Case Study on Bulgaria:
From Totalitarianism to Democratic Local Governance

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From 1989 to 1991, Bulgaria, like many other countries in Eastern Europe, went through a dramatic transition from totalitarian socialist rule to democratic governance. The transitional period required the creation of temporary governing structures that would incorporate more broad-based representation, on the one hand, but also would ensure some continuity in basic services to citizens.

The transitional experience was difficult, for a number of reasons. First, there was no clear recipe for making the transition, so the temporary structures were established more on the basis of faith than of proven experience. Second, the transition required new governing skills and attitudes that were not part of the country's "mentality." However, the establishment of temporary governing committees that paved the way for a new legal framework for permanent local government—plus subsequent attention to building a network of local government support organizations—provides a number of lessons about a successful local government transition.

1. Brief History of Local Self-Government

Bulgaria's system of local governance is shaped in part by several long periods in its history as a nation-state. The Bulgars who had occupied the region beginning in about A.D. 680 were invaded by the Ottomans in 1396. The area then remained a province of the Ottoman Empire until independence from Turkey was achieved after several rebellions, and under post-war pressure from Russia, in 1878. The next half-century of monarchic rule was marked by wars over disputed territory in the Balkans, an issue that also factored heavily in the country's alliances during the two World Wars. A Communist coalition took control of the government in 1944, and a Soviet-style People's Republic was set up in 1947.

In Bulgarian legal tradition, based on the first Bulgarian constitution—known as the Turnovo Constitution of 1879—local governments were a creation of the state and did not exist on the basis of their own intrinsic, inalienable rights. It was also accepted, however, that despite the establishment of the municipalities by the state, their authority derived from the people's sovereignty, an arrangement seen as complementary rather than contradictory. Such a concept of popular sovereignty is similar to state authority under democracy. All elements of local government—including the structure and organization of its bodies and its mechanisms of governance—were similar to those of the state. Hence, local government was a smaller replica of the state in terms of its major elements: community, territory, and power.

The 1879 constitution devoted a single provision to this matter that, however, spoke volumes. It laid down the principles of local government and self-government: "The land shall be divided for administrative purposes into counties, districts, and municipalities. There shall be adopted a special statute of this administrative division that shall be based on the principles of municipal self-governance."

The two subsequent constitutions of Bulgaria of 1947 and 1971 contained a full chapter on local government. However, the traditional principles underwent substantial changes: Administrative decentralization was effected within a system of Soviet-type councils, established as "local bodies of state power," which was at the heart of the entire static communist-state model. The Soviet system was distinctly different from the parliamentary system—i.e., the separation of powers and the direct election of council members. Rather, this system combined two branches of government: The 1971 Constitution expressly provided that "People's Soviets shall combine decision making and execution." Within the Soviet system, public entities were legitimized "from above." Higher people's Soviets directed and controlled lower ones and had the power to overrule what they saw as any unlawful or inappropriate act of the latter.

Bulgaria was divided administratively into 28 districts (*okruzi;* singular *okrug*). By 1987, however, the *okrug* bureaucracies had become far too complex and inefficient; the Todor Zhivkov regime[1] proposed a new reorganization of the local government structure, ostensibly to simplify the bureaucratic structure and to improve the operation of "people's self-management," the system by which people's councils nominally managed the state-owned enterprises. Thus, the *okruzi* were replaced by nine regions (*oblasti;* singular *oblast*), including the city of Sofia. The primary function of the new *oblast* governments was narrowed to assisting local workers' collectives. At the same time, municipalities and townships became somewhat more autonomous because the restructuring gave them some of the administrative power removed from the district level. All *oblasti* and municipalities were administered by popularly elected people's councils. Council members were elected to terms of 2½ years. The councils were responsible for all economic, cultural, and social problems within the area and supervised all government-owned enterprises. A tangible part of the Zhivkov regime's massive (and largely theoretical) plan for economic and political restructuring, the reorganization imitated restructuring plans in the Soviet Union.

