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## U.S. TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### **USTDA GRANT SUPPORTS BULGARIAN TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT**

SOFIA, BULGARIA (February 5, 2009) – Fostering the development of a nationwide information and communications technology (ICT) network in Bulgaria is the goal of a USTDA grant awarded today to the State Agency for Information and Communication Technology (SAITC). The grant will fund a study that will evaluate the economic and technical feasibility of developing a network that will ultimately connect all local and national government entities, enabling Bulgaria to comply with EU administrative standards.

The \$390,180 grant was conferred in a signing ceremony at SAITC's office in Sofia. U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria Nancy McEldowney and SAITC Chairman Plamen Vatchkov signed the grant agreement on behalf of the U.S. and Bulgarian governments, respectively. SAITC Advisor Roumen Trifonov and Senior Commercial Officer Scott Pozil, from the U.S. embassy in Sofia, signed as witnesses to the grant agreement.

The current lack of interoperability between ICT systems at various government entities in Bulgaria hinders interagency cooperation, thus reducing the quality of public services and increasing costs. Under a new e-governance law, approved by the Bulgarian Parliament in June 2008, strong requirements for interoperability among administrative information systems, as well as for network and information security, have been introduced. In addition, the Government of Bulgaria has identified the creation of a national network as one of its top priorities under its e-government program.

In a preliminary move to unify government networks, the SAITC was mandated to expand its present network and to evolve it into a National State Network for communications between ministries, regional authorities, and municipalities. The network will also provide core ICT infrastructure for broad public access to e-government services. The grant awarded today will further this effort by funding the development of a roadmap for expanding the SAITC network and unifying it with other ICT networks operated by various government agencies.

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Today's grant reflects USTDA's ongoing commitment to the development of the ICT sector in Bulgaria. In the past seven years, the agency has funded four orientation visits that brought senior Bulgarian officials to the United States to learn about cutting-edge U.S. ICT equipment and services that could be applied in meeting Bulgaria's priorities for technological and procedural improvements in ICT infrastructure, emergency management and e-government services. To date, over \$18 million in U.S. exports by Microsoft, Cisco, Tumbleweed, Hewlett Packard, and IBM for consulting and training services and various hardware and software products are attributable to the contacts made during these USTDA-sponsored visits.

The opportunity to conduct the USTDA-funded study for SAITC will be competed on the Federal Business Opportunities (FBO) website. A link to the FBO announcement will be posted to USTDA's website at [www.ustda.gov](http://www.ustda.gov). Interested U.S. firms should submit proposals according to the instructions in the FBO announcement. SAITC will select the U.S. contractor that will complete the study.

The U.S. Trade and Development Agency advances economic development and U.S. commercial interests in developing and middle-income countries. The agency funds various forms of technical assistance, early investment analysis, training, orientation visits and business workshops that support the development of a modern infrastructure and a fair and open trading environment. USTDA's strategic use of foreign assistance funds to support sound investment policy and decision-making in host countries creates an enabling environment for trade, investment and sustainable economic development. In carrying out its mission, USTDA gives emphasis to economic sectors that may benefit from U.S. exports of goods and services.