



Modernising the Capacity of the Assembly of the Republic of Albania

PROJECT BULLETIN 2003 ANNUAL SUMMARY

THE MODERNISING THE Capacity of the Assembly of the Republic of Albania project was launched by the OSCE Presence in Albania in 2002 with funding from the Dutch government. After having observed the workings of the Assembly since 1997, the Presence embarked on the project as a means of strengthening the one institution of the country that embodies the democratically expressed will of the people.

The project has three main components: (1) training for MPs and their staff, including the creation of a permanent training capacity within the Assembly; (2) creation of a research and advisory capacity to support the work of MPs and their committees; (3) support for outreach activities to promote greater contact between the public and their elected representatives. A main theme running through the project is strengthening the Assembly's role in the annual state budget process.

The project enjoyed considerable success in 2003 as the number of its activities expanded in response to the progress of certain initiatives. The project has been able to foster a sense of partnership between itself and the Assembly, and the commitment and enthusiasm shown by the project's partners in the Assembly have been a critical element in this relationship. During the past year, the project focused in two main directions: continuing its work with the Committee on

Economy, Finance and Privatisation to support the development of recommendations for amending the Organic Law on the Budget, launched at the Budget Conference in November 2002; and continuing the initial administrative staff training cycle begun in December 2002.

At the end of 2003, the 55-nation Permanent Council of the OSCE updated the mandate of the Presence to reflect better its current activities and define more clearly the areas in which its continuing work in Albania should be directed. Given the results achieved both by the project and by other Presence work with the Assembly of a legislative nature, the revised mandate now specifically encompasses Presence support to the Albanian Assembly.

During OSCE Permanent Council meetings on Albania held on 26 November 2003 and 26 February 2004, both the European Union and the United States commended the Presence's parliamentary support project. In its latest statement, the United States referred to the candid description given by the Albanian delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the OSCE PA's Winter 2004 Session on the working environment of their parliament [which] "made it clear that the Presence's parliamentary programs are very much needed." The European Union welcomed the project's planned work with the Committees on Public Order and Defence and called for the prioritisation of the work of revising the Rules of Procedure.



Albanian parliamentary delegation at the Portuguese Assembly, November 2003
Left to right: Eric Filipink (OSCE), Mustafa Muçi, Vangjel Dule, Anastas Angjeli, Jozefina Topalli, Ilir Zela, Fatmir Mediu



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

The Budget Process: Economy and Finance Committee

MTEF Workshop

Together with the Committee on Economy, Finance and Privatisation and the Research on Economic Policy Implementation and Management (REPIM), the technical advisory group to the Ministry of Finance, the project organised a workshop on 16 February on the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). The purpose of the workshop was to emphasise the importance of the Assembly's role in managing public expenditure through the use of the MTEF expenditure guidelines, which indicate plans for government expenditure over a three-year period.

Budgetary Issues Study Visit

In mid-March, the project organised a study visit to the parliaments of Finland, Sweden and Poland in order for the members of the Economy and Finance Committee to gain insight into the annual budgetary process of these countries to aid in fostering the development of an action plan aimed at strengthening their role in the Albanian budgetary process. Particularly remarkable was the transparency of the process and the extent to which the governments in these countries kept the budget committees informed of the budget's development.



Minister of Finance Kastriot Islami (second from right) describes NSSD to Chairman of the Economy and Finance Committee Ylli Bufi (third from right) and other committee members, 18 April 2003

The Ministry of Finance discussed the NSSD with the Assembly for the first time in April 2003 at a seminar sponsored by the project, leading the committee to demand a larger role for the Assembly in the preparation, revision and oversight of the NSSD.

NSSD Seminar

In partnership with the Ministry of Finance, the project organised a seminar in April on the National Strategy for Socio-Economic Development (NSSD) to define the Assembly's role in the strategy's implementation and oversight. Essentially a national economic development plan, the NSSD was officially launched in November 2001 after 18 months of development. This seminar marked the first time that the Albanian government discussed the detail of the NSSD with the Assembly.

State Budget Law Roundtable

A second budget roundtable, following that of November 2002, was organised by the project and the Economy and Finance Committee on 16 June with the participation of members from other parliamentary committees as well as government budget experts. The roundtable provided a forum to summarise the conclusions of the previous seminars and to discuss the results of the study visit in order to agree on recommendations for amendments to the Organic Law on the Budget. The committee will continue communicating with the Ministry of Finance in 2004 as the bill is finalised so that the changes to the budget process can be implemented in 2005 for the drafting of the 2006 budget.

"Model Committee" Room

At the request of the Secretary-General, the project reconstructed the Economy and Finance Committee meeting room as a "model" committee premises, including the installation of a state-of-the-art sound system to facilitate the recording of committee meetings, which will be integrated into a direct audio-visual feed to the media room in 2004.

