



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Modernising the Capacity of the Assembly of the Republic of Albania

The Republic of Albania is a parliamentary republic where the Assembly is the focal point of national sovereignty. All of the other constitutional bodies such as the Prosecutor-General's Office, the Supreme State Audit and the People's Advocate are derived from the Assembly and are responsible to it. Despite this central role, there has been limited attention given to the needs of the Assembly as an institution since 1997. Most international assistance to Albania has been directed towards the government or to the strengthening of the judiciary or other independent institutions. With the opening of negotiations between the European Union and Albania on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement at the end of January 2003, the demands placed on the Assembly to pass legislation in accordance with the *acquis communautaire* will increase greatly. In this regard, the capacity of the Assembly needs to be enhanced.

Experience shows that the Assembly has been capable of timely adoption of legislation; however, its ability to analyse

and to review sufficiently government bills and then draft amendments to them remains underdeveloped. This impacts on the Assembly's ability to carry out its responsibilities as a law making body thus allowing the government to continue to enjoy disproportionate decision-making powers.

Role of the OSCE Presence

Within the scope of the democratisation element of the mandate of the OSCE Presence in Albania, the Presence has begun implementing a three-year project aimed at modernising and strengthening the capacity of the Assembly. The Presence has received its funding for the project from the Netherlands Government and it is being implemented from January 2002 until the end of 2004, leading up to the next national elections.

During the immediate post-1997 period when political tensions were at their height, the Presence regularly monitored the activities of the Assembly. Through this process of observation, it was able to build up considerable knowledge as

to the workings of the Assembly; and its general conclusions regarding the main areas requiring attention served as the basis for the project it is now implementing.

The project is focused in three main areas: (1) training for MPs and their staff, including the creation of a permanent training capacity within the Assembly; (2) the creation of a research and advisory unit to support the work of MPs and the parliamentary committees; (3) support for outreach activities to promote greater awareness amongst the public of the role of parliamentarians, including their responsibilities as citizens to ensure that MPs are informed of their interests, provided with the necessary information to make responsible decisions, and then held accountable.

Given Albania's political objectives of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, this project will make use of resources available from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Project Components

Component I Training

Component I will encompass training for MPs and staff. For the most part, the project will avoid traditional lecture style training for MPs as this is widely viewed as an inefficient means of building skills. Instead, specialists will be brought to Tirana to work alongside their counterparts in a form of “on-the-job training” making use of peer-to-peer training techniques.



The early success of the project has been a result of the commitment of both the OSCE Presence and the Assembly to act in partnership, from joint decision-taking on objectives to cost-sharing for certain initiatives.

Over the course of its implementation, the project will work towards increasing the amount of information available to MPs in order to meet their needs for amending and approving increasingly complex legislation, particularly in view of the need to harmonise legislation with EU standards. Targeted study visits to other parliaments are also foreseen as a means of presenting relevant concepts in their appropriate context.

Significant resources will be devoted to the training of staff to increase their knowledge of parliamentary concepts and their professional skills. Courses will include *inter alia* Team Building, Office Management, Conflict Management, Leadership Skills, Presentation Skills and Human Resource Management.

Component II Research Capacity

Because technical and legal expertise is mainly concentrated in the government, MPs suffer from a disproportionate lack of information to undertake thorough and adequate readings of the legislation being presented to them by the government. Most parliaments have addressed this need by ensuring permanent and independent expertise within the committees, and by establishing

research and advisory facilities. Component II will directly support the establishment of the capacity for parliamentary research under the direction of the Secretariat of the Assembly to provide an independent service to MPs and committees.

As continuity in the Assembly is provided by the administrative staff, the project aims to develop an in-house training capacity for the Assembly so that sustainable long-term knowledge transfer can be achieved.



The project will support in particular the work of the Committees on Economics and Finance and on Legal and Constitutional Issues. In partnership with the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF), support will also be provided to the Committees on Defence and on Public Order.

Component III Outreach

As 100 out of 140 Albanian MPs are elected from single-member constituencies, the third component aims at building relationships between deputies and their electorate. This component will support various civic participation activities and stimulate discussion and debate at the local level on governance issues, including how the state budget affects them, to promote the culture of civil society involvement in the decision-making process. The majority of these activities will take place in 2004, in preparation for the 2005 national elections.