The people's councils at all levels were run by executive committees—elected from among council members—that met frequently to implement the decisions of the council and to manage the administrative departments. The executive committees of municipalities with up to 10,000 inhabitants had not more than 9 members and those with

[1] Zhivkov was general secretary of the Bulgarian Community Party for 35 years, beginning in 1954.

more than 10,000 inhabitants, not more than 11 members. These committees had full executive power to act between sessions of the people's councils, in the same way as the State Council acted for the National Assembly in the Zhivkov-era national government. Each council was responsible to the council at the next higher level; financial planning was to conform to the goals of national economic programs. Local councils had authority over the People's Militia, or police, as well as over local services and administration.

In practice, all decisions were made by the Communist Party—the Secretariat. Decisions were communicated to the neighborhood party organizations, which asked their representative in the council to support the decisions, so that they would be legalized as council decisions.

At the beginning of 1989, groups of individuals with democratic values initiated the first environmental protests. In addition to the environmental groups, the so-called Club for Publicity and Democracy was established in Sofia and later in many other cities. This was the beginning of the dissident movement in Bulgaria. On November 10, 1989, the Politburo of the Communist Party made a decision to replace Todor Zhivkov as General Secretary of the party and as State Secretary, thus opening up the transformation of the political system. The first opposition parties were registered in December 1989. The Turkish party was registered in April 1990 after long debates about whether it was an ethnic party or not. (The law did not allow registration of political parties founded on ethnic principles.)

At the beginning of 1990, "roundtable negotiations" about the shape of the country's future governance started. All existing parties (the Communist Party, transformed into the Socialist Party and its satellite, the Agrarian National Union; newly formed political parties; public organizations; trade unions; religious groups; and prominent citizens, or the "citizen quota" of individuals not connected with political parties—e.g., scientists and professors) were represented at the roundtable. The most important decisions concerned (1) elections for a Grand National Assembly (a special temporary Parliament to consider fundamental constitutional changes and adopt a new democratic Constitution), (2) the restitution of land and property to the previous owners (before the nationalization in 1944), and (3) the temporary local government structure. In Western academic literature, the Bulgarian roundtable discussions are routinely depicted as a well-planned scheme devised by the Communist Party in an attempt to retain its power and stall the process of democratization. In fact, these discussions generated their own political dynamic and brought the participants into a genuine dialogue that resulted in the creation of several key institutions, such as the National Assembly; the presidency; and a competitive party system.

In June 1990, elections for the Grand National Assembly (400 members) were held. The 19th presidential decree, of April 13, 1990, created 200 single-member and 28 multi-member electoral districts. The Central Election Commission registered 40 parties and coalitions. The 400 seats (200 majority seats and 200 proportional seats[2]) were distributed among:

- Bulgarian Socialist Party – 211 (114 majority and 97 proportional)
- Union of Democratic Forces – 144 (69 and 75)
- Movement for Rights and Freedom – 23 (11 and 12)
- Bulgarian Agrarian National Union – 16 (0 and 16)
- Fatherland's Union – 2 (2 and 0)
- Fatherland's Labor Party – 1 (1 and 0)
- Independent – 2 (2 and 0)

The Socialist majority in the National Assembly elected a Socialist government. In September 1990, based on the decision of the roundtable to dismiss the old "Communist type" local government, the Grand National Assembly changed the old law regulating the "people's councils," dismissed the old local and regional people's councils and executive committees, and introduced temporary governments in the form of temporary executive committees at the regional and local levels. The primary purposes of these committees were to allow equal representation of all political parties at the regional and local levels and to prepare fair local elections.

2. Temporary Local Government

The original charge to the temporary local governments was to organize the first democratic local elections no later than March 1991. By then the Grand National Assembly was supposed to have approved a new Constitution, a new electoral law, and a new Law on Local Government and Local Administration.[3] However, this timeframe was too optimistic and the difficulties in the process of reaching consensus were underestimated. At the same time, the economy was in collapse after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of mutual economic aid (that is, the economic union among the Communist countries, as a result of which each country specialized in certain economic sectors).

The new Constitution was approved in May 1991, the new electoral law in August 1991, and the Law on Local Government and Local Administration in September 1991.