Support for other committees

Defence Committee and Committee on Public Order and SHISH

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) launched a joint initiative with OSCE missions in Southeast Europe to support parliamentary committees responsible for security-related issues. As a first element of this co-operation, the project co-ordinated the Albanian translation of a handbook recently published by DCAF and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Principles, Mechanisms and Practices*, launched at a conference in Tirana in February 2004. The project is supporting committee staff training in the coming year.

Foreign Affairs Committee and Ad hoc Committee on European Integration

During its 2002 OSCE Chairmanship, Portugal expressed interest in Albania's reform process aimed at achieving eventual NATO and EU membership. Together with the Portuguese Delegation to the OSCE, the project organised a visit for Albanian deputies to the Assembleia da República in Lisbon on 11–14 November. The Albanian delegation included deputies from the committees on Foreign Affairs, Economy and Finance, Legal and Constitutional Issues, and the ad hoc Committee on European Integration. The study visit focused on the institutional and legislative reform undertaken by the Assembleia da República during Portugal's own reform process and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

The study visit concluded a number of important recommendations:

- the ad hoc Committee on European Integration should become a standing committee as a sign of commitment to the integration process
- a structural change in the Assembly is needed for greater oversight of budget implementation
- greater institutional independence is required for the Assembly, particularly in the planning, preparation, and implementation of its budget

The project will work with the delegation to support these recommendations in 2004.

Budget recommendations

At the conclusion of the second budget roundtable, the Economy and Finance Committee recommended the following for consideration by the Ministry of Finance:

- The Assembly should have a formal role in reviewing the NSSD, its annual Progress Report, and the MTEF
- Synchronisation of the state budget and local government budgets should be improved
- Assembly oversight of budget should be improved by requiring submission of budget bill on 20 October annually (providing an additional month's review time)
- A special structure in the Assembly for monitoring and controlling the budget's implementation should be established

Parliamentary Administration: Staff Training

The project completed an initial cycle of introductory level training courses designed to strengthen the professional skills of the administrative staff. The Albanian National Training and Technical Assistance Resource Centre (ANTTARC) conducted the training.

Team Building, Office and Time Management

The initial cycle of interactive training seminars designed to focus on general concepts of good management had begun in December 2002 with the first session on Communication Skills. On 8–9 and 12–14 January, courses were taught on Team Building and Office and Time Management, respectively. The courses stimulated discussion on a number of issues, such as the need for standardised internal documents and the establishment of concise job descriptions for all staff.

Conflict Management

On 4 April, the project conducted a training course on Conflict Management specifically targeted to the senior staff and committee secretaries to impart the skills necessary to mediate and resolve disputes that might occur in the workplace.

Stenography

In response to the request for more specialised, job related training, the project is currently funding a five-month long stenography course that was developed by the Personnel Department and is being delivered by a staff expert. The course participants include the secretaries for parliamentary committees and groups, staff members responsible for transcription of plenary sessions, and those who take notes in meetings with foreign dignitaries.

Training Impact Evaluation

In order to assess the results of the training and gauge the extent to which the administrative staff are incorporating the management concepts into their daily work, the project asked ANTTARC to conduct a training impact evaluation in late June that involved sampling 25% of the staff. The assessment methodology included a participant questionnaire (completed by both staff and deputies), private interviews and workplace observation. The assessment also included an ANTTARC-facilitated focus group of department/directorate

heads, the purpose of which was to determine their commitment to change in the workplace.

The conclusions of the training impact evaluation found that co-ordination of work within the administration has improved, there is an increased awareness of the need for standardising documentation and improving internal procedures, the participation of department directors in the training courses positively influenced the change process and although many expressed a desire for specialised training courses targeted to their jobs, the majority recognised the need for higher-level management training on issues such as human resource management and leadership.

Workflow Analysis

In October, the project completed a document and information workflow analysis conducted by a member of the Dutch parliamentary administration knowledgeable about Albania and its progress towards reform and development. The analysis was very well received by the parliamentary administration management and staff. The project was gratified to learn that many of the expert's recommendations validated project activities already envisioned or currently underway, and several of the planned 2004 project activities are in direct response to his other recommendations.

The workflow analysis made a number of recommendations including the creation of a management team, more participative planning, improved internal operational procedures, better communication and co-operation between departments and clearer definition of roles between the Speaker and the Secretary-General.

Publications

The project also supported the following research projects of the Assembly:

- Printing a publication on *Women in Albanian Politics 1921–2001*, the first research publication produced by the library.
- Publishing the *Manual of 16th Legislature 2001–2004*, prepared by the library, which includes biographical and professional information on the Members of Parliament for the period 2001–2004, as well as information about the Assembly's institutional infrastructure.
- Funding the English translation of the first analytical report prepared by the Department of Legal and Constitutional Issues, on *The Budget Process in the Albanian Parliament: A Comparative Approach with Other Countries*, which served as a basis for the recommendations later made by the Economy and Finance Committee.

