

LEGISLATURES AND CITIZENS:
**STANDING REGIONAL
CONFERENCE**

14-17 APRIL 2005

THESSALONIKI, GREECE

REPORT

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Legislatures and Citizens:

Promoting EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the domestic and regional level

Date: 14-17 April 2005

Venue: Hyatt Regency Thessaloniki, Greece

Participants: Representatives of parliaments and civil society from Western Balkan countries; representatives of EU parliaments; representatives of inter-governmental agencies; representatives of the East-West Parliamentary Practice Project

Thursday, 14 April 2005

Arrival of participants in Thessaloniki

Friday, 15 April 2004

10:00 – 10:10

Opening of the conference by Jill Adler, EWPPP Director

10:10 – 11:10

Establishing EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the domestic level

Chair: Lord John Roper, House of Lords, United Kingdom

The parliamentary perspective:

In all the parliaments in the region, parliamentarians are faced with the daunting task of having to pass an inordinate amount of legislation in too little time. Understaffing, political pressure, lack of trust and effective cooperation and communication stand in their way. Regardless of country-specific differences, parliamentarians have a common duty to establish contemporary legislation compatible with EU standards and effectively perform their oversight function. Presentations by representatives of the participating parliaments (ten minutes):

- Mr. Fatmir Mediu, Member of Parliament, Albania
- Mr. Mirsad Ćeman, Member of Parliament (SDA), House of Representatives, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Mr. Slavko Matić, Speaker, Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Mr. Dušan Stojičić, President, Parliament of the Republic of Srpska
- Mr. Hydajet Hyseni, Member of Parliament (PDK), Kosovo
- Ms. Cvetanka Ivanova, Member of Parliament, FYR of Macedonia
- Mr. Dragan Kujović, Vice-President, Parliament of Montenegro
- Mr. Vojkan Tomić, Member of Parliament (DSS), Serbia

12:30 – 13:30

The NGO perspective:

Elected representatives need to be encouraged to reach out to civil society for support in both developing effective legislation compatible with EU standards and informing the public about the implications of EU integration. Presentations by representatives of partner NGOs (ten minutes):

- Ms. Kozara Kati, Albanian Centre for Human Rights (Albania)
- Mr. Ivica Čavar, Centres for Civic Initiatives (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Ms. Huliya Hilmi, Centre for Strategic Research and Documentation (FYR of Macedonia)
- Mr. Lulzim Peci, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (Kosovo)
- Mr. Marko Čanović, Centre for Democratic Transition (Montenegro)
- Ms. Dragana Aleksandrić, European Movement in Serbia (Serbia)

15:00 – 16:00

Establishing EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the regional level

An essential element of EU policy is the advancement of individual countries towards EU integration parallel with the regional approach. Attempts by some countries to accelerate the process of EU integration have resulted in weakened cooperation at the regional level.

Panel discussion:

- Mr. Csaba Sogor, Member of the Senate, Parliament of Romania
- Mr. Arno Visser, Member of Parliament, The Netherlands

16:30 Conclusions and Recommendations by Prof. Stevan Lilic, Serbia

Saturday, 16 April 2005

10:00 -11:00

The importance of regional transparency and communication for effective democratic development

Chair: Mr. Fatmir Mediu, Chairman of the EU Integration Committee, Parliament of Albania

The basic aim of improving the functioning of democratic institutions and civil society participation in the decision-making process represents a crucial element of democratic development in any country in transition. Regional expertise and resources can help

strengthen certain democratic mechanisms, especially the role of civil society in relation to government and parliament.

Panel Discussion:

- Ms. Branka Rajner, Human Rights Bureau, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Ms. Suzana Grubješić, Member of Parliament, G17, Serbia
- Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu, Member of Parliament, Kosovo

Panel Discussion:

- Mr. Ivan Anastasovski Member of Parliament, SDSM, FYR of Macedonia
- Mr. Franklin de Vrieze, Coordinator, Assembly Support Initiative (ASI), OSCE Mission in Kosovo

14:30 – 16:00

Common approaches of parliaments and civil society in promoting region- wide compliance with EU standards

Chair: Mr. Zoran Sapurić, Member of Parliament; Minister of Environment, FYR of Macedonia

Although some countries are further along in the process of EU integration, all of the countries in the region still have a long way to go. Despite different political situations, promoting EU policies is a common challenge. Common approaches to this challenge will strengthen the regional position vis-à-vis the EU.

