

*Republic of Macedonia*  
*Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia*

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY:  
PROMOTION OF THE ECONOMIC LEGISLATION REFORM IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

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Distinguished Chairman,  
Distinguished participants in the Second meeting of the working group,

In October 2007, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia hosted the Workshop on *the Promotion of the Economic Legislation Reform in the Republic of Macedonia*. A study analysis was published as a follow up including conclusions and recommendations, which was distributed among the MPs, Government institutions and the public. The analysis comprises the efforts of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia over the past two years to improve the legislation effectiveness and quality, as well as the Parliament's scrutiny function. Speaking in economic terms, the efforts have been focused on making the Parliament an important factor in enhancing the culture of confidence in the legal system, which in turn, is the driving force behind the success of every economy.

The candidate status for EU membership and the expectation of a date for starting the negotiations have on their part imposed an intense legislative activity and complex process of harmonization with the European law. However, in order to avoid repeating the negative domestic experience of adopting laws in shortened procedure without doing the necessary comparative analysis and examining the potential impact and harmonization status with the other legislation, that have produced problems in implementation and imposed frequent changes of legislation, and in order to also avoid negative experience of some other EU Member States on their path to the Union, management is required that will bring about a high degree of regulatory consistency and coherence.

In the European Commission Report on the Republic of Macedonia's Progress in 2007, it has been indicated that the Assembly failed to adopt the new Rules of Procedure, which would streamline the parliamentary procedure, and that insufficient attention has been dedicated to the provision of the appropriate Budget and staff, in particular in support of the committee operation.

With a view to overcoming the mentioned weaknesses, for two years now there has been an active debate in our Parliament on adoption of new, modern Rules of Procedure and provision of better legislative, research, spatial and IT prerequisites for work. Since the beginning of the year the debate has also involved the idea to increase the financial independence of the Assembly.

The Twinning programmes and expertise that the Macedonian Parliament went through pointed to considerable weaknesses in operation that primarily derive from the weaknesses in the current Rules, i.e. the inefficient legislative procedure. During plenary sessions, there are often fruitless debates that hinder the legislative procedure in a way that the Rules is more and more often used as a tool for blockade, primarily with the possibility of limitless speech time, limitless number of registrations to speak, and the possibility for a single MP to block particular draft legislation by tabling huge number of amendments. On the other hand, it has been acknowledged that the committees play an inactive and inadequate role and that unnecessarily the entire legislative process has focussed on the plenary sessions. Hence, the Parliament has worked rather extensively, i.e. plenary sessions are held almost every workday and on a regular basis they coincide with the committee sessions, which play an insignificant role in the legislative procedure. In effect, the entire amendment debate is held in the plenary, so that the process of adoption and harmonisation of the proposed amendments is clumsy and ineffective. Having in mind that plenary sessions are live broadcast at a separate parliamentary channel, the MPs regularly add to the essence of the debate a propaganda dimension focussed on the viewers and voters.

All these weaknesses were topic of discussion at the Conference held in Wilton Park, England in last January, which brought together nearly ¼ of the total number of MPs of almost all parliamentary political parties. Three action plans emerged as a follow up to this internal parliamentary dialogue, including implementation deadlines, and part of the foundations for their preparation were the conclusions and recommendations of the Workshop on the Promotion of the Economic Legislation Reform in the Republic of Macedonia.

At the same time, the remarks concerning the efficiency in the work of the Parliament have become part of the total list of remarks i.e. benchmarks submitted to the Republic of Macedonia by the European Union prior to the acquisition of the date for starting the negotiations for membership in the Union.

In the period following the workshop, numerous steps have been made that are prerequisites for ensuring an enhanced legislative, controlling and representative role of the Assembly.

Thus, with a view to strengthening the coordination relating to the plenary session agenda, in the situation of the current Rules being in force, regular practice of Monday coordination meeting was established between the President of the Assembly and parliamentary groups coordinators.

