainable development is possible only if good governance principles are respected. These principles are closely linked to the way public institutions manage their resources and whether they provide their services efficiently, without abuse or discrimination.

Ambassador of Switzerland, H.E. Erwin Hofer

- Partnership projects between civil society and local government institutions, supported through the first round of Citizens Involvement Fund created 40 temporary and permanent employments, established services for local vulnerable populations, influenced governments to become more responsive to citizens needs and improved policy making on the local level.

- 30 projects recommended for funding in the second round of Citizens Involvement Fund; quality of applications was significantly higher than in the previous round.

- Citizens Advisory Services in Novi Pazar, Prokuplje and Žitorađa provided free legal assistance to more than 600 people: 35% for identity documents; 27% for social welfare; 12% for pension and unemployment; 10% for health-related cases.

- 12 municipalities of the South West and Toplica District established local gender equality mechanisms; Local Action Plan (LAP) for gender equality developed in all municipalities except Prokuplje; six municipalities assigned a local budget line for gender equality related activities for the first time, totalling more than 90,000 Euro.

- For the first time there was a joint project of the three National Minority Councils - Roma, Albanian and Bulgarian – supported by the EU PROGRES

- 18 municipalities were advised how to link good governance principles with their infrastructure projects.

During implementation of infrastructure projects, EU PROGRES provides advisory support to municipalities in redesigning some of local policies, regulations and practices in order to enhance the impact and sustainability of the project as well as to introduce a mini governance reform. For example, a new kindergarten, does not only mean a new building but also local regulations that will enhance transparency in the admission of children and strengthen parents’ participation. It is exactly this approach to implementation of different projects that singles out EU PROGRES among others.
Slavica is packing up her rucksack, as she will spend the weekend in the Centre Sun. “I really like going to the Sun; we learn, play and have fun there”. En route to the Centre, Slavica is greeted by a joyful friend, Cana: “Hooray! It’s Friday! Who else is coming along?” Slavica and Cana are beneficiaries of the educational-therapeutic Centre of the Cerebral Palsy Association Sun, which has started the programme “Breather” as a weekend support to children with disabilities and their families living in Ivanjica municipality.

“Children from rural areas, from socially and existentially impoverished families, as well as a large number of children from the town’s area whose parents don’t have babysitters, take part in this programme. For all direct beneficiaries of the programme, some 50 children, this means inclusion into activities of a wider community, socialisation, and an attempt at integration” Svetlana Glavinić, the Centre’s special education teacher said.

The pupils of the Elementary School “Milinko Kušić”, together with the volunteers of the youth branch of the local Red Cross, are often at the Centre. Together with children with disabilities, they draw, write, exercise, eat and rest. The experts employed at the Centre say children are most pleased when they go to cinema, theatre, playground or stroll around the town.

The results of the poll about the quality of given care show that as many as 97% of parents are fully content with the service. They highlight the importance of socialisation and positive change in daily routines. “My daughter Sandra always returns home happy, full of impressions. She asks for a lot of attention and energy and I sometimes need to have a rest so that I can meet all her needs”, Danijela Popović says.

The activities within the “Breather” programme are implemented during the weekend: the beneficiaries arrive on Fridays at 3 pm and leave on Sunday around 7 pm.

This pilot project is in line with the new Law on Social Protection. Due to extraordinary results, the Ivanjica Assembly adopted in December 2011 a decision vowing to continue financing this service after donors support from the EU and the Government of Switzerland, through EU PROGRES, ends.
One of the biggest challenges is provision of quality service to citizens. That's why the public administration has to be established on professional, responsible, and politically neutral pillars.