Panel Discussion:

- Mr. Dragan Antonovski, Citizen's Association MOST, FYR of Macedonia
- Prof. Stevan Lilić, University of Belgrade; former Member of Parliament, Serbia
- Mr. Goran Đurović, Center for Development of NGOs, Montenegro
- Mr. Paul de Krom, Member of Parliament, The Netherlands
- Mr. Petro Koci, Member of Parliament, Albania

16:30 Recommendations and follow-up by Lord Roper, United Kingdom

Sunday, 17 April 2005

Departure of participants

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

☐ Albania

Ms. Makhbule Ceco, MP, Deputy Speaker of the Albanian Parliament, Socialist Party

Ms. Elsa Ballauri, Director, Albanian Group for Human Rights

Mr. Rasim Gjoka, Director, Albanian Helsinki Committee

Ms. Kozara Kati, Executive Director, Albanian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR)

Mr. Petro Koci, MP, Head of the Albanian Delegation to the Council of Europe, Socialist Party

Mr. Nard Ndoka, MP, Democratic Party

Mr. Musa Ulqini, MP, Chairman of the Committee for the Media, Socialist Party

□ Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Slavko Matić, Speaker, HDZ, House of Peoples, Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mr. Dušan Stojičić, President, SDS, National Assembly of Republika Srpska
Mr. Remzija Kadrić, Speaker, S BiH, Council of People of Republika Srpska
Mr. Anto Baotić, Secretary, House of Representatives, Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mr. Ivica Čavar, Project Manager, Centers for Civic Initiatives (CCI)
Mr. Mirsad Ćeman, MP, SDA, House of Representatives, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ms. Nada Decovski, Executive Director, Democratic Center "New Hopes", Čapljina
Ms. Lejla Deronja, Project Assistant, Centers for Civic Initiatives (CCI)
Mr. Avdo Hebib, MP, SDA, House of Representatives, Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mr. Ivo Miro Jović, MP, House of Representatives, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mr. Ivan Madunić, MP, HDZ, House of Representatives, Parliament of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ms. Branka Rajner, Executive Director, Human Rights Bureau, Tuzla
Mr. Boško Šiljegović, MP, SDS, House of Peoples, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mr. Mirko Stevanović, Secretary General, Council of People of Republika Srpska
Ms. Nevenka Trifković, MP, PDP, National Assembly of Republika Srpska

□ FYR of Macedonia

Mr. Ivan Anastasovski, MP, Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia
Mr. Dragan Antonovski, Citizen's Association MOST
Mr. Blagoja Gesovski, MP, Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia
Ms. Hulija Hilmi, Project Manager, Forum - Centre for Strategic Research and Documentation (Forum – CSRD)
Ms. Cvetanka Ivanova, MP, President of the Legislative and Legal Committee
Mr. Dimce Mitreski, Head of the Development Department, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation
Mr. Ismet Ramadani, MP, Party for Democratic Prosperity
Mr. Nelko Stojanoski, MP, Liberal Democratic Party
Mr. Zoran Zaev, frmr. MP, Mayor of Strumica

□ Kosovo (UNMIK)

Mr. Kole Berisha, MP, Democratic League of Kosovo
Dr. Alush Gashi, MP, Head of the Parliamentary Group, Democratic League of Kosovo
Mr. Sabri Hamiti, MP, Democratic League of Kosovo
Mr. Hydajet Hyseni, MP, Democratic Party of Kosovo
Mr. Oliver Ivanovic, MP, Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija
Mr. Nazim Jashari, MP, Parliamentary Group ORA
Mr. Jakup Krasniqi, MP, Head of the Parliamentary Group, Democratic Party of Kosovo
Mr. Dzezair Murati, MP, Parliamentary Group 6+
Mr. Lulzim Peci, Executive Director, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED)
Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu, MP, Member of Presidency, Democratic League of Kosovo

Ms. Gjylnaze Sylja, MP, Head of the Parliamentary Group, Alliance for the Future Kosovo

☐ Montenegro (Serbia and Montenegro)

Mr. Dragan Kujović, Vice-President, Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS)

Mr. Marko Čanović, Center for Democratic Transition (CDT)

Mr. Goran Danilović, MP, Serbian People's Party (SNS)

Mr. Ferhat Dinusha, MP, Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA)

Mr. Goran Đurović, Center for Development of NGOs (CRNVO)

Mr. Vasilije Lalošević, MP, Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP)

Mr. Krsto Pavićević, MP, Citizens Party of Montenegro (GPCG)

Mr. Boris Raonić, Nansen Dialogue Center (NDC)

