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**MUNICIPAL ECONOMIC  
GROWTH ACTIVITY**

## **Czech beer, Croatian chocolate, Macedonian wine and Serbian kaymak as driving engines of local government progress**



While some may think that this is all about world conspiracy and global espionage other believe the official version that it is about efforts of local government units to reform and improve their work, but there is a gastronomical side, so to speak, of this story. So, let's take a look at it.

When a municipality that wants to provide more efficient service to its citizens and improve its work or introduce a new practice, visits some of its neighbors we may say that it is cross border cooperation in action.

Macedonian–Serb border. Venko Pasalski, the Mayor of Berovo, Macedonia, is fidgeting in its car getting ready for meeting with his old

Goran Ješić, Mayor of Indjija, successfully implemented a series of projects and introduced many novelties in his local government. Indjija has become a model of successful local government unit, recognized both in the country and the region. Does one of the most successful mayors in the region have some other reasons to smile?

friend. Mr. Pasalski is on his way to visit Vranje, a town in the south of Serbia. The formal reason for this trip is paying a visit to Citizens Assistance Center and Local Economic Development Office, the projects Vranje Municipality

implemented together with USAID. Briefcase is hiding additional reason for the visit. Mr. Pasalski promised a bottle of red wine to the Mayor of Vranje Mr. Miroljub Stojcic four years ago during a summer holiday in Budva when they met for the first time. In the meantime Vranje has, through USAID funded programs, become the role model to other municipalities when it comes to providing services. Their Citizens Assistance Center is one of the best in the region. Also, in cooperation with USAID funded program – Municipal Economic Growth Activity Vranje opened its Local Economic Development Office, established Business Improvement District, prepared an original and interesting promotional kit, they are developing their industrial park and working on the Master Plan... These are the reasons why Mr. Pasalski, who is investing big efforts in making his municipality become example of good practice for other municipalities in Macedonia, initiated this visit. The trip to Vranje and learning about their best practices turned out to be a collateral benefit. So the story goes on. The customs officer realizing that he had before him a group of representatives of one municipality paying a visit to another just mumbled „public servants“ and wished them happy trails.

Mr. Miroljub Stojcic was walking alongside his quest with a big smile showing his satisfaction. He finally got his Tikves wine. He is a great connoisseur of wine and Tikves wine is something special.

At the same time, on the other side of Serbia, the Mayor of Indjija is saying good bye to a delegation from Veles, Macedonia, and is getting ready for a new one. The successful cooperation with USAID and implementation of many innovative projects such as System 48, Training Center, Citizens Assistance Center, GIS, are reasons why so many representatives of cities in the country and the region come to visit Indjija. Only a few days ago he got a variety of chocolates produced by Kras from a delegation of USAID Croatia who are getting ready to replicate in Vukovar Indjija's wireless internet connection system.

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On the other hand we have a simple deal with Stojcic, Kras chocolate and Montenegrin prosciutto in exchange for Tikves red wine. The only thing missing here is actually Montenegrin prosciutto, but you'll see not for long.

Back to Indjija, Montenegrin delegation from Budva is visiting Indjija CAC and is getting ready to launch similar initiative in cooperation with Democratic Transition Initiative (DTI), a nongovernmental organization formed by people employed in USAID funded programs (OTI and SLGRP) to continue the implementation of related activities. Lazar Radjenovic, Vice- Mayor of Budva wants to improve the work and introduce the highest standards for their public administration. The Municipality of Indjija has the best service department in the region (unique by the fact it includes tax and cadastre departments in the CAC). Can anything make more sense than exchange of experience? And so little by little we got the information from the reliable source as to where to get the best Montenegrin prosciutto!

Epilog - Representatives of the ten MEGA municipalities (Vranje and Indjija are amongst them) shall visit the Czech Republic and get to learn about their best practices pertinent to local economic development. USAID introduced a concept of local economic development and strategic planning to the Czech Republic. The Czech domestic beer shall be accompanied by Montenegrin prosciutto, Serbian kaymak and Macedonian wine, and as for the dessert – Croatian chocolate!