[2] In the proportional party system, the political parties decide on the name and order of candidates on a list. Citizens cast one vote for the list they prefer. The number of seats allocated to each party is based on the proportion of votes each list receives.

[3] This basic law on local government was to identify the responsibilities of the mayor as the executive authority at the local level, and of the municipal council as the legislative authority at the local level.

The first democratic local elections were held in late October 1991 together with the parliamentary elections. So in practice, the temporary local governments were in place for an entire year and played a significant role in the transition process at the local level.

2.1 Structure of the Temporary Local Government

The general rule in structuring the regional and municipal temporary executive committees was that none of the political parties could have a majority. Both types of committees consisted of a chair, deputy chair, secretary, and members. Regional committees had 11 total appointees. The total for the municipal committees depended on the size of the population:

- 7 members for municipalities with up to 50,000 population
- 9 members for municipalities with up to 100,000 population
- 11 members for municipalities with more than 100,000 population.

In November 1990, the Prime Minister started to appoint the members of the regional and municipal temporary executive committees, after consultations with the political parties represented in the Grand National Assembly. It took almost a month, because the process of reaching consensus was not easy.

The general practice was that the election results for the Grand National Assembly were taken into consideration. That is, the seats for the temporary executive committees were allocated among the parties based on the number of votes they received in the elections. In addition, one or two seats were reserved for prominent citizens (the citizen quota).

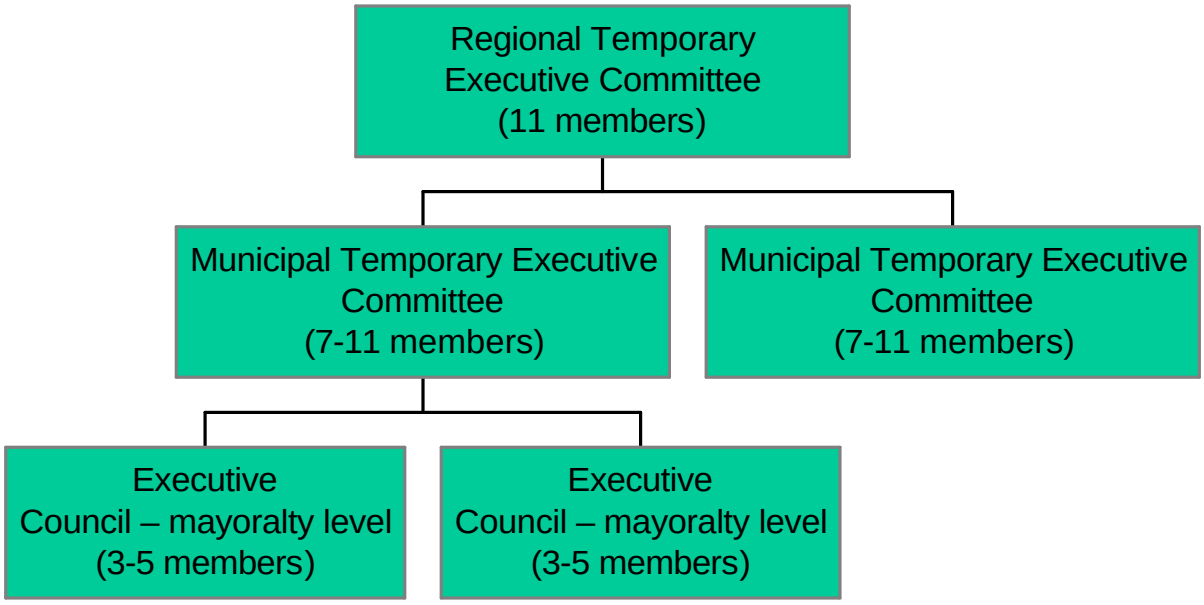
The regional and municipal executive committees selected their own chair, deputy chair, and secretary from among themselves, each representing a different political party. These officers headed the regional administration and local government on a full-time paid basis, and oversaw the work of the municipal departments, including those overseeing finance and price controls, spatial planning, social affairs, and education and culture. In effect, the chair of the municipal temporary executive committee served as mayor.

The municipal executive committees also appointed an executive council of three to five members at the mayoralty level (i.e., submunicipal territorial and administrative units)[4] after a consensus of the political parties at the local level.

