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Talking Politics



Citizens of Macedonia, when asked about their elected representatives, consistently respond that they are out of touch with the concerns of the people they represent. They say that between elections politicians are rarely, if ever, seen except in the media. Most people have no idea which politicians represent them nor what they do between elections.

Over the past few months, however, that's begun to change. This issue of *NDI Macedonia* features ground-breaking ways Members of Parliament are showing citizens they want to hear from them. The response is encouraging. Citizens are lining up at newly-opened constituency offices, appearing as witnesses to present submissions at parliamentary hearings and attending town hall meetings to speak out about important issues.

Elected officials, too, are rising to the challenge of showing citizens they have the public interest, not their political or personal interest, at heart. Four more Members of Parliament opened constituency offices in Gostivar and Debar. Along with the four MPs who already opened an office in Kisela Voda, they're exercising their authority as MPs to get answers from government and results for constituents. The success of these offices, in fact, led all parties in parliament to support a proposal calling for legislation to assist each MP to open an office in their electoral district.

In the same spirit the DUI leadership held a session with the media to present their record in government, including achievements and challenges yet to be resolved. This was followed by meetings in dozens of communities where citizens could judge for themselves the DUI record, well in advance of an election.

Parliamentary study tour to Hungary



Bottom row, 1 to r: Jani Makraduli, Aleksandar Novakoski, Sheila Fruman, Tome Trombev
2nd row, 1 to r: Hisni Shaqiri, Nevzat Bejta, Adnan Jashari, Eleonora Petrova-Mitevaska, Blagorodna Mingova-Krepieva, Sonja Lepitkova, Roza Topuzova-Karevska
3rd row, 1 to r: Elvis Zutic, Zoran Sapuric, Zoran Krstevski

See page 2 for stories

Meanwhile, Citizen's Association MOST has been sponsoring Mobile Parliaments which bring together NGOs and MPs to discuss community issues. One meeting resulted in three MPs from different political parties joining forces to address the common concerns of citizens - a multi-partisan approach not often seen.

In yet another ground-breaking move, parliament for the first time held a public hearing where witnesses were called to provide their input on the development of a Code of Conduct for MPs. As one long-time MP commented afterwards "This is the first time I've ever felt important as an MP."

Director



Visit to one of Europe's most beautiful parliaments



Delegation members enjoy the view on the Danube

Hungary provides an interesting example of a recent and successful transition from a one-party system to a multi-party democracy. Since the early 1990s, the Hungarian National Assembly has become a central institution in the country's governance. The Hungarian parliament has evolved from an institution with members who lacked political experience and democratic role models to an institution with experienced, professional politicians. Originally lacking staff, equipment and resources, the National Assembly now functions with ample human and other resources to enable members to fulfill their roles as legislators and representatives of the people. The parliament plays a critical role in law-making, has developed an effective committee system, and actively conducts executive oversight.



MPs Adnan Jashari, Blagorodna Mingova-Krepieva and Nevzat Bejta work on action plans for Macedonian parliament on the study tour

Opening new perspectives

By Jani Makraduli MSc.

SDSM parliamentary group coordinator

A study trip to the Parliament of the Republic of Hungary was conducted May 21-26 with the cooperation of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and NDI, and with the assistance of the World Learning program.

The multi-partisan delegation consisted of the following MPs: Eleonora Petrova-Mitevaska, Sonja Lepitkova, Roza Topuzova-Karevska, Blagorodna Mingova-Krepieva, Hisni Shaqiri, Adnan Jashari, Nevzat Bejta, Zoran Krstevski, Zoran Sapurik, Tome Trombev, Jani Makraduli and the Secretary General of the Parliament, Aleksandar Novakoski. I would like to mention that the invited MPs from VMRO-DPMNE did not come on the study trip because of party activities, and the DPA MPs did not join the delegation because of their abstinence from the work in parliament.

The excellently organized program offered diverse activities: meetings with representatives of the parliamentary leadership, the political establishment, and the parliamentary structures along with meetings with political parties, presidents of individual committees, and individual members of parliament.

During the stay, the delegation of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia had an opportunity not only to become familiar with the Hungarian parliament's method of work, but also to exchange experiences and opinions about different issues. As a result of these exchanges, the delegation was unanimous in their determination to strengthen the role of the commissions in parliament with a special emphasis on the tasks that must be completed in the process of approximation towards Europe, from the experiences of several working bodies and committees.

The meetings with individual MPs were of significant interest because we had an opportunity to become familiar with their work in the field and the regular meetings the MPs have with citizens in their constituency offices. The agenda also offered a visit to such an office and this visit opened new perspectives for our delegation.

During the study visit, the delegation was able to attend a coordination meeting of the majority party in the Parliament and a plenary session in which the agenda for the current week was adopted and a question period was held.

The delegation would like to express special gratitude to Mr. Peter Hack, former Hungarian MP and president of the Committee on Constitutional, Legislative and Judicial Affairs, who, with his valuable experience generously provided explanations and advice.





