



## Progress Report

### 1. General remarks

The importance of the core objective Parliamentary Cooperation and of its Regional dimension for the democratisation and Euro-Atlantic integration processes is being given more and more recognition. However, the relevance of the role of Parliaments in the reform processes, both as legislators and multipliers, is a process that takes time to become visible.

The **common perspective of EU accession, as well as the degree of preparedness required**, is the main source of development of a stronger regional parliamentary cooperation.

The growing number of bilateral and regional cooperation activities is a significant sign of the increasing will of **SEE parliamentarians** for a stronger and also much more institutionalised **exchange of their experiences and expertise**. In fact, there is still a long-term need to support parliamentary administration due to the lack of qualified parliamentary staff and adequate equipment.

In 2005, therefore, the PC Task Force focused on the strengthening of parliamentary capacities and on the creation of sustainable working structures amongst South Eastern European Parliaments, which will lead to a stronger **involvement of SEE Parliaments** in regional activities in different political fields.

### 2. Implementation of the Regional Ownership Strategy

Following the discussion initiated at the WTI meeting held in Sofia on 17 May 2005, WT I conducted a consolidated assessment of the task force activities and the state of the regional ownership process.

In this context the Stability Pact has provided substantial support to several initiatives, which originated from the region itself, paying particular attention to their coordination.

The **Cetinje Parliamentary Forum**, is an initiative undertaken by the Assembly of Serbia and Montenegro and the Parliament of Montenegro since 2004 and has developed as an important pillar of sustainable regional parliamentary cooperation, especially on the Committees level. In 31 May 2005 the **Presidents and Speakers of the Parliaments of the Countries of the Region** pointed out the importance of the establishment of a regular inter-parliamentary communication, through bilateral and multilateral exchanges. The proposed Rules of Procedure and Plan of Information System, currently under discussion, will pave the way for a much more institutionalised form of coordination of regional parliamentary cooperation activities.

The Cetinje Parliamentary Forum offers the possibility to share experiences and best practices and to rationalise parliamentary work, especially in relation to the implementation of EU standards into national legislation and in other issues of common regional interest.

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



**Balkans COSAC**), particularly promoted by the Bosnian and FYROM Parliaments, was established in June 2005 and constitutes the first institutionalised structure of the SEE parliaments which will contribute to strengthening even further the dialogue between SEE Parliaments and EU institutions. This Conference will reinforce the role of the EU integration committees of SEE Parliaments and will also benefit the process of harmonisation of SEE national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*.

The **Western Balkans COSAC** will apply for **special guest status** to the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC).

The **SEE Parliamentary Roundtable**, organised by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo in June 2005, was focused on the **effective parliamentary oversight of the government**, an essential element in dealing successfully with the unique responsibilities that elected representatives in a democratic society have to face. A set of instruments and tools were put at the disposal of the governing majority and the opposition and their different roles were highlighted. Moreover, the clear need for specific interactive training programmes and enhanced networking and cooperation it was reiterated in order to strengthen the Parliaments of the Region.

### 3. Activities in Capacity Building

A stronger and more focused regional parliamentary cooperation, often at Committees level, was promoted through various conferences, workshops and seminars, amongst others, offered by international institutions and organisations and supported by Stability Pact expertise.

The Parliamentary Conference on the “**Parliamentary Dimension of the Establishment of the Energy community in SEE**”, organised by the Parliament of FYROM, the European Commission and the Stability Pact in June 2005 in Skopje, was focused mainly on the parliamentary dimension of the Athens Process, especially the treaty ratification process, which presented the respective Parliaments with the measures to be undertaken to fully implement the EU legislation. This needs to be followed up by increased capacity building at national level as well as an enhanced dialogue with the social partners.

In the autumn of 2005, the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** and the Stability Pact held two Seminars (**one on Situation of Refugees and Displaced Persons and one on the Education for Democratic Citizenship**) for SEE Parliamentarians in the framework of the Parliamentary Troika.

Petra Bläss, SP Senior Consultant on **Parliamentary Cooperation**, continued to promote the development of cross-table and cross-task forces activities, contributing for example to the organization of **two seminars on defence (with the Office of the US State Secretary for Defence) and macroeconomic issues (with the IMF/Joint Vienna Institute) and a Regional Women MPs Workshop (with the Gender Task Force)** responding to the need long expressed by SEE parliamentarians.

Additional **Study visits of SEE parliamentarians** to EU institutions and EU Parliaments offered a unique opportunity for Members of Parliament to become more familiar with EU issues, in order to better communicate the EU agenda and challenges related to the integration process and also to share experiences with established structures and experienced parliamentarians.



#### 4. Stability Pact proposed Parliamentary Cooperation Activities

The **Stability Pact Parliamentary Cooperation Task Force Meeting** was held on October 13, 2005 in Brussels. Representatives from SEE parliaments, donors, international institutions and NGOs discussed past and future activities and the implementation of the regional ownership strategy.

Moreover, the need for a long-term strategy for the hand-over of the actual SP coordination into local hands, possibly through the creation of a Secretariat for regional parliamentary coordination, was discussed.

The role of the Stability Pact in providing its expertise and information to SEE parliaments, especially on the potential use of EU instruments and tools available, and in coordinating donors' activities was fully recognised.

Moreover, it has been agreed that the main focus of further activities should be put on the **strengthening of the parliamentary oversight capacities**, especially in the field of legislation implementation. To this end particular attention will be devoted to the empowerment of the work of committees dealing with:

- **European integration**
- **Democratic control of the security sector** and armed forces
- **Budgetary control**
- **Judiciary reform**/Home and justice affairs

SEE Parliamentarians have shown a particular interest also towards the following issues: the **Energy Community Treaty** ratification, the **trade liberalisation, visa regulations, infrastructure development, investment policy, social cohesion, fight against organised crime, migration, education and gender equality**. A cross-table cooperation will be applied in order to tackle them.

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