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PRESS RELEASE

Novi Pazar, Sombor and Veliko Gradište the Most Transparent Local Governments in 2023

Belgrade, October 13, 2023 – Novi Pazar, Sombor and Veliko Gradište are the most transparent local governments in 2023 according to the Local Transparency Index published today by Transparency Serbia, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Since 2015, the Index has been measuring the transparency of all 145 local governments and 25 city municipalities in Serbia and tracks trends over time.

“These three local governments worked hard to increase transparency in their operations... And I sincerely hope that other local governments can, and will, apply some of those changes and improvements to better serve their own communities – because as we know – there is always room for improvement,” said Ms. Brooke Isham, USAID Serbia Mission Director.

As in 2022, the strongest overall performers were the cities of Novi Pazar and Sombor, with respective scores of 94 and 84. They are joined by the municipality of Veliko Gradište in third place, with a score of 82. One of the most concerning trends is a decrease in transparency in the work of local self-government bodies in the biggest cities in Serbia (Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad), which serve the largest population and manage the largest local budgets.

The 2023 results showed higher transparency scores in almost two thirds (65%) of municipalities, compared to 2022. The most marked improvements concern local budgets and publication of information booklets. On the other hand, a third of municipalities registered lower scores compared to 2022. The most critical decline concerns public procurement and is related to legislative changes in 2020 that require local governments to publish information about procurements only on the centralized electronic Public Procurement Portal and no longer on local websites. The work of local parliaments and councils remains the least transparent among governance bodies.

“The importance of transparency for the prevention of corruption cannot be overstated. At the same time, it is equally important to have in mind that even the highest level of transparency does not warrant that corruption will not occur – it just facilitates the identification of potential corruption risks. Transparency Serbia is glad that the new draft national Anti-Corruption Strategy recognizes both the importance of transparency of local governments and the Local Transparency Index as a tool to measure it. We would be even more glad if good practices that we identified in some cities and municipalities are replicated on the national level, in particular when it comes to data on budget spending and publishing of data on small value procurements,” said Mr. Nemanja Nenadić from Transparency Serbia.

For more information about Transparency Serbia, please contact Zlatko Minić, Research Coordinator, at 063 252 949 or zlatkobeta@gmail.com. For more information about USAID, please contact Mirjana Vukša Zavišić at 065 316 4530 or mvuksa@usaid.gov.

Since 2001 USAID has invested more than \$914 million to stimulate economic growth, strengthen the justice system, and promote good governance in Serbia.

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