DUI opens two constituency offices



MPs Agron Buxhaku and Talat Xhaferi at their office opening in Debar



MPs Nevzat Bejta and Adnan Jashari at their office opening in Gostivar

“After not getting any answers from the institutions in charge, the constituency office made it possible for our problem to reach parliament in order to find a solution.”

Nizam Tairi, Mersel Tairi, Fehim Tairi and Esad Ademi - Gostivar citizens



MOBILE PARLIAMENT

MOST mobile parliament brings together MPs and citizens



MPs Zarko Karadzovski, Lupco Meskov and Blagoja Gesoski in Prilep during a mobile parliament on the future of tobacco production.



MPs Blagoja Golomeov, Slobodan Danevski, MOST coordinator Slavica Biljarska, moderator Dragan Antonovski and MP Risto Pejovski at the Veles mobile parliament on the law for financing local self government.



Parliament holds first public hearing

On June 23 a multi-partisan panel of MPs held a public hearing on legislative ethics and a Code of Conduct for MPs. The hearings were co-organized by the parliamentary committee on Political System and Inter Community Relations and NDI. These were the first official public hearings ever to be held in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. By all accounts, the hearings were a great success.

Recommendations by witnesses for MP Code of Conduct

- Financial disclosure of assets for MPs and their families
- No nepotism
- No abuse of services and privileges by MPs for personal or families' benefit
- MPs should not destroy the credibility of parliament, other MPs or citizens with their actions
- Each parliamentary group and each MP individually should help create better inter-party relations
- MPs and the parliamentary groups should use the time allocated for discussion in parliament more effectively
- MPs should strive to represent the general interest of the public, and if there is a conflict of interest, he/she should publicly announce it
- MPs should perform their job as professionals (regular session attendance, active participation in public hearings, communicating with citizens)

Fifteen witnesses appeared, including MPs, NGOs and experts. Based on their submissions there is clearly support for a Code of Conduct for MPs that would set ethical norms to guide MPs in their every day work. Many of the witnesses believe a Code of Conduct would raise the MPs' awareness of their responsibility, strengthen the integrity of the MPs and the parliament as an institution and strengthen citizens' trust in MPs.

Several witnesses pointed out the need to establish a neutral, professional body to be responsible for implementation of the Code of Conduct for MPs.

Public hearings welcomed by MPs as innovative tool

By Zoran Sapuric, M.A.
President of Commission on Political System and Inter-community Relations



As far as the Code of Conduct for MPs and legislative ethics are concerned, I personally think that the recent public hearing held in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and organized by the Committee on Political System and Inter-community Relations and NDI, demonstrated the great interest of MPs and the wider public. Using a public hearing to raise this issue, that is MPs hearing statements on a particular issue, is an important innovation in the work of parliament. The public hearing itself revealed different visions on this topic. In any case, the MPs expressed a definite will for this issue to be standardized: in the form of a Code; through amendments to the Rules of Procedure; or through passage of a new legal act by the parliament. This would regulate the conduct of MPs, as well as their rights and obligations, which would be in the interest of both MPs and the public. This would be in accordance with legal norms such as the anti-corruption legislation, the laws dealing with conflict of interest, etc. This does not diminish, however, the need to pass a separate law for MPs where their rights, obligations, working conditions and other issues related to their parliamentary work would be regulated. All of this emphasizes the significance of a Code of Conduct for MPs and legislative ethics and points out the need to conduct more public hearings on specific topics in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

Sanctions for violating the MP Code of Conduct recommended by witnesses at the public hearing

- Public reprimand
- Fee
- Suspension of the mandate
- Demotion
- Warning
- Exclusion from Parliament



Strengthening cooperation between Parliament and NGO's

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and Citizen's Association MOST co-sponsored a conference on strengthening cooperation between Parliament and NGOs in Macedonia on April 7th in Skopje.

Through a series of panels and workshops, MPs and NGO representatives had a unique opportunity to learn about and discuss ways to increase cooperation.



Front row l to r: Mitko Basov from European forum Gevgelija, MPs Marija Kojzekliska, Slavica Grkovska, Tome Trombev and Eftim Manev

Conference Conclusions

- Parliament should open a citizens office .
- The web site of Parliament should be updated with information on the daily agenda for plenary and committee sessions, adopted decisions, transcripts and other relevant information.
- Parliament should organize public discussions where all interested NGOs and citizens could participate.
- MPs should open offices in their election units so citizens can contact them with questions and contribute to the decision making process.
- Amend the Rules of Procedure to enable public participation.



Living up to constitutional requirements and its own new Rules of Procedure, the Macedonian parliament has started to translate laws --once enacted-- into Albanian and to provide simultaneous interpretation from Albanian to Macedonian in committee meetings and plenary sessions.

Through its parliamentary language program, NDI has equipped committee rooms for simultaneous translation, purchased much-needed dictionaries for parliament and, most recently, organized a fast-track course at Skopje University's Department for Translation and Interpretation for newly-hired translator-interpreters in parliament.