Mr. Vladan Simonović, Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM)

Mr. Ervin Spahić, MP, Social Democratic Party of Montenegro (SDP)

☐ Serbia (Serbia and Montenegro)

Ms. Dragana Aleksandrić, Project Assistant, EMINS

Ms. Suzana Grubješić, MP, G17 Plus

Mr. Željko Ivanji, MP, G17 Plus

Mr. Miroslav Janković, MP, Democratic Party of Serbia

Mr. Stevan Lilić, Professor at Law, Lawyers for Democracy

Mr. Danijel Pantic, Secretary General, EMINS

Mr. Vojkan Tomić, MP, Democratic Party of Serbia

Mr. Zoran Vacić, Center for Liberal-Democratic Studies

☐ Representatives of EU and other European countries

Mr. Paul de Krom, MP, Parliament of the Netherlands

Lord John Roper, Liberal Democrat Chief Whip, House of Lords, United Kingdom

Mr. Csaba Sogor, Senator, Parliament of Romania

Mr. Arno Visser, MP, Parliament of the Netherlands

Mr. Franklin de Vrieze, Political Affairs Officer, Assembly Support Initiative (OSCE Mission in Kosovo)

☐ East-West Parliamentary Practice Project

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Mr. Fatmir Mediu, Member of Parliament, Albania

Mr. Zoran Sapurić, Member of Parliament, Minister of Environment, Liberal Democratic Party, FYR of Macedonia

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SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

DAY 1

Opening of the conference by Jill Adler, EWPPP Director

On behalf of the East-West Parliamentary Practice Project, Jill Adler welcomed the participants, distinguished presidents, speakers and other representatives of parliament and civil society organizations from the Western Balkans and other parts of the ever-expanding Europe to the first Standing Regional Conference of the *Legislatures and Citizens* programme.

She extended a special welcome to Lord Roper, who has worked with the EWPPP on this project in its first phases and continues to provide his invaluable insight, guidance and support.

Ms. Adler further mentioned how pleased the EWPPP was that Mr. Sogor from the Romanian Parliament could join the meeting, and that the EWPPP would continue to include representatives of parliaments and civil societies from Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia in future activities. This new programme is aimed at the Western Balkans and has a distinctly regional focus. Through a series of regional meetings, including visits to participating countries, common regional problems will be brought into focus, as will common strategies for dealing with them. The theme of this first Standing Regional Conference is promoting EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the domestic and regional level.

Establishing EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the domestic level

The first part of the conference, chaired by **Lord John Roper**, House of Lords, United Kingdom, addressed the establishment of EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the domestic level and included both the parliamentary and NGO perspective.

Lord Roper began the discussions by mentioning the great importance of maintaining good relations between parliament and NGOs. He also referred to the recently released report by the International Commission on the Balkans *The Balkans in Europe's Future*, and the great interest of Europe in the Balkans.

The Parliamentary Perspective

Mr. Fatmir Mediu, Member of the Albanian Parliament, spoke about member state building. He stated that the objective is not simply to build or establish a state the EU can accept; the challenge is building democratic governments within those states.

Mr. Mirsad Ceman, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, Chairman of the Constitutional Committee, spoke about BiH in transition, the consensus in Parliament regarding the EU, and the willingness of all parties to work towards ascension.

Mr. Slavko Matić, Speaker, Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, focused on the pace and problems connected with changes, including, the danger in adopting laws which are not harmonized with the constitution.

Mr. Dušan Stojičić, President, Parliament of the Republic of Srpska, Chair of the Constitutional Committee, discussed the inevitability of joining the EU, considering the history of the region and the importance of finding the institutional processes necessary to make it happen.

Mr. Hydajet Hyseni, Member of the Kosovo Assembly (PDK), Kosovo, focused on the creation of standards. He stressed how crucial standards are for the further development of Kosovo. He also noted the importance of regional cooperation to Kosovo.

Ms. Cvetanka Ivanova, Member of Parliament, FYR of Macedonia, spoke about the difficult path Macedonia followed in order to submit an application for EU membership in February 2005, and the further work which needs to be done in order to complete the accession process.

Mr. Dragan Kujović, Vice-President, Parliament of Montenegro, discussed the EU accession process and the need to achieve standards. He discussed the Cetinje Parliamentary Forum, a framework aimed at promoting and supporting regional parliamentary cooperation, especially at the level of Committees. This forum was initiated by the Parliament of Serbia and Montenegro and by the Parliament of Montenegro.

