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Protector of Citizens

Ombudsman

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**SUBMISSION OF THE PROTECTOR OF CITIZENS ABOUT
THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY-
BUILDING IN FOSTERING MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL
COOPERATION IN PROMOTING AND PROTECTING
HUMAN RIGHTS**

The Protector of Citizens actively participates in the implementation or direct use of the projects funded from international donations. Over the past 10 years, the Protector of Citizens participated in 36 projects supported by 20 donors. A short overview of most significant projects implemented by the Protector of Citizens follows, and these projects contributed both to capacity building of this National Human Rights Institution and to the improvement of cooperation with civil society organizations and other stakeholders in order to protect and promote human rights.

The project: Capacity building of the Protector of Citizens for issuing legal initiatives by offering independent expertise

From April 2015 to the end of December 2016, the Protector of Citizens implemented the project of capacity building of the Protector of Citizens for issuing legal initiatives by offering independent expertise, in cooperation with the House of Human Rights and Democracy which provided administrative and technical assistance. British Embassy in Serbia was the donor of this project.

Civil Society Organizations and scientific research organizations dealing with the promotion of human rights were engaged to submit to the Protector of Citizens the analyses of laws and bylaws, as well as of the international acts related to exercising human rights; which were ratified by the Republic of Serbia. 46 expert analyses were conducted from different fields: child rights, gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities, the rights of persons deprived of liberty and the rights of national minorities with the aim of strengthening the role of the Protector of Citizens as the National Human Rights Institution.

It is important to note that the number of legal initiatives submitted by the Protector of Citizens to the National Assembly increased by 10% by December 2016 i.e. by the second stage of project implementation.

The project: Promotion Of Human and Minority Rights through a More Intensive Contact of the Protector of Citizens with the Citizens

In June 2015, the Protector of Citizens successfully completed a two and a half year long project Promotion of Human and Minority Rights through a More Intensive Contact of the Protector of Citizens with the Citizens which was implemented with the financial support of the Royal Norwegian Government. In one of its parts, the project represented the extension of cooperation with the libraries within the framework of the project Electronic Access to the Protector of Citizens¹, with the additional components related to human rights promotion at the local level, as well as to establishing a more functional system of the Protector of Citizens for the electronic management of documents. The Project was implemented in cooperation with the Serbian Library Association and public libraries in 15 cities and municipalities all over Serbia, and following activities were carried out:

- Promotional activities were held at 15 local libraries, which formalized the cooperation with these libraries that would be the leaders of project activities at the local levels and from which the citizens can directly communicate via video link with lawyers in the Secretariat of the Protector of Citizens.
- By the end of 2014, the Protector of Citizens was addressed by 1372 citizens via the video link installed in the local libraries. 2382 citizens came to the libraries or made a telephone call to obtain information on the Initiative of the Protector of Citizens which was implemented in cooperation with the local libraries.
- In cooperation with the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID), research of the public opinion on the attitudes towards gender equality and the rights of vulnerable social groups (national minorities, LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities) and the perception of work of the Protector of Citizens was conducted; the results of the research were published on June 9th, 2014 within a public discussion organized on the occasion of presenting Annual Report of the Protector of Citizens for 2013.
- 15 round table discussions were held in order to initiate the dialog among important stakeholders at the local level on the perception of rights of vulnerable groups in public - their position and problems they were faced with.
- In cooperation with the Accessibility Audit Association, data collection on the accessibility of public facilities to persons with disabilities at the local level was completed. On the basis of the data collected, Accessibility Map, available on the website of the Protector of Citizens and containing the data on the physical accessibility of the facilities for wheelchair users, communication accessibility and availability of public services to persons with disabilities at the local level, was designed.
- Another research of the public opinion, presented in June 2015, on the attitudes towards gender equality and the rights of vulnerable social groups (national minorities, LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities) and the perception of the work of Protector of Citizens was conducted.

¹ From December 2010 to July 2012, the Protector of Citizens successfully completed a pilot project Electronic Access to the Protector of Citizens. The Project was implemented in cooperation with the Serbian Library Association, libraries and local self-government bodies in ten selected municipalities in Serbia, with the financial support of the Royal Norwegian Government. The project aimed at contributing to the improvement of citizens' rights through greater visibility and accessibility of the Institution for the citizens who live in smaller towns and municipalities in Serbia.