For six weeks in June and July, after working hours, parliament's translators had to muster all remaining energy and face this summer's searing heat in order

to learn some of the very special skills and techniques it takes to be professional interpreters. At the end of the course, translators thought that it had been very helpful and, if anything, could have lasted longer!

Parliamentary translators learn new techniques





Strong branches Strong parties

By David Dougherty
Political party program director

In the competitive world of politics, it often seems difficult to get parties to agree on anything. In developing a program that would appeal to each of the major parties in Macedonia, we at NDI had to ask ourselves the basic question: what is it that every party could benefit from, whether it is large or small, old or new, Albanian or Macedonian?

The answer was that parties in Macedonia have the same needs as parties in every other democracy: strong and well-trained activists at the local level, and local branches that connect the public to the party, and to government itself. These needs are only intensified by the fact that 2004 brings local elections, meaning parties need to have effective structures in a number of places at the same time, depending on where they foresee electoral opportunities. Hence, NDI's party program for 2003-2004...Emerging Leaders & Local Branch Development.

The goal of this program is to provide training and consultation to local branch activists in an effort to cultivate stronger local leaders and stronger branches--fundamental components of effective, modern parties. NDI will work directly with party leadership and local branch representatives to improve party activists' technical skills in key areas and to build an understanding of the benefits the parties themselves will derive from stronger branches.

DUI activists blitz communities after NDI seminar

Over 60 party activists attended a jointly sponsored two-day DUI-NDI seminar in Mavrovo in June which featured a slide show of DUI's early results in government, presentations on how to communicate with citizens and build support, and group work to develop local action plans at the branch level.

July saw the fruits of this labour when over 50 meetings were organized by local DUI branches in towns and villages stretching from Kumanovo to Kicevo, with audiences ranging in size from 10 to 400, to hear about DUI achievements and challenges. A leaflet summarizing the main themes of the DUI presentation along with information for how to contact MPs and representatives was widely distributed at the meetings.



Over 60 DUI activists attend local branch seminar in Mavrovo

"We heard a lot about topics that represent novelty in politics that will differ us from the practices of other parties."

*Xheladin Shatku
Seminar participant*

"I think that transparency and honest communication with citizens will bring us closer to them and to new achievements."

*Fatmir Dehari
Seminar participant*

Emerging leaders in the Liberal party



Liberal Party activists at NDI seminar in Skopje

Fighting their image as the smallest caucus in parliament, feisty Liberal party activists were the first to kick off NDI's Emerging Leaders & Local Branch Development program. On July 18 twenty Liberal party activists attended the first one-day session in a year-long program to explore ways to build their skills and learn new techniques to strengthen their local branches.

Each participant will now conduct an assessment of their own branch to gain an overview of its strengths, weaknesses, needs and potential. They will focus on the three main areas featured in the NDI program: communications, management practices and internal procedures. The results will form the basis of future working sessions with NDI.

Similar sessions are planned with SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE and LDP in the fall.

“There were many ideas on how to better organize local bodies that might be used in practice...”

*Dejan Talimdzioski,
Seminar Participant*



Nikola Kjurkciev
SDSM

“The activities of SDSM are set out in the document adopted at our fourth Congress. Political engagement also means a constant “storm” of new ideas and new initiatives. We will strengthen our local branches to better implement the responsibilities from our mandate in the government.”



Gezim Ostreni
DUI

“DUI priorities in the next year will be to work on strengthening the organizational capacity of our party, since this effort will make our party perform better and meet the challenges ahead. This is in line with party efforts to impose a new political mentality in the country.”



Roza Topuzova
Karevska
LDP

“LDP will focus on strengthening the organizational aspect of the party structure and prepare for elections in the local branches. We will also continue to put our efforts into the realization of our pre-election program.”



Den Doncev
VMRO-DPMNE

“Our priorities are the selection of the local branches and a new organizational structure. We are the first party to implement modern practices for the selection of local branch presidents. We will do the same with our new structure, which will make us ready to fight and win the next elections.”



Zoran Dimov
LP

“The priority of LP is to hold annual conventions at the local branch level, as well as preparation for the Party Congress. We're building a strategy of transferring certain activities to the local level and also to the specific forms of organization of the LP membership.”



Ruzhdi Matoshi
DPA

“DPA will work toward the full implementation of the Framework Agreement as agreed among the parties in Ohrid. We will oppose every tendency to denigrate it.”

Coming Next:

New class of interns for Parliament



“This is an excellent way to help the work of the MP’s but at the same time to train young people. When I say this I must congratulate NDI for the selection of these young people – it is obvious that the work has been done based on good methodology and objective criteria.”

*Liljana Popovska
Vice-president of Parliament*

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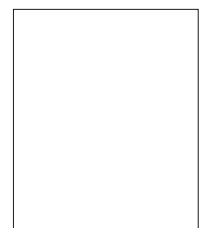
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