[4] Usually a municipality consists of a city and its nearby towns and villages, grouped into several *mayoralties.* The municipal administration is responsible for administrative departments in all the mayoralties.

Exhibit 1 shows the relationships between a regional temporary executive committee and its municipal committees and mayoralty councils.

Exhibit 1: Relationships among regional and subregional government administrations



Executive councils at the mayoralty level were consultative bodies to the municipal temporary executive committees. The chair of the executive council acted as mayor of the mayoralty. The executive councils replaced the people's councils ?t the mayoralty level. They were responsible for street maintenance and cleaning, waste collection, public safety, and other tasks given to them by higher levels of government.

The municipal executive committees acted as a body, meeting at least once per month. They also played a role that had previously been allocated to the "people's councils"—that is, making policy decisions for the overall development of the municipality. Between meetings, the chair, deputy chair, and secretary of the municipal executive committee organized the implementation of these decisions and oversaw the work of the administrative departments.

The temporary executive committees had the same legal rights regarding local governance as their predecessors under the Communist system. The regional and municipal administrations remained the same—same structure, same people, same principles of work. The heads of municipal departments were mainly leaders of the Communist Party. Their job was more to implement party policy than to manage the departments.

In March 1991, to continue the process of change, the Council of Ministers made a decision about the reorganization of the regional and municipal administrations. The heads of departments, who were representatives of the Communist Party, had to be dismissed and the temporary executive committees had to introduce a new administrative structure, bearing in mind the main responsibilities of the regional and municipal administrations. In a way, for the first time an opportunity was granted to decide locally on the administrative structures. Thus, the executive committees adopted structures matching their own needs—a different number of experts, or bigger departments for priority areas. In this way, a municipality with many mayoralties and many schools might have a larger education department, for example. The heads of the departments were appointed after a consensus among the political parties.

Up to this point, the main responsibilities of the "permanent" municipal administrations had been: finances and control over prices; coordination of the economic activities of companies, organizations, and citizens; agriculture and the food industry; state and municipal property; social welfare, health care, education, culture, and employment; urban development, public works, and land management; administrative and legal services; preparation and implementation of elections; rule of law and public order; and military accounting/reporting, mobilization readiness, and civil defense. It became obvious that the Communist Party was controlling almost all spheres of economic and social life. All decisions of the municipal temporary executive committee had to be sent to the district attorney's office for an assessment of the legality of the decisions, and to the regional temporary executive committee. Often the district attorney personally attended the meetings of the municipal temporary executive committee to observe the work of the committee and to ensure that all decisions were legal.

2.2 Building New Skills

The new administrative structures were an opportunity for new experts to be appointed. Most experts working in the administrations had been members of the Communist Party. This meant a great challenge for the new parties because they had few skilled managers with administrative experience to take leadership positions. At the same time, it was an opportunity mainly for young people to start getting experience. During the Communist era, it was almost impossible to obtain a leadership position without being a member of the Party. Thus, most companies and services were under the control of the Communist Party. There were numerous cases in which the former (Communist) managers sabotaged the decisions of the temporary executive committees or would not provide needed information or expertise.

The relationships between the political parties and the governing institutions changed. Because the institutions had been controlled and instructed by the Communist Party for so long, many people found it difficult to accept that the Party no longer had a

leading role, that interactions should be based on rule of law, and that management decisions should be made by individuals from different political parties. Personal responsibility was a difficult choice.

But in the smaller municipalities, the Communist Party continued to influence the process at the local level. The main reasons were that the Party had a long history of ruling experience, information, well-prepared experts, party discipline, long-term plans for development, well-established networks, and means to influence and manipulate public opinion. The Party controlled the media, trade unions, and public organizations.