Mr. Vojkan Tomić, Member of Parliament (DSS), Member of the EU Integration Committee, Serbia, spoke about how hard the Serbian Parliament has worked to adopt laws in accordance with EU prerequisites and the importance of maintaining the relationship between parliament and citizens throughout the EU integration process.

Lord Roper found that overall the presentations were very encouraging. The growing maturity of the parliaments and the success of the *Legislatures and Citizens* programme in assisting the growth are evident.

Establishing EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the domestic level

The NGO Perspective

Ms. Kozara Kati, Executive Director, Albanian Centre for Human Rights, discussed improvements in cooperation between legislatures and citizens. An example of improved cooperation is the fact that the Albanian Parliament has begun to invite experts to roundtable discussions. She also stressed how important the program was in building bridges of mutual respect among all the participants.

Mr. Ivica Čavar, Project Manager, Centres for Civic Initiatives, Bosnia and Herzegovina, spoke about how complex BiH is and how many organizations are working very hard to democratize both the state and civil society. The democratization of the state and civil society will allow both parties to support one another in their common goal, a functional and modern BiH.

Ms. Hulija Hilmi, Coordinator, Forum-Centre for Strategic Research (CSR) and Documentation (CSR), FYR of Macedonia, explained that CSR's projects are based on the concept of good governance and the rule of law. She emphasized that this concept and the respect of the principles associated with it are the basis of good governance and rule of law at the domestic and regional level.

Mr. Lulzim Peci, Executive Director, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, focused on three issues, including problems with the adoption of laws, civil society, and European integration. He stressed that effective cooperation between the legislature and civil society is of utmost importance in reforming and improving the law making process in Kosovo.

Mr. Marko Čanović, Director, Centre for Democratic Transition, Montenegro, referred to a recent poll of Montenegrin citizens' knowledge of their parliament. The results demonstrated how little the public knows. He noted that these results demonstrate the need to keep citizens informed.

Ms. Dragana Aleksandrić, Project Assistant, European Movement in Serbia, noted the importance of the opportunities provided by the conference, including the possibility to exchange ideas, define strategies for mutual campaigns, crystallize thoughts on future interregional cooperation, and to become better acquainted with one another as partners.

Establishing EU standards of good governance and rule of law at the regional level

Mr. Csaba Sogor, Senator, Parliament of Romania, spoke about Romania's experience with establishing EU standards and the difficulties it has faced since it began the accession process. He stressed that the focus in Romania needs to lie on decentralization, stable institutions at all levels of public administration, access to adequate financial resources for local administrations, the restructuring of the eight existing regions of development, competent and decisive regional authority, and strengthening the autonomy of local communities.

Mr. Arno Visser, Member of Parliament, The Netherlands, focused on the region and its importance for the Western Balkan countries. He stated that regional partners are trade partners and there should always be a focus on cooperation. EU cooperation should not be in conflict with regional cooperation. He stressed that the pace of integration is a concern; the transition process is difficult and "speed" is a risk.

Lord Roper began the open discussion by posing questions about regional identity. Who decides what constitutes a region? Does the EU often impose regional boundaries with little regard for good or bad governance?. He suggested that perhaps Brussels was to blame for some of the problems in “the region.”. He noted that regions are very valuable; they include a lot of diversity and opportunities for development. One must accept a degree of flexible geometry when discussing regions. There are opportunities and a role for a sub-regional parliamentary body.

Mr. Mediu noted that two years ago the European Union initiated the integration of the Balkans through the European Partnership Programme. But this region is as close to failure as it is close to success. *The Balkans in Europe’s Future* reports on both violence and corruption, which is how the region is viewed from an international perspective. The futures of Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Albania are all unclear. It is difficult to discern who represents the people and with whom the EU will communicate. Member state building and the regional market are very important in order to attract foreign investors. Minority rights and multi-ethnicity are also very important issues. There is a great need to work together as a region. One important issue concerns visas: currently, it is more difficult to travel within the Balkans than outside. There is no free movement and nothing can be done without free movement. Common policies for common concerns should be created.

Mr. Zoran Vacić, NGO representative from Serbia, from the Center for Liberal-Democratic Studies, emphasized the important role of the NGO sector in promoting EU standards and the rule of law. Politicians have the ability to quantify success. Constitutional reforms are the responsibility of the politicians and NGO sector. Strong ownership rights and an independent judiciary are vital to economic growth and stability. It is important to address the question of how basic civil, political, and economic freedoms are guaranteed. There is a need for a free and deregulated market, not only for the Balkans but also for the EU, which has been in transition for 15 years and continues to grow, including radical and populist movements.

