



**Parliamentary Cooperation Task Force
Progress Report
Working Table I Meeting
Belgrade, 29 May 2005**

1. Introduction

The last six months have shown the consolidation of some tendencies that have been shaping since the announcement of Parliamentary Cooperation as Stability Pact Core objective two years ago:

- a) The regional dimension of parliamentary cooperation is getting an increasing role in the democratisation and Euro-Atlantic integration processes.
- b) The relevance of the role of parliaments in the reform process is being more and more recognized, although it is a process that takes time to become visible.
- c) The common perspective of EU accession is the main source of development of a stronger regional parliamentary cooperation.
- d) The growing number and increasing quality and coordination of bilateral and regional cooperation activities is a significant sign of the SEE Parliaments increasing interest and involvement in further exchanges.
- e) There is still a long-term need to support the SEE parliaments, especially the parliamentary staff.

The Stability Pact will continue to support the strengthening of parliamentary capacities, and to promote the creation of sustainable working structures amongst SEE Parliaments, ensuring a better coordination and communication of donors' activities and providing expertise and information to SEE Parliaments, especially on the EU instruments and tools available.

2. Implementation of regional ownership strategy

Following the debate initiated at the WT I meeting in Sofia one year ago, the Stability Pact has provided substantial support to initiatives originated by the region itself, paying particular attention to their coordination.

The **Speakers of Parliaments of the South East European Cooperation Process** met in Athens on 16-18 March 2006 to discuss the European perspective of the SEECP countries and the role of the SEECP for the regional cooperation and ownership of the region.

SEECP is expected to take a key role in the regional ownership process, in particular in relation to the Parliamentary dimension. Croatia, who is going to hold the SEECP Chairmanship, has elaborated an ambitious programme and plan.

The Second Conference of the European Integration Parliamentary Committees of States participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process of SEE



(**Western Balkans COSAP**) was held in Zagreb on 5 and 6 March 2006, under the Croatian Chairmanship and with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The conference focussed on the functioning and role of the COSAP and on the cooperation between the SAP national Parliaments and the European Parliament through the activities of the joint Parliamentary Committees, taking into account the EU enlargement strategy and the Commission Communication on consolidating stability and raising prosperity in the Western Balkans.

The SP has supported the strengthening of the COSAP, who managed to apply for the special guest status and will participate to the next COSAC meeting in Vienna, in May.

The SP Gender Task Force organized the **Second Regional Women's MP Meeting, in the framework of the SEE Women's MP Exchange Project**, which took place in Sarajevo on 24-26 February 2006, funded by the German Ministry. MPs from 7 SEE Parliaments gathered to assess the progress made in integrating EU strategies for Lifelong Learning as well as good practices from EU member states for implementation. The workshop was followed by national hearings and meetings and by the production of numerous publications on the subject.

The SP Gender Task Force organized also the **SEE Women MPs Conference on Poverty Reduction Strategies**, which was held in Budva, funded by the Italian Ministry. Women MPs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia met and reaffirmed that although SEE countries have a poverty reduction strategy or a development strategy, female poverty is still not properly tackled as a special form of poverty by relevant institutions.

The methodology adopted for the preparation and organization of these Women workshops, which include national preparation, follow up workshops and publications of practical results and tools, is recommended also for other regional activities in parliamentary cooperation.

3. Activities in capacity-building

Capacity-building activities have been implemented through the organization of workshops and seminars, especially gathering together committees dealing with the same issues. The themes are chosen following the needs and priorities expressed by SEE Parliamentarians in the course of the regular Parliamentary Cooperation biannual Task Force meetings and other close consultations with the SP partners.

Following the recommendation issued by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in 2004, the two seminars organized under the Chairmanship of the CoE PA in the framework of the **Parliamentary Troika of the Stability Pact**, have targeted committees working respectively on Education for Democratic Citizenship and on Migration issues.