Because the other parties were newly formed, they lacked organizational, administrative, and management skills; did not have clear party platforms; and lacked information and clear ideas for long-term development. They had few individuals prepared to take leading positions. The party leaders were so busy setting up the agenda at the national level that local authorities were left to perform as the local situation dictated. So most of the decisions of the representatives of the Union of Democratic Forces (the coalition of the opposition parties) were made based much more on intuition, emotion, willingness for change, and enthusiasm than on knowledge, experience, and long-term vision. There were cases when the law was not respected, as had often been the case under Communism; and there were attempts to advance party or individual interests before the public interest. It was not easy to introduce a new political culture and new behavior where there was no example to follow. Some people joined the opposition parties to get their own problems solved, and were far less interested in changing the political system and creating new relationships among institutions; between institutions and citizens; and among institutions, citizens, and businesses.

As noted above, the temporary executive committees had the same legal rights as their predecessors. The central government (i.e., the Socialist government) started to transfer new responsibilities to them between March and October 1991, but without modifying the legal base or providing resources. It was mostly done to discredit the legitimacy and the capability of the temporary executive committees to manage problems, because the local committees included members from the opposition. It was extremely difficult to manage new relationships and responsibilities under the existing legislation. This continued to be a problem even after the Law on Local Government and Local Administration was adopted in September 1991, because legislation concerning other areas of responsibility—such as municipal property, water supply, and agricultural land management—had many contradictory requirements and was not changed until later.

The decision to introduce a temporary local government structure was a top-down one (although it resulted from the roundtable discussion at the national level), and the

public's awareness about this change was very low. None of the political parties put any effort into increasing the public's awareness, mainly thinking that its main function would be to organize the first democratic elections. In reality, as noted, these temporary local governments acted for a year, during a period of severe crises—lack of food, fuel, medicine, building materials, etc. A "coupon system" was introduced in many municipalities to ensure equal access to basic food products. One good practice was to establish a consultative council, with representatives from different political parties and citizens' leaders, to observe, monitor, and even make decisions about the distribution process. This approach limited the opportunities for manipulation and fraud.

The temporary governments created an opportunity to start the process of changing the management mentality at the local level:

- The temporary executive committees had to *search for consensus*. While it was relatively easy to implement the command system by force, it was not easy to dismantle it through political debate, persuasion, and compromise.

- The representatives of the opposition parties had to *gain knowledge and administrative experience in practice*—learning by doing. This period gave a lot of young members of the new parties a chance to prove themselves in action, to become popular, and later to be elected as mayors or council members.

- *New relations between the economic entities* were established based not on party discipline, but on efficiency, real cost of services, and independence from the Communist Party management programs.

- *New attitude toward the rule of law* – The performance of the temporary executive committees was monitored by all political parties and by the district attorney.

- *Equal access to services regardless of party affiliation* (until then, Communist Party members were in a privileged situation).

- *Increased demand for training, new professional and management skills, and knowledge of the legal framework.* Experts from the administration were expected to have a higher level of skills and to generate ideas for solutions in their respective areas, while the members of the executive committees needed more managerial skills as well as knowledge about the legal environment. In other words, they were expected to provide options for solutions, not just to implement orders. The members of the temporary executive committees also had to bolster their positions and to convince the rest.

- Citizens started to realize that knowing the party leader was not the way to receive a service; they had to *justify their need for a service* or provide requested documents.

In general, the breakdown of the old system was not only a political process, which sought to modify the matrix of power in society, but also a true cultural revolution. The actual difficulties for effective decentralization were rooted in the culture as much as in politics or in the administration.

2.3 First Democratic Local Elections

The Constitution adopted in May 1991 defines Bulgaria as a parliamentary republic with local self-government. As noted, in September 1991, the Grand National Assembly adopted the Law on Local Government and Local Administration and a law on electing members of the National Assembly, representatives of new local governing bodies called municipal councils, and mayors. In October 1991, elections were held for members of the National Assembly, municipal councilors, and mayors of municipalities and mayoralties. There were no elections at the regional level. The regional administrations were deemed to be deconcentrated structures of the central government and regional governors were appointed by the Council of Ministers.

The municipality is now the basic administrative and territorial unit in Bulgaria. According to the Law on Local Government and Local Administration, each municipality is a legal entity and has the right to own property and to have an independent municipal budget. A dual system of power exists at the municipal level:

- The *municipal council* is the highest-level decision-making body. Members are elected at large on a proportional basis with party lists for a period of 4 years. The size of the municipal council depends on the number of inhabitants of the municipality. The numbers tend to be large—for example, municipalities with populations between 50,000 and 75,000 have 33 council members.