Ognjen Mirić, the Chairman of the EU PROGRES’ Steering Committee

- Citizens Assistance Centre opened in Trgovište while Bosilegrad and Crna Trava are under construction. Nine Centres received support for modernisation of services.
- Five municipalities identified for Foreign Direct Investment planning.
- Vranje Business Incubator Centre plans to employ 14 people.
- Three clusters identified for establishment: Pešter Plateau Agro, Radan Mountain Tourism and South Serbia Fruit.
- Vranje and Leskovac chosen for establishment of One Stop Shops. Two smaller Shops to be established in Novi Pazar and Ivanjica.
- Žitorađa database was updated with 980 new taxpayers from five villages and it is expected that municipal income will be increased by 1.5 million RSD.
- Vranje, Bujanovac, Surdulica, Novi Pazar and Ivanjica selected for Quality Management System certification.
- The number of urban planning documents prepared almost double compared to the envisaged.
- Specialised equipment delivered to the Urban Planning Directorates in Leskovac, Vranje and Novi Pazar.
- Pilot project for water provision identified for Vranje, Novi Pazar and Surdulica Roma settlements, covering some 800 families.
Many researches done in the past years have shown that the citizens are not content with the quality of service provided by the local administrations. Most citizens’ complaints related to the long queues while at the same time, the municipal administrations’ employees pointed that they spent working hours explaining and directing clients to the appropriate department.

Inhabitants and municipal employees in Trgovište should not have such problems in the future. The newly opened Citizens’ Assistance Centre offers, in one place, opportunity to obtain birth certificates, work booklets, notary services, submit requests for opening of shops or building permits, solve social claims (child allowance, disability allowance, maternity leave allowance, scholarships) as well as registration on the voting lists. Clients can also leave their suggestions or complaints about the work of the municipal administration.

“This project is in line with the Strategy of Public Administration Reform adopted and implemented by the Government of Serbia. The opening of the Citizens Assistance Centre improved the way of service provision, sharing of information and changes the relation between employee-citizen. Though this may sound like a small step, it is a step in the right direction and strategically speaking it goes towards adopting the highest European standards”, Graeme Tyndall, the EU PROGRES Programme Manager said.

The project activities included preparation of technical documentation, after which the building works were done: connecting two existing offices, widening of the entrance door to enable people with disabilities easier access and purchase of furniture and computer equipment as well as networking with the other offices in the municipality. European Union and the Government of Switzerland supported the works in Trgovište with 37,600 Euro, while the municipal contribution was 3,400 Euro.
The construction of this school is very important, above all for the children who will attend classes in better conditions. The European Union is currently supporting over seven hundred projects across Serbia, which are to improve the conditions for education, infrastructure, and contribute to economic development and opening of new jobs.

Ten inter-municipal and 30 small infrastructure projects are implemented. Small infrastructure projects are a good on job training in project management - municipalities have the ownership, EU PROGRES advisory and monitoring role. In addition they have immediate positive effect on lives of people: improved working conditions in schools and kindergartens by increasing energy efficiency in buildings (Preševo school with close to 2,500 pupils, kindergartens in Raška, Tutin, Ivanjica and Vladičin Han); upgrading sanitary conditions (school in Kumarevo, green market in Bojnik); improved water supply systems (Lebane, Trgovište), better medical services (Nova Varoš).

All activities regarding the support to landfills and recycling centres are in line with the National Waste Management Strategy.

The Leskovac Green Zone should facilitate investments of 5.5 million Euro and create about 970 jobs within the next three years. At least 200 local entrepreneurs (SME) will be engaged for logistic support to large investors and at least 4,000 agriculture manufacturers/registered farms will be able to increase their economic activity through business connections with major manufacturers in the Zone.

EU PROGRES support has influenced doubling of the projects in the SCTM SLAP database, from 147 in May 2010 to 342 in May 2012.

Eleven municipalities are getting support for development of technical documentation.

Inter-municipal projects increase capacity of municipalities for integrated infrastructure development as they improve awareness of the need for complex coordination with all stakeholders while meeting multiple legal requirements.

