

## **What will you be talking about at the celebration of the St Nicolas Day on December 19?**

On Friday night of December 19, you will be sitting with dear friends and relatives. Of course, you are together to celebrate the most important Patron Saint's Day, St Nicolas Day. Suddenly, as it always happens, someone started to talk about "big topics". Recession, world crisis, difficult year ahead of Serbia .... gloomy discussion without optimism continues. Yet, thoughts in your are going opposite direction: "Slow down, my friends. I have something to say":

"Things are not so bad. In fact, I am a moderate optimist" – everybody is looking at you with expectation. They have known you as a serious person. You are continuing:

"My colleagues and I were in Hyatt to see the competition "Invest in Serbia II". We were really surprised. This is the second time that the USAID's Municipal Economic Growth Activity (Program) is organizing such competition. 19 local governments participating in the Program presented their own tools and promotional materials for attracting new investments. You would not believe what did cities and municipalities do. People in local communities are trying very hard to attract investors and create new businesses and jobs".

The attention of the audience is slowly growing. You are now using a small trick by giving an answer to the question that is already in the air. Who was in the Hyatt Regency? "Apart from participants there were representatives of national and local media, Government representatives and mayors. Of course, representatives of US and other embassies, programs sponsored by USAID and European Union, American Chamber of Commerce and Foreign Investors Council came to the event together with businessmen looking for good investment opportunities. "

The host interrupts you for a second, trying to pour a drink. You have known him for years. This is a small sign that he is interested for the topic. "Let me say one thing more", you continue to talk, "this is the second time this competition has been organized. I will show you some of the promotional brochures we got this year. You wouldn't believe how much effort local people were investing in this". While taking the promotional material from your bag, you are continuing to talk: "Look how modern their booths looked". You are showing the pictures taken by your camera. The camera goes from one person to another.

"Yes, they look great" – someone added.

"In fact, when you read the brochures and other info material about concrete opportunities, it will be clear to you. Many cities and municipalities are preparing themselves for investments – proactive local governments, developed industrial zones, functional mechanisms for attracting and retaining businesses..."

"All right, all right" – the eternal pessimist interrupts you. "What exactly was evaluated yesterday?"

"Promotional brochure and one-page-info about the investment opportunities, communication skills of promoters and attractiveness of the booth itself".

The eternal pessimist does not want to give up. "What else did they prepare for competition?. Brochure, one-page-info, nice and pleasant faces at attractive booths are fine, but is this the way it is done in the world? "

You slowly begin to enjoy: “Yes, it is exactly how this is done in the world. In fact, there are now more local governments in Serbia that are prepared to present their investment potentials at the fair in Munich, Celje, Vienna and elsewhere, the same as any other municipality in the world“.

The pessimist is interrupting again: “All right, but this is not answer to my question, whether...”

You stop him in the middle of a sentence: “Brochure, one-page-info, booth and communication skills were evaluated at the competition, but, a lot of effort was put before the competition. All cities and municipalities have prepared their community profiles with all relevant information for investors. They created an inventory of available land, Brownfield and Greenfield sites, and improved Web-presentations. This is not all. Each LED Office made a presentation of investment opportunities of its community to the Panel of Judges. These scores were added to the scores gained at the competition.

“Stop, stop“, interrupts your host. “What are LED Offices“?

“Local Economy Development Offices are set up in 24 municipalities. Their task is to attract new investments, create new jobs and new businesses, as well as Public-Private-Partnerships. So far, the municipalities participating in the Program managed to attract about €400 million and create 6000 new jobs“.

“Local governments struggling for their own development! I like that“, replies your host. “Have the people working in LED Offices been awarded for a hard work they invested in this competition?“

You are already smiling: “At this competition, cities and municipalities were split in two groups. In the first group were local governments which joined the Program in 2006 (Subotica, Zrenjanin, Indija, Loznica, Novi Beograd, Kragujevac, Kruševac, Užice, Vranje, Prokuplje). The most successful three municipalities were awarded. They will be sponsored to exhibit at the Investment Fair in Hanover. The second group was made of 11 municipalities which joined the Program in 2008 (Vršac, Pančevo, Pečinci, Šabac, Smederevo, Čačak, Paraćin, Kraljevo, Arilje, Prijepolje and Lekovac). Three best municipalities will go on a study tour to Auburn, Alabama. Auburn is a municipality in the US which has achieved the best results in local economic development. Imagine how useful this visit will be for them. They will be able to see on spot many projects which are implemented with the MEGA Program in Serbia. A functional LED Office which supports the existing businesses, attracts new investors, develops Industrial Parks and Business Incubators.....in the end, the winners of the first competition were Zrenjanin, Indija and Loznica, the municipalities which are among the most successful local governments in Serbia in terms of new investments and new jobs. You will hear more about the winners of this year competition in the future.....“