Mr. Dragan Kujović, Vice-President, Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS), stated that he would rather wait and not push through a thousand laws in one year. He mentioned that he used to criticize NGOs, but that he has changed his position. In Montenegro over the years, there have been important improvements in the cooperation between Parliament and NGOs. Events were organized by NGOs that included the participation of all parties. It is necessary for NGOs and Parliament (ruling and opposition) to do their jobs. In order to adopt one thousand laws, all will need to work very hard.

Mr. Arno Visser, MP, Parliament of the Netherlands, responded by saying not to underestimate the transition within member states. Citizens in EU member states have mixed feelings. The essence of democracy is mixed; currently, there is a rise in populism, anti-EU feeling, and regional movements.

Mr. Csaba Sogor, Senator, Parliament of Romania, noted that the EU is not a solution for all; Switzerland and Norway maintain a life outside of the EU.

Mr. Stevan Lilić, Professor of Law, Lawyers for Democracy, drew some conclusions and recommendations. He first mentioned that it was evident that the participants have come a long way. This was demonstrated by the fact that all speeches were held within the time limits. The improved communication skills are a product of the project.

Among countries within the project there are tensions, conflicts (Serbia and Montenegro) which are affecting the whole region. Mr. Mediu focused on corruption; it is interesting that criminal organizations have no communication problems whereas institutions do.

Regarding common policies, valued added tax (VAT) is a common policy which helps to get rid of grey area. There are a few rare pieces of legislation in which all of the Western Balkan countries have an interest; the implementation of VAT laws is considered vital by all. Laws on broadcasting and free access to information have been adopted but are either not implemented or too difficult to implement. As an example, the Freedom of Information Act was passed in Serbia but it has not been implemented. Constitutional reform laws are vital but to have an effective constitution there needs to be a social consensus on EU integration and political compromise. In Kosovo, the structure of legal institutions should be a focus; there is a gap between legislatures and citizens and too much legislation is being churned out.

Further, two key issues were emphasized: the rule of law and citizens' initiatives. Regarding the rule of law, the legal infrastructure needs to comply with the value system. Concerning citizens' initiatives, there are three entities that have legislative capacities: government, deputies, and citizens' initiative. Regarding implementation, ideas include creating parliamentary committees. Currently, Parliament lacks a legislative role; they are overshadowed by their political role. There is too much politics in Parliament. In conclusion, interaction between legislatures and citizens is working. There is interaction; however, it must be enhanced through the implementation of laws passed.

Mr. Hydajet Hyseni, MP, Democratic Party of Kosovo, stated that one of the issues in Kosovo is indeed incomplete structures and also the intensive law making process. A sign of improvement, however, is that multilingualism is functioning better.

Lord Roper ended the day by drawing two conclusions; first, more time needs to be spent on constitutional reform and second, implementation is the responsibility of the executive. However, it is also important for the parliaments to set up committees on post-legislative scrutiny.

DAY 2

The importance of regional transparency and communication for effective democratic development

The morning session, chaired by **Mr. Fatmir Mediu**, Member of the Albanian Parliament, addressed the importance of regional transparency and communication for effective democratic development through panel discussions which included both NGO representatives and members of parliament. **Mr. Mediu** began the discussions by stating that implementation is key and it is the most crucial topic for any country in transition.

The countries need to get out of the status quo. Many questions still need to be answered, such as visa issues, minority rights, etc.

Ms. Branka Rajner, Executive Director, Human Rights Bureau, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated that through good will and good legislation changes are possible. She gave the example of her organization, which started as a local organization but through hard work has come to be recognized throughout BiH and the region. This has allowed the organization to realize several regional projects which worked towards improving implementation of laws and the harmonization of laws with EU standards.

Ms. Suzana Grubješić, MP, G17 Plus, Serbia, emphasized the necessity for Serbia to abide by the rules, as the only alternative to regional cooperation was isolation. She also noted that there is a need for more harmonization between government and parliament. Currently, the parliament is only able to act as a voting machine.

Mr. Fatmir Sejdiu, Member of Parliament, Kosovo, spoke about how all the countries are concerned about how to accelerate the integration process and that Kosovo was no exception. Kosovo is strongly oriented towards this goal. No longer a potential source for a crisis, integration is an obtainable target for Kosovo.

The floor was opened for questions by **Mr. Mediu** who stated that the final status of Kosovo is a very important point and that the European Commission needs to work with parliament.