For further information on this project, please contact:

Mr Eric Roman Filipink, Political Officer
+355 4 240 001 ext. 127
Eric.Filipink@osce.org

Ms Miranda Veliaj, National Project Officer
+355 4 240 001 ext. 155
Miranda.Veliaj@osce.org

The Assembly and the State Budget Process

One of the fundamental roles of parliament is to review the annual state budget and ensure that its allocation of resources is in line with the stated objectives and priorities of the Government. The annual budget is therefore a critically important document in insuring transparency and accountability of the government to the people. By providing a detailed description of proposed state expenditures, the annual budget should allow parliament and the general public to trace the allocation of funds, what the priorities of the government are and how state resources are being used for the benefit of the country. Therefore, a well-informed analysis of the budget is necessary before giving parliamentary approval.

Within its three main components, the Presence's project will maintain a special emphasis on the state budget given its importance for the role of the Assembly. The annual nature of the preparation and review process will allow for progressive enhancements to be made. The project's activities in this respect will primarily benefit the Assembly's Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Privatisation, which will be treated as a "model committee". Progress made in strengthening the Assembly's structures and professional capacities will then be able to be transferred to other committees.

In this context, the project will support the amendment of the Organic Law on the Budget to increase the Assembly's role in

the process of the budget's preparation, which is currently does not have, and to increase the amount of time the Assembly has to review the budget bill. Additional attention will be given to the Assembly's role in monitoring the implementation

of the budget. The project will also support changes to the Assembly's staffing structure to increase the number of technical experts working on budget issues so that MPs will be able to benefit from improved analytical information available to them.

Budget Process Work Plan 2003

February

Following on from the 2003 State Budget Conference held in November 2002, a workshop on the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) is planned to raise MP's awareness of the importance of the role of planning and managing public expenditure through use of the multi-year MTEF.

March

A Study Visit for the Committee on Economics and Finance is planned to gain insight into the annual budgetary processes of Finland, Sweden and Poland and the internal Parliamentary administrative structures that support the work of the committees.

April

A roundtable organised jointly with the Ministry of Finance is foreseen to engage the Assembly in the National Strategy for Socio-Economic Development (NSSD) and to discuss the progress achieved thus far in its implementation.

April-July

Based on the recommendations coming from the previous meetings on the State Budget, MTEF, NSSD and the information gathered during the study trip, amendments to the Organic Law on the Budget and Parliamentary Rules of Procedure will be prepared. These changes are necessary for improving the legal framework governing the budget process and enhancing the role of the Assembly's committees.

May

A conference involving the Committee on Economics and Finance and the chairmen of the other committees is planned to discuss the previously mentioned recommendations and the proposals for amendments that have been prepared.

May-August

Construction of a new meeting space will begin to modernise the facilities of Committee on Economics and Finance, including committee meeting room and budget analysis unit. The establishment of a "Model Committee" premises will help to increase the efficiency of the committee's work.

June-October

If agreed by the Assembly at the May conference, hiring and training of new committee staff members should begin to increase the resources available to the Committee on Economics and Finance for analysing the budget, producing committee reports and advising MPs.

