



ALBANIAN ASSEMBLY SUPPORT PROJECT

Phase II, 2007-2010

(funded by the Netherlands, co-funded and implemented by the OSCE)

Programme Summary

The Albanian Parliamentary Support Project Phase II builds on the work done and its achievements in the first phase of support provided to the Albanian Assembly thanks to the Netherlands funding (780 000 Euro) for a project implemented by the OSCE Presence in the period December 2001 - December 2006.

Being based on the Assembly's own identified objectives for reform, the second phase of the Project is designed to complement the Assembly's budget with additional resources (total Netherlands grant of 1.2 million Euro, OSCE contribution of 135 000 Euro) and to provide the necessary expertise and assistance in jointly agreed areas. As such, the Project is intended to achieve sustainable and lasting results since the principal components of the project are derived directly from the Assembly's internal plans. The Project is implemented in close co-operation between the Assembly and the Presence.

The overall goal is that, assisted by the Project and in line with the Assembly's own programme, the Assembly will:

- Become a more *effective* institution that can fulfill its constitutional role as a forum for political debate and a mechanism for government oversight and control;
- Become a more *professional* institution whose staff are qualified and well-trained;

- Become a more *transparent* institution whose functioning is open for scrutiny and one that ensures its ongoing work is readily available to the public;
- Become a more *responsive* institution that, through its increased transparency, takes into consideration public opinion and can react to the collectively expressed interests of the citizens it is meant to serve.
- Strengthen the *participation of women* in the Assembly. In an effort to increase the role of women in Albanian political life, the Project will aim to implement specific activities to assist female MPs, work to promote gender equality and add a gender dimension to other activities.

The Project is foreseen to run for the period 2007 - 2010, mainly funded by the Government of the Netherlands. It is composed of six principal components:

- 1 Supporting modernised leading management and decision-making structures;
- 2 Supporting more effective and professional committees;
- 3 Supporting more active and professional MP (district) offices;
- 4 Supporting improved access to the Assembly and the availability of parliamentary information;
- 5 Modernising the Assembly library; and
- 6 Creating a student internship programme.

1. Strengthening of the management and decision making structures

The Project assists the Assembly to develop more appropriate terms of reference, job descriptions and internal procedures in accordance with the new Rules of Procedure. This is to be accompanied by providing ongoing advice and assistance to the Speaker and Secretary General and support for improving management and planning. Many of the structures, such as the Bureau and secretariats, are new and do not have detailed terms of reference to guide their functioning beyond the general roles set out in the Rules of Procedure. An evaluation of the Rules of Procedure after 3 years of their use will be conducted as well in order to determine if any adjustments or “fine tuning” should be made after assessing their effectiveness and applicability.

Further the project will assist the Assembly in:

1. Developing MP Resource Handbook/Reference Guide
2. Reviewing/updating job descriptions for staff
3. Developing a transparent system of promotions
4. Developing Standard Operating Procedures Manual for staff
5. Providing continued support for developing an internal training capacity
6. Improving the Assembly's internal budget planning

2. Committee development

As all parliaments develop, their committees become the place where most of the work is accomplished and where most of the decisions are taken. To achieve more effective and professional committees, the project provides training, expertise and support to expand their functioning beyond their current limited roles. As Albanian legislation becomes more complex, given the demands of the European integration process, MPs serving on committees will need to become



specialised and also rely on well-trained and expert committee staff. Additional support is provided specifically to the committees on Legal Issues, Public Administration and Human Rights, on National Security, on European Integration and the Subcommittee on Juveniles and Equal Opportunities.

Training of committee staff

The focus of the support activities is on the committee staff. Improvements are needed to clearly define the duties and responsibilities for each committee staff member. Often duties are shared, inefficiently, between the committee secretaries and advisors. Also the support to committees of the research unit in the Library is not always clear. Additional training is provided to assist secretaries in preparing minutes and using new equipment, and for advisors in terms of research methods.

Committee outreach

The Project is assisting the committees in hiring consultants, if necessary, for conducting outreach activities and field visits and for promoting more frequent hearings. The current group of committee chairpersons have proposed numerous types of activities that will certainly diversify committee activities and strengthen their oversight roles.

Parliamentary Oversight on bodies reporting and informing the Assembly

Specific attention is given to the role of the Assembly and its committees in oversight on those institutions established by law and those Constitutional Bodies that report to or inform the Assembly. In order to develop a clear concept of the roles and responsibilities of the Assembly and the committees towards these Institutions and aiming at increasing the research capacities and expertise of the Assembly as such, the Project will assist the Assembly in assessing the relationship with the bodies in question and devise a more effective and efficient oversight, both in terms of procedures and structures.

European Integration

After a review of the existing structures, assistance is available to strengthen the research capacity mainly focusing on in-depth training on European Integration issues, as well as strengthening the capacities of the Assembly in adopting legislation that fully meets European standards and takes into account the *acquis communautaire*.

3. More active and professional MP Offices

One hundred of the 140 seats in the Assembly are directly elected through majoritarian contest. These MPs are required to have constituency offices to keep in touch with their electorate and provide a link between the central institutions and the local level. The rules governing the operation of these offices and the limited financial resources available make it difficult for MPs to maintain the level of representation and service required. The Project is working with the Assembly to improve the Status of Deputies Law. Through an expansion of the pilot project begun under the Phase I of the Assembly Project, in Phase II the Project will work to improve a larger number of MP offices and raise the qualifications of their staff.

4. More transparency

Increasing the transparency of how the Assembly functions and opening it up to the public has been recognised as a crucial element of parliamentary reform. The current Speaker has committed herself to improving the Assembly's public relations. The new Rules of Procedure recognise the importance of transparency by obligating the Assembly to prepare and make available in a timely manner *verbatim* transcripts of plenary sittings and minutes of committee meetings so that the public and the media can see exactly the content of lawmakers' debates taking place.

To achieve improved access to the Assembly and availability of parliamentary information, the Project provides support to the Assembly in improving the Assembly's physical infrastructure and IT technology. The Project supports the Assembly to develop a documentation database that will include their entire paper trail for pieces of legislation, voting results and Question and Answer sessions, available both on the intranet and to the public.

Numerous public events are foreseen, which aim at bringing the public in closer proximity to the Assembly and stimulate public participation in plenary sittings.



5. Library

The Assembly Research and Library Service enjoys a high rate of use by MPs and staff. Its holdings and research material remain limited, however. As the issues being dealt with by the Assembly continue to diversify and grow more complex, the library will need to expand its holdings and services to accommodate users looking for assistance in finding up-to-date information in a wide variety of fields and in languages other than Albanian. The general infrastructure of the library requires improvement as well.

To modernise the library, the Project is looking for a bilateral agreement with a national European parliament which has a well established Library and Documentation Service to design and expand the physical space of the library, expand its holdings of current print and multimedia reference materials, increase access to information technology and electronic resources, enhance the skills of its research staff, offer additional training and services, all with the goal of expanding its regular user base.

6. Internship

Given the budgetary constraints faced by the Assembly, there is insufficient support staff available for committees, where they are needed. As a way of supplementing the existing staff with skilled personnel (in terms of language skills, computer literacy, and technical knowledge) without raising costs, the Project works with the Assembly to develop a student internship programme.

The students will benefit from the experience of working in a unique environment, either by working for committees, parliamentary groups or for the administration. The goal is to achieve a successfully run internship programme, sustainable without the involvement of the Project by the third year.



In addition to working for the Assembly, interns - students will attend a programme of monthly meetings that include job skills training seminars and student reports on their progress. The training seminars may be organised by additional project partners.

7. Project Team

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