Lord Roper asked Ms. Grubješić whether or not the citizens of Serbia are included in the EU integration process and if so, is it the same in the other countries of the Western Balkans. She responded that through certain programmes, citizens are included in the process.

Mr. Oliver Ivanovic, MP, Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija, commented that the status issue is most important. There needs to be a compromise. There is no chance for a trade off or a declaration for independence because that would not bring stability. He stated that it is better to contemplate problems such as the fight against crime and corruption because although status is the most important issue, it will not resolve all problems.

Mr. Lulzim Peci, Executive Director, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), noted that NGOs in Kosovo have created programs to assure the education of the youth about the EU and EU institutions in both secondary schools and universities. To this end, various debates have been held. He added that despite these advancements still more needs to be done for the population in general.

Mr. Sabri Hamiti, MP, Democratic League of Kosovo, stressed that communication with NGOs is very important because parliament bears the burden of failure. He asked Ms. Grubješić to give her perspective using both her past experience in civil society and current experience in parliament.

Ms. Grubješić responded by saying that NGOs have more freedom with ideas, raising initiatives, as they do not have responsibilities to voters.

Ms. Nada Decovski, Executive Director, Democratic Center “New Hopes”, Čapljina, BiH, stated that NGOs assume the responsibility of political parties to the people. NGOs define positions for the public and launch initiatives. The countries of the Western Balkans need to get into the EU, which will be very difficult without cooperation.

Mr. Ismet Ramadani, MP, Party for Democratic Prosperity, Macedonia, added that there is still a problem with cooperation. NGOs should continue to work towards finding ways to assure more fruitful cooperation.

Mr. Dzezair Murati, MP, Parliamentary Group 6+, Kosovo, stressed how different results are often arrived at when dealing in official settings. He suggested that informal meetings between citizens and MPs that focus on the quality of laws would yield better results.

Mr. Dragan Kujović, Vice-President, Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro, stressed that the task is difficult. There is a need to harmonize efforts in order not to waste time.

Mr. Jakup Krasniqi, MP, Head of the Parliamentary Group, Democratic Party of Kosovo, suggested sticking to the theme. He stated that in the region at present there are many important changes taking place and commitments being made. There is a new democratic reality in Southeastern Europe. A few issues have been raised including decentralization, the role of parliament, and local government in particular. Parliament has been discussing many topics, including religion, which should raise the issue of tolerance. MPs are the representatives of the people in a country with a complex past; a new vision is needed to step up efforts towards change.

Mr. Ivan Anastasovski, MP, Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia, stated that integration is difficult and that the Copenhagen criteria will only become more difficult to fulfill. He gave Macedonia’s recent adoption of Albanian as an official language as an example of working together towards one goal. He suggested a mini-Balkan parliament in order to help harmonize legislation because the EU is interested in the region as one market. He noted the imposed necessity for maximum transparency and communication, and thus the enhancement of positive democratic processes.

Mr. Franklin de Vrieze, Political Affairs Officer, Assembly Support Initiative (OSCE Mission in Kosovo), presented the work of the Assembly of Kosovo and its interaction with civil society. He further elaborated on issues of relevance for the whole region - specifically, the legislative process, enhancing transparency, and making resources available at a regional level.

Mr. Danijel Pantic, Secretary General, EMINS, Serbia, stressed the importance of the promotion of peaceful integration, suggesting a liberalized visa regime as a good start. Political representatives, NGO representatives, business representatives all need to be able to contact counterparts throughout the Balkans. Through the *Legislatures and Citizens* programme, EMiNS has had the opportunity to hear about the experiences of local partner organizations, which has proved very useful. He also suggested making experts from NGOs available to parliamentary committees when they are understaffed.

Ms. Grubješić responded by stating that she has seen regional cooperation at work in Serbia through comparative legislation, which the EU integration committee proposed to parliament. This is an encouraging example, but she stressed the need for further communication between parliaments and NGOs in the region. The current lack of communication is an obstacle to free exchange.

Ms. Gjylnaze Sylja, MP, Head of the Parliamentary Group, Alliance for the Future Kosovo, responded that Kosovo is also seeking open, peaceful relations. All the countries in the region are aiming towards common targets. She proposed the building of a common trust. Currently, the EU sees the Balkans as an alien body; the region needs to be promoted.

Mr. de Vrieze stressed the importance of monitoring. The Kosovo Assembly has the capacity for self-regulation, which ensures that accountability is in place.

Common approaches of