- The *mayor* is the highest-ranking executive officer of a municipality, elected by direct popular, majority vote with a term of four years. The municipal council, acting on a motion made by the mayor, elects one or more *deputy mayors* by secret ballot. The election is made by a simple majority of more than half of the councilors. During their terms of office, the mayor and deputy mayor cannot participate in the leadership of political parties or engage in commercial activities as defined by the Commercial Code.

Elections for municipal councilors and mayors are carried out under public control and the process is guaranteed by law, which requires transparency of the electoral bodies' actions. The Central Electoral Commission monitors the legality of actions taken

by the local commissions and publishes the results of the vote for the whole country in a special bulletin.

Every citizen of the Republic of Bulgaria who has reached the age of 18 at least two months before the election has the right to vote. According to the electoral rules of organization and procedure, voters must reside in the municipality in whose election they plan to vote. The right to vote in local elections is stipulated in the Law on Local Elections.

Citizens' electoral rights are tied to the voter rolls. These lists are assembled by the municipal administrations, where the public register is kept; they are printed from centralized databases and are signed by the mayor and the secretary.

2.4 Local Government Matures

In November 1991, the first democratically elected National Assembly in Bulgaria took office. Intensive changes in the legislative environment and relations between institutions started.

It is important to realize that the country has been in the process of virtually turning the whole society and political and economic system upside down. What was once decided by a very few people at the top of the system is now decided by many people at the bottom of the system. Where everyone worked for the collective interest, now many work to satisfy their own interests. Where people were afraid to meet, express their opinions, and protest the actions of the few, now many are willing to organize, demonstrate, and demand to have their views heard. The interaction of economic, political, and cultural forces is very complex and the forces must be seen as mutually reinforcing. Economic and political reforms have to be managed in parallel. The cultural dimension of building democratic values must also accompany the reforms so that the public understands why and how the changes are occurring. As pointed out earlier, whereas it was relatively easy to implement the command system by force, it is not easy to dismantle it through compromise. Political experience to act in the new environment has been lacking.

The newly elected local governments faced even more difficulties than the temporary governments. The citizens' expectations were very high and they were focused on the mayor, as directly elected by them. The municipal councilors elected on a proportional basis from the party lists represented more the views of their political parties than those of the citizens. It was extremely difficult to establish consensus on long-term policy because the society was highly politicized. The central government, busy with its own problems, did not help local governments manage their new responsibilities. There was no experience or practice that could be followed. Everything was new. The country

was still quite closed in terms of international relations, and if there was information on foreign experience, it was at the national level. There was no information about local government experience abroad.

The need to exchange information and experience, to present municipal interests before the central government, and to have a common policy on various issues led some mayors to organize regional associations of municipalities. The first three regional associations were founded in May 1992, half a year after the first democratic elections, in the border regions. There the problems were significant because of the relative isolation from the political and economic centers, the lack of previous public investment, and the fact that the municipalities were too small to manage on their own. The mayors were the first to realize that they had common problems despite differences in their political affiliation.

But this type of partnership was still not possible at the national level. Two national municipal associations were established along political lines, but neither of them was strong enough to represent the interests of local government. They soon ceased to exist.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started to support the regional associations technically and financially at the beginning of 1994.

In May 1995 the Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR) was established, after a successful lobbying campaign by the most active mayors for changes in the Law on Local Government and Local Administration, based on their practical experience. The FLGR is a nongovernmental organization that bills itself as an "independent professional resource center, supporting local democracy." The FLGR's mission has evolved to offer customized information, expertise, and assistance; to encourage innovations in local self-government; to act as a mediator; and to build a broad network of domestic and international partners.

In December 1996 the National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) was established. It focuses mainly on negotiations with the central government for improvement of the legislative environment for local self-government, particularly on fiscal decentralization. Since its founding, the NAMRB has had 100 percent voluntary local government membership. It has become a powerful lobbying force and a source of valuable information to its members. It has also become a model for other municipal associations throughout southeastern Europe.