- A more functional electronic document management system was established with the aim to improve efficiency and transparency of the work of the Protector of Citizens;

The project: Capacity building of the Protector of Citizens to Effectively Monitor the Implementation of Deinstitutionalization

From September 2012 to March 2013, the Protector of Citizens completed a project of support to deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and with the support of Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations (TACSO) and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Serbia. The project itself was implemented in order to build the capacity of the Protector of Citizens, local authorities, civil society organizations and other stakeholders participating in this process, as well as to improve the position of persons with disabilities and monitoring the exercising of their rights guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The focus of the project was on the issues of transformation of residential institutions in which persons with disabilities are accommodated and following results were achieved during the project implementation:

- An expert working group of the Protector of Citizens which addresses legal aspects of deinstitutionalization was formed.
- A revision of the current legal framework in the area of deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities.
- The Report of European Expert Group for Deinstitutionalization with guidelines for transition from institutional care to community-based care was translated and promoted.

The project: Strengthening the Rule of Law, Raising Awareness on the Reforms in the Judiciary and Building the Capacities of Government Institutions, Civil Society and Independent Institutions for Identification and Prevention of Corruption

Since 2011, the Protector of Citizens has participated in the realization of a five year long reform program of the judiciary and the responsibilities of the Government implemented by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with the aim of strengthening the rule of law, raising awareness on the reforms in the judiciary and building the capacities of government institutions, civil society and independent institutions for identification and prevention of corruption. As an independent institution, the Protector of Citizens was the Beneficiary of the Project in the responsible government component which addresses the capacity building of independent institutions and support for their mutual cooperation, as well as the cooperation with civil society organizations. Following results were achieved during the project implementation:

- The capacities of the staff were strengthened in the field of keeping more efficient communication with the complainants and state administrative bodies, especially when handling more complex investigations.
- Internal operational procedures and practices in complaint handling, with a focus on the oversight and reporting procedures, were improved.
- Communication Strategy of the Protector of Citizens aiming to improve the communication with different stakeholders (citizens, state bodies, civil society organizations, media, etc...)

and increasing visibility and support of the public and the institutions to the work of the Protector of Citizens was developed.

- A plan for the promotion campaign of the principles of good governance among state bodies and the citizens was designed.
- In cooperation with Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM), a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of Recommendations by the Protector of Citizens in the field of good governance was established.
- The practice of regular meetings with the representatives of National Assembly Committees in order to further improve cooperation was established.
- Training in the field of human rights promotion and good governance principles was organized for 42 staff members of the Secretariat of the Protector of Citizens.
- An informative session for new Members of the National Assembly on the competences and the role of the Protector of Citizens and other independent institutions was held in July 2014.
- A training program for the advisors for the protection of patients' rights and local councils for health on competences and the role of the Protector of Citizens and other independent institutions in the field of healthcare protection was implemented.
- The skills of more efficient reporting of the staff members in the Secretariat of the Protector of Citizens were improved.

Twining project: Support to the Strengthening of the Ombudsman Office

From 2009 to 2011, the Protector of Citizens implemented a Twinning project Support to the Strengthening of the Ombudsman Office together with the Greek Ombudsman, The National Ombudsman of the Netherlands and European Public Law Center with the financial support of the EU. The project objective was to contribute to further development of internal capacities of the Protector of Citizens in performing the mandate and the mission in the field of human rights promotion and protection, as well as to develop a sustainable network of cooperation of the Protector of Citizens with all relevant organizations and institutions in both the country and the EU countries. The most important results achieved during two years of project implementation are the following:

- Mission and vision of the Institution were defined and organizational structure was improved in accordance with the best European standards and examples.
- Special Communication Unit aiming to ensure the publicity and visibility of the Institution's work at state and international level.
- The skills and knowledge of the staff in the field of complaint handling were improved.
- The capacities of the Institution in terms of human resources development and technical equipment were strengthened.
- A revision of rules and procedures which is to contribute to a more efficient complaint handling was conducted.
- More than 400 representatives of the community of experts (non-governmental organizations, Ministries, other governmental organizations, faculties, local ombudspersons, independent institutions and international organizations) were informed on the role, competences and the most important fields of work of the Protector of Citizens.

- The Institution of the Protector of Citizens was admitted to the European Ombudsman Institute, International Ombudsman Association and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children.
- Conditions were created for improving the cooperation of Ombudspersons Institutions at state, provincial and local levels.