Migration issues have been thoroughly discussed also at the **Seminar on European Law and Policy in the field of migration, asylum and fight against organized crime** organized by the SP Thessaloniki office, the King Badouin Foundation and the European Commission in Thessaloniki in December 2005.

Parliamentarians from SEE gathered in Tirana, on 11 and 12 April 2006, to discuss on **how to strengthen parliamentary oversight in the fight against organized crime**. The event was organized the OSCE presence in Albania, the Albanian Assembly, the SP initiative against organized crime and the Political Academy of the Austrian's People Party and was co-financed by the Austrian Development Agency. The immediate outcome was a toolkit, which presents 10 points for MPs on how to fight organized crime in SEE. A handbook will be printed shortly after the follow up seminar, which will be held in Brussels in September.

These two workshops are part of a wider project that aims at developing a network among the Justice and Home Affairs parliamentary committees.

SP has also supported the regular **International Parliamentary Conference on the European Social Model and its importance for SEE countries**, held in Cavtat in November 2005. This conference is part of the wider cycle of Conferences organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung every year on the issue and has become now a sustainable event.

The East West Parliamentary Practice project, with Dutch funds, has organized the **Standing Regional Conference of EWPPP Legislature and Citizens on Regional Cooperation in the EU integration process** in Portoroz in April 2006. A special focus has been put on the sustainable dialogue between parliamentarians and NGOs.

4. Stability Pact proposed Parliamentary Cooperation Activities

The **Stability Pact Parliamentary Cooperation Task Force meeting** was held for the first time in the region, at the premises of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo on April 25. Representatives from the SEE and EU parliaments, international organisations, foundations and donors discussed the priorities and needs in Parliamentary Cooperation as expressed by SEE countries and the ongoing and planned donors` activities in parliamentary cooperation.

After an introduction by Goran Svilanovic, Chair of Stability Pact Working Table I and member of the Senior Review group on the Stability Pact, the implementation of the regional ownership in the field of Parliamentary Cooperation was debated. Participants agreed on the importance of granting substantial support to initiatives coming from the region (such as the COSAP or the Cetinje Parliamentary Forum).

The SP and SP partners support should also led to the draft of a long-term strategy for the hand-over of coordination of the SP parliamentary dimension, potentially by creating a regional focal point or service secretariat for



Parliamentary Cooperation. To this aim the importance of the cooperation among Secretary Generals and parliamentary staffers is becoming more and more evident.

The Cetinje Parliamentary Forum, initiated by Montenegro, presented its planned activities for 2006, which will focus on natural disaster prevention, free trade agreements and agriculture.

The SP activities will continue to focus on capacity building for SEE parliamentarians and staffers on harmonisation of legislation with EU acquis communautaire. Moreover, the planned activities aim at:

1. Strengthening and institutionalizing links between committees of different parliaments dealing with similar issues.
2. Channeling efforts towards training and capacity building of MP and staff, especially in
 - parliamentary oversight on government
 - implementation of legislation
 - parliamentary budgeting process
3. Supporting regional parliamentary cooperation structures originating from SEE to become more operational and institutionalized
4. Developing a common strategy/presentation of SEE parliaments with a special focus on EU integration process
5. Free trade agreements, visa regime, fight against organized crime, infrastructure development and investment policy will be further priorities to deal with in further parliamentary cooperation.

At the end, Amb. Lawrence Butler, Principal Deputy High Representative of the OHR, opened the debate on the **challenges and opportunities for SEE MPs in the Constitutional reform process** and on constitutional reforms in SEE as a milestone for EU enlargement. The discussion was launched at a crucial time, when the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina was deciding on the amendments to the Dayton Constitution. As it was pointed out, the constitutional reform process is a key element in establishing a modern, functional, fiscally sustainable and citizens-oriented multi-ethnic state that can move forward more rapidly. Moreover, once the fundamental reforms that are necessary for the Euro-Atlantic integration will be in place, citizens will enjoy the lasting stability and prosperity they are entitled to expect.

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