EU PROGRES consultants’ support resulted in shortening the time for preparation of tender documents from two months in some cases, to three-four weeks.
“Look at our new school building” we hear children cheering from the yard of the Elementary School “Radoje Domanović” in Kumarevo. “We even have computers! Do you know it rained in our classrooms in the past and that we only had outdoor toilet”, giggling kids ask.

The European Union and the Government of Switzerland, through the European Partnership with Municipalities - EU PROGRES, secured 100,000 Euro, while the City of Leskovac invested 40,000 Euro to build the new school. The old building, constructed after the World War II, was torn down while the new one meets all conditions for quality schooling.

“We decided to turn around the desks as it’s a better way to study the World Around Us subject. Previously, we really did not have much choice as the space was limited”, teacher Suzana Ilić Stojiljković says. “Children are hard working and they achieved very good results in municipal competitions in Serbian and Maths, even though they had to travel to the neighbouring village during making of the new school. Ever since we’ve been using this building we have good progress and next year we shall record even better results”, the teacher continues.

The village inhabitants evoke how they welcomed the demolition of the old building. “We were really scared when children went to school. We knew the isolation was poor, as soon as it rained we started to worry whether there’d be a flood, or whether the water pouring down the walls, on electrical installations, would cause fire” Nenad Pešić said. No one even dares to mention the possibility of infections, due to improvised and unhygienic toilets.

Kumarevo village is one of the few with increasing population, where a lot of young people remain at their households. The new school was much needed, as the number of children is growing. Currently, there are 50 pupils from grades 1-4, while in the autumn 16 first graders will start the school year. The new building, along with the pre-school classes, will also host the Agro Information Centre, where all interested can gain knowledge how to improve agriculture production.

“The future rests on youth, and this is our pledge for the better life of community”, European Union Ambassador Vincent Degert said at the opening of the school in April 2012.
EU PROGRES initiated exactly what we had hoped international organisations and programmes would - to hear and respond to community needs. That is a quality we didn’t have before. This Programme is helping local self-governments and the civil society to apply European procedures, it is helping us acquire the knowledge we need to work in keeping with EU standards.

Zibija Šarenkapić, the Director of the NGO DamaD

- 610 affirmative media reports about EU and Switzerland supported initiatives
- EU PROGRES website visited 28,528 times from July 2011-June 2012; seven blogs published, from different contributors, on a wide range of themes; established website section with reports in minority languages - Roma, Bulgarian and Albanian
- Four Programme Steering Committee meetings, including the first annual meeting, organised effectively gathering key local, regional, national and international stakeholders
- Three quarterly e-Newsletters prepared and each distributed to 1,000 email addresses
- Six quality media reports promoting gender equality published by the Sandžak Danas
- Organised ten high level functions including four on ambassadorial level
- Three community initiatives supported: Bosilegrad International Folklore Festival, the EU PROGRES Day in Novi Pazar, Celebration of the World Roma Day in Leskovac
- Students from 27 high schools submitted 119 art works on the topic “Serbia-Embracing Civilisations” and best 12 were chosen for the EU PROGRES calendar for 2012
- Municipal authorities vow to fight corruption, improve transparency in their work and reach higher levels of governance, during good governance campaign
- Seven branding projects within five branding plans selected for funding. All focus on economic/business development
REAL LIFE STORY

"... important, as we can accept ourselves and others and build good quality relationship", Dalida from Prijepolje says. Danilo from Prokuplje adds that it is necessary for everyone to "respect diversity in order to be able to function with each other", while Shemsije from Bujanovac claims that "diversity makes a country more interesting". 

Dalida, Danilo and Shemsije are three high school awardees whose artistic works are displayed on the EU PROGRES calendar for 2012. The jury, presided by the academic painter Zoran Krulj, chose 12 best works among 119 submitted by 27 schools from 25 towns in the South and South West Serbia.

"I’ve tried to present equality, which is nowadays often fettered by religion and nationality. I’ve painted a synagogue, the St Sava Church and a mosque. The topic was nice as I see the problems of being different every day. I did this drawing really fast," Danilo Cerović, the second grade pupil of Prokuplje Gymnasium said.