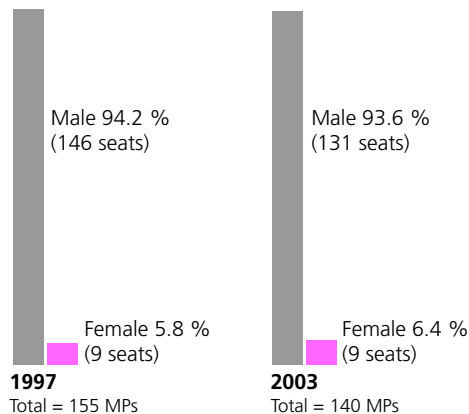
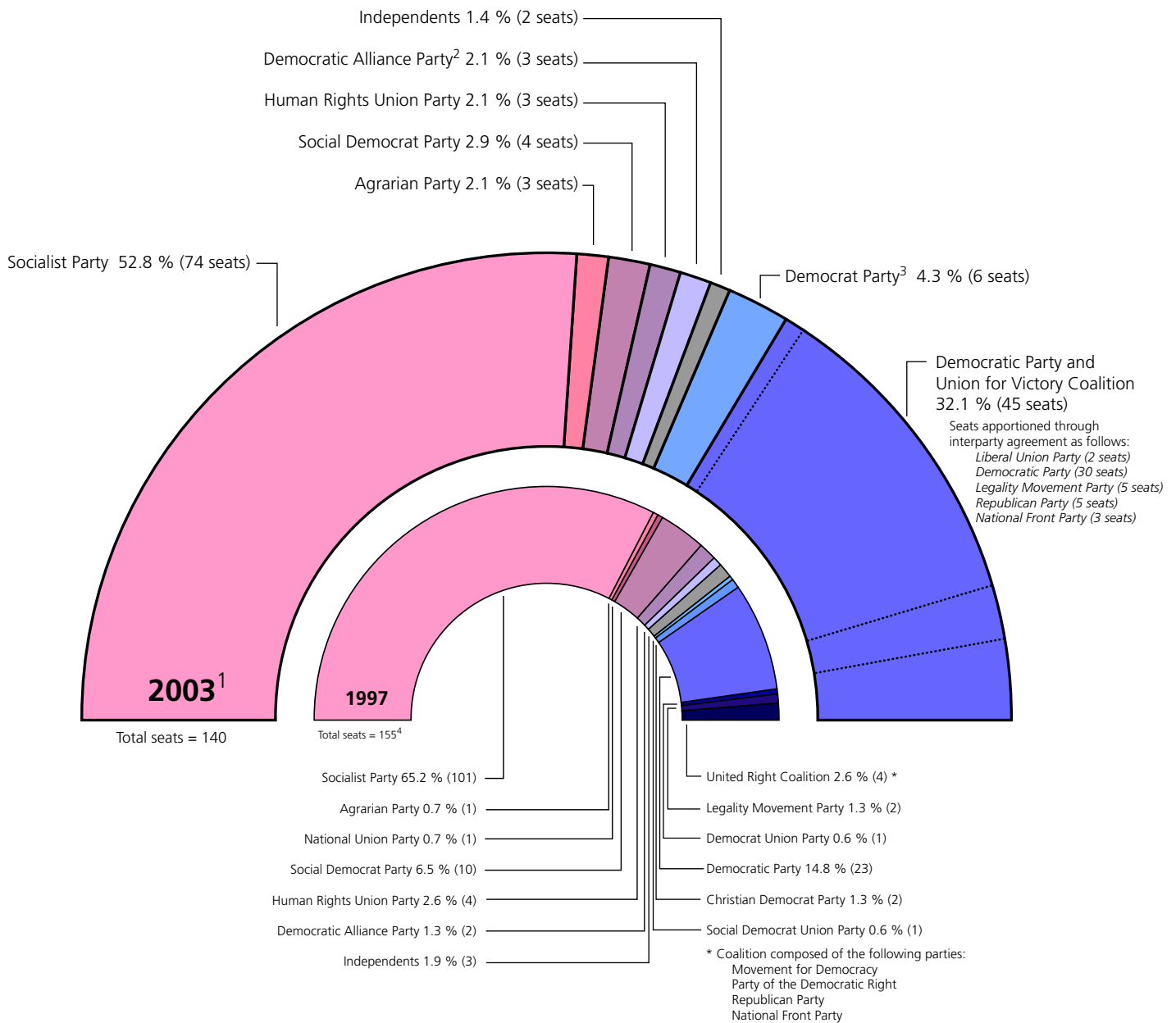
October

A 2nd Study Visit on Budgetary Processes is planned at a time when parliaments are proceeding with their own budgetary review activities.

November-December

A short-term budget expert will be hired for the budgetary review period at end of 2003 to help prepare a more extensive report of the Committee on Economics and Finance.

PARTY REPRESENTATION IN THE ALBANIAN ASSEMBLY



Gender Balance in Parliament

Explanatory notes

¹ Elections to the Assembly were held in June-August 2001. This chart represents the composition of the Assembly as of 31 March 2003 following three by-elections and one replacement that have taken place since that time.

² Members of this party have split. Both factions claim the right to use the original name of the party.

³ One member from this party has broken away to form a new party, which has been officially registered. It has not yet been resolved, however, whether or not this individual is a representative of a parliamentary party.

⁴ Following the murder of Azem Hajdari (DP) in September 1998, the Assembly sat with only 154 members until 2001.