Regional Co-operation



Group photo taken at regional parliamentary conference in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3 October 2003

As part of the continuing effort to add an element of regional co-operation to the project, the Presence hosted a meeting on 27–28 January 2003 that brought together representatives from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and representatives from the OSCE missions in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia and Montenegro to discuss parliamentary support projects

and exchange different programming ideas and successful methodologies.

The missions agreed to co-operate further in the planning and implementation of activities of a technical nature that would involve parliamentarians at the committee level, an idea stressed by the Speaker of the Albanian Assembly in his meeting with the missions. With this concept in mind, the OSCE missions in South East Europe organised a regional conference on "The Role of Parliaments in Human and Economic Development in Southeast Europe: Implications for the Legislative Work and Possibilities for Regional Institutional Co-operation" in Sarajevo on 2–4 October 2003.

Many of the workshops of the conference were targeted to members of parliamentary committees and included themes specific to the issues of parliaments' role in the budget process and in poverty reduction strategies, in order to ensure maximum correlation to, and visibility for, the ongoing support project in Albania.

2004 Work Plan

Support for MPs

Support for revision of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure to ensure an open and consultative process including roundtables and possible study visit

Professional lecture series to introduce MPs to experts and scholars in parliamentary policy and practice

Regional seminars on National Strategy for Socio-Economic Development (NSSD) to provide MPs a forum and an opportunity to increase their awareness about the national strategy and their constituents' concerns

Translation and printing of academic articles on parliamentary policy and practice to provide MPs with access to a broader scope of information on parliamentary issues

Legislative drafting workshop to familiarise MPs with the technical skills of legislative drafting and increase their ability to analyse bills and draft amendments

Capacity-building for Parliamentary Committees

Committee on Economy, Finance and Privatisation

Study Visit on Budgetary Processes and Reform (Part II) to strengthen and expand the previous efforts made by the committee to increase their role in budget preparation, reform, oversight, and reporting and in amending the organic budget law

Short-term budget expert to improve committee's preparation of reports, to assist in reforming the organic budget law and to support a more proactive approach by parliamentary committees in budget preparation

Committees on Defence and Public Order & SHISH

Capacity-building for committee advisers in collaboration with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)

Generalised support

Legislative drafting course to strengthen the drafting skills of legal advisors for parliamentary committees to draft original legislation and increase their capacity to conduct internet research, to analyse bills and draft amendments

Committee secretary training to increase awareness about the roles and responsibilities of committee secretaries

Capacity-building for Parliamentary Administration Management and Staff

Support to Secretary-General

Provide a senior-level parliamentarian to consult on internal organisational development, personnel, and budgeting issues and to implement the recommendations from training impact assessment and project workflow analysis. Organise specialised study visit to Portuguese parliament to gain insight into a similar parliamentary administration. Participate in regional retreat for Secretaries-General sponsored by OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro

Support to Personnel Director

Assist the development of operational procedures for all departments, a standard operating procedures manual (SOP), an employee handbook, a new employee/MP orientation programme, and an internal training capacity. Organise specialised study visit to Portuguese parliament and prepare training of trainers course

Support to Parliamentary Publications Section

Modernise transcription process through procedural changes, training, and purchase of equipment. Organise study visit to for technical staff from administration to observe process and technologies in a similar parliamentary structure. Fund part-time staff for parliamentary publications office to eliminate the three year back-log of transcriptions

Support to Parliamentary Information Section

Facilitate a mentoring relationship with Public Affairs Office of the US Embassy and the OSCE Presence Spokesperson to strengthen the section's relations with media and the public, support the creation of an Assembly press pool, increase capacity for web-site management, and improve office procedures and infrastructure

Peer Education Programme

Provide managers of the parliamentary administration with the opportunity to observe the work practises and operating procedures of a similar parliamentary administration (such as Portugal) to exchange information, discuss common concerns and challenges, and share lessons learned

Professional Skills Training

Ensure understanding of civil service law, internal rules and procedures, the importance of effective management and decision-making, planning and budgeting; support managers and Personnel Director in preparation of standard operating procedures and developing training skills

Research and Advisory Unit

Research and Advisory Unit Phase I

Support the administration in the creation of a new research and analysis department to increase the resources available to the Economy and Finance Committee and others responsible for oversight of public finance; assisting the administration in structuring it, in developing operating procedures, roles and responsibilities, job descriptions, and in recruiting and training of staff. *Phase II includes the expansion of the unit in 2005 to include additional sectors*

Outreach

Constituency Outreach Pilot Programme

Collaborate with relevant departments in parliamentary administration and consulting experts to sensitise MPs about the importance of providing access to their constituents, of understanding and responding to their constituents' concerns, of improving and capitalising on their relations with the media, and on strengthening the infrastructure and technical capacity of their offices and staff in the regions

For further information on this project, please contact:

Ms Penny Martin, Project Manager
OSCE Presence in Albania
+355 4 240 001 ext. 121
Penny.Martin@osce.org
www.osce.org/albania