Soon afterward, several professional associations were formed—for example, membership organizations of financial officers, public relations specialists, municipal secretaries, chairs of municipal councils, and legal advisors. All of them are financially

supported by USAID. Their organizational development was and is still supported by USAID's Local Government Initiative and the FLGR.

This network of support organizations is the biggest asset of local governments in Bulgaria. It represents local government interests at the central level and abroad, collects and disseminates information and experience, provides professional training and development, and stimulates citizen participation and community development.

This network has become a vital part of the ongoing public debate about the evolution of local government in Bulgaria. The main topics in this debate include clarifying central and local roles for effective decentralization; building an open and transparent process for policy formulation; strengthening the democratic nature of municipal councils; and building administrative capacity to respond to the challenges of greater decentralization.

3. The Role of Foreign Assistance

The process of fundamental change from a command system implemented by force, to a democratic/participatory one based on political debate, is a true cultural revolution. A lot of effort is needed to change the mentality and behavior of elected officials and citizens. One quick and sustainable way to build local capacity and multiply the effect of pilot programs or projects is to build a network of local support organizations—membership organizations, think tanks, and professional associations—working in support of local government. In Bulgaria, the most effective assistance has included the following.

- Training in general management, human resource management, strategic planning, programming and project preparation, conflict-resolution skills, relations with citizens and media, local economic development.

- Practical information dissemination – case studies, law commentaries, examples of local ordinances, Q&A on practical questions, exchange of good practices.

- Financial support and technical assistance for project implementation and better service provision.

- Colleague-to-colleague exchange of experience – twinning relations between cities based on peer-to-peer exchange of know-how, practices, and expertise in concrete areas.

- Demonstration of participatory practices – communicating information about all local decisions to citizens to increase the legitimacy of and support for the new local

governments, generating community-based recommendations and project ideas, preparing a long-term development strategy.

- Support for advocacy for policy change at the national level, building of coalitions, and maintenance of dialogue between central and local governments on the decentralization process and ongoing reforms.

- Building the capacity of grassroots organizations and issue-based groups to advocate for their needs, and to identify and implement community initiatives.

4. Lessons Learned

The Bulgarian experience offers a number of lessons about the transition from totalitarian government, characterized by highly centralized, party-driven structures, to democratic local governance.

- **Temporary local structures must be established along multiparty lines to be seen as legitimate:** Every effort must be made to ensure that temporary structures are broad-based and that their decisions are the result of negotiation and consensus. Multiparty representation ensures that negotiation among local interests replaces decisions dominated by a central party.

- **Democratic local governance changes the decision process:** Instead of simply implementing decisions made higher up, local officials must acquire the capacity to make decisions based on local interests and needs. They must learn to take the initiative rather than simply execute. This represents a significant change in attitude and requires a new set of skills.

- **New managerial skills:** Local decision making requires not only local initiative, but also new managerial skills—that is, the ability to make transparent decisions based on effectiveness of services and efficiency of public resources. These requirements generate an enormous need for professional training across all local government functions.

- **Need for public awareness:** If the general public's perception of government is based on a highly centralized model, significant efforts must be made to raise awareness about the role of local government and the role of citizens in local government. Without this, citizens continue to perceive local government as an arm of central government rather than as a body that can take initiative to solve local problems. Local government's ability to use the media is critical in this process.

- **Difficulty in building mechanisms for citizen involvement:** Even with awareness campaigns, citizens may not easily understand their rights and responsibilities under democratic local government because they are used to being told what to do and forced to participate. Therefore, they are skeptical—even cynical—about opportunities to influence local decisions. As a result, local governments must be very proactive in establishing mechanisms for citizens to participate and in seeking citizen involvement.

- **New intergovernmental relations:** The relations among levels of government must be reframed from control to guidance and oversight. Central decision makers may have difficulty acknowledging and respecting local decision-making authority and establishing transparent relationships.

- **Focus on the entire system:** Developing strong local government is not just a matter of creating strong individual local governments. The entire network of institutions that support local government—providing information, training, and advocacy—is necessary, even in the short run.