As for the adoption of the new Rules, it has been agreed that the procedure for its adoption be re-initiated and concentrated in the Committee on the Rules of Procedure and Mandate and Immunity Related Issues and that the Committee acts as a proponent of the text of the new Rules. It was agreed that the existing blocked drafts of Rules submitted by the majority would be simultaneously withdrawn. The intention was that the new draft Rules receive support by all parliamentary groups. There is an agreement between the ruling majority and the opposition on the need for passing new Rules, however the opposition has required that its application begin as of the next parliamentary mandate in 2010, given the proposed and necessary speech time limit.

In relation to the efforts to strengthen the Assembly's financial autonomy, a number of breakthrough steps have been made in order to establish a new committee, i.e. Parliamentary Budget Council, authorized to discuss the Parliament's segment of the State Budget, but also to make consultation, give proposals and conduct harmonization of the Budget items with the competent Ministry. The draft decision on the establishment of the committee has already been drafted and the Assembly is expected to adopt it - including list of MPs who will be represented on the committee on a parity basis, in accordance with the numerosness of each particular parliamentary group. The newly established body would allow budgetary programming of parliamentary revenues and at the same time control of the expenditures pursuant to the previously adopted aggregate budget items.

As for the remarks on the inefficiently organized legislative and legal assistance and lack of expert advice in parliamentary groups, strengthening of the Assembly's capacity has been envisaged for the next 3 years, to be provided by increasing the number of the Assembly staff in the Departments of Research and Analysis, Committees and Translation, that would be supported by acquisition and utilization of appropriate linguistic software. On their part, the Assembly staff members will undergo numerous training programs that are planned to be intensified in the course of the next two years.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia and the Economic Chamber of Macedonia has enabled the private sector to establish connection with the web pages and thus provide direct and timely information on the draft legislation and respect of the right to free access to information of public interest. This link allows for greater participation of the business

community in public debates, and direct submission of initiatives and opinions that have to do with economic legislation.

On its part, the research basis and capacity of the Assembly for an active participation in the legislative process have been enriched with all the research resources of the Government and the ministries accessible by all MPs via Internet.

In terms of strengthening the IT sector capacities, with the Budget re-balance adopted by the end of the last year, additional 250,000 Euros were allocated for improvement of the electronic performance which affect the legislative capacity. The modernisation has been completed with a purchase, for the first time, of notebook computers for all MPs and part of the staff, in the amount of approximately 200,000 Euros. Investment in this area continues in 2008, with 500,000 Euros allocated for this purpose.

In terms of creation of spatial pre-condition, with the project for construction of an annex and refurbishing of the Parliament building, each MP will be provided a separate office, and additional meeting halls for committee sessions will become available.

With a view to integrating and utilising the strengthened IT capacities, the Parliamentary Library Project has been implemented, providing for creation of new library stock of printed and electronic editions of books and other publications, digital library record keeping and spatial and technical pre-conditions requiring approximately 45,000 Euros. For the acquisition of new library stock and translation of capital works in the area of politics and economics 50,000 Euros have been allocated this year.

The efforts in this area are expected to result in an increased access of the MPs and the Assembly staff to the libraries and research potential in the Parliaments of other countries, European Union, Council of Europe and other international organizations, and in particular the US Congress Library and parliamentary libraries of the EU Member States. As part of this type of cooperation with the EU, it is expected that with the implementation of the IPA projects, conditions will be created for closer cooperation with parliamentary libraries of the EU Member States and establishment of an adequate info-segment on the EU legislation. The establishment of the Council of Europe's Information Point has been in the same direction, and the same type of cooperation is expected with other international institutions and organizations.

Early this year the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia became part of the Global Legislative Information Network (GLIN) headquartered in the US Congress Library.

In relation to the strengthening of the **representative role** of the Parliament, and in cooperation with the non-governmental sector, numerous projects have been carried out, and worth mentioning in particular are the Constituency Offices Project, in cooperation with the National Democratic Institute, contributing to an enhanced regular communication between the citizens and Members of Parliament and the local government and the Assembly (Under the Project, 65 offices have been opened allowing high level of access to citizens), as well as My MP Project focussed on the information dissemination in the public on the effects of the work of the MPs.

Thank you.