Shemsije Avdiu, the first grader from the Bujanovac High School "Sezai Suroi" also said inspiration came easily. "In my drawing I tried to represent people of different religions. Everyone is praying in their own way, but their aim is the same".

“I’ve decided to participate in this competition as I live in an environment which is truly an embrace of civilisations” Dalida Muškić from Prijepolje Gymnasium says, adding that her painting is a part of tradition of her town: “Sahat Tower, monastery Mileševa and the White Angel fresco are multi-ethnic characteristics and landmarks of Prijepolje”.

Professors didn’t have to work hard to motivate their students. "This kind of competition is useful as it stimulates in a number of ways, especially with the final exhibition of works, good prize and generating the feeling of belonging to a wide artistic family" professor Bojan Bogavac from Prijepolje said.

"The competition was valuable in that it awakens creativity among youth. The interest of pupils in high school Sezai Suroi was immense. I enjoyed their intra school competition before nominations, and understood what a great fun it was”, Xhevdet Dula, art professor from Bujanovac said.

The art competition “Serbia – Embracing Civilisations” was organised in order to support young artistic talents, as well as to promote cultural, ethnic, traditional and religious diversity of Serbia and Europe. Twelve winners received video cameras and photo cameras, while the best schools got funding for school equipment. One thing in common for all is that they are impatiently waiting for the new competition and a new opportunity to show their talent.
**Sustainable construction**

Students and teachers in Serbia are benefiting from new, environmentally friendly school buildings, which were funded by the European Union and Governments of Switzerland and Serbia to improve education in the country.

**UNOPS construction and project management expertise** meant that all renovations were sustainable in design, used local materials and labour and were delivered on time. This helps to drive development and contributes to a more positive image of the EU in the area.

**EU PROGRES Among the Best in the World**

EU PROGRES was declared among the four best United Nations Office for Project Services’ (UNOPS) projects worldwide for 2011. Eleven projects were nominated for the award, out of 1,000 implemented in 80 countries, and the winner was the project from the South Sudan. Along with EU PROGRES from Serbia, other finalists were from Afghanistan and Honduras.

This nomination is of great significance, as it demonstrates the importance and quality of the EU PROGRES intervention, particularly having in mind that the finalists work in extremely difficult and challenging conditions.

With the donor support of the European Union and the Swiss Government, EU PROGRES has so far entered into 137 grant support agreements to strengthen good governance, municipal management and development planning, infrastructure and branding of areas in 25 municipalities in the South and South West Serbia.

*This graph shows projects contracted by 30 June 2012, and it does not include all approved projects, called off projects, and some specific interventions such as purchasing IT equipment.*

137 projects were contracted by the end of the second year of EU PROGRES implementation, worth over six million Euro. So far, 44 have been successfully completed, while eight have been called off.
Good Governance

We are supporting the municipalities in improving their adherence to the principles of accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in their work and in increasing civil participation in decision-making and are thus creating important prerequisites for sustainable development.

Municipal Management & Development Planning

We are endeavouring to improve the quality of services municipalities provide their citizens and businesses and providing professional support to the design of planning documentation. We are sure that the effects of our endeavours will be long-term, because municipal staff are acquiring knowledge they will need for the further development of the municipalities after the Programme is completed as well.

Physical, economic & social infrastructure

We are taking part in the funding and implementation of municipal and inter-municipal infrastructure projects – which immediately produce visible results and improve the quality of life; we are working together with the local self-governments on the design of technical documentation requisite for attracting additional investments.

Public Awareness & Branding of Areas

Departing from the fact that positive communication facilitates faster and easier changes, the activities we are conducting within this Component simultaneously promote the potentials and build a positive image of South and South West Serbia, and raise public awareness of the socio-economic problems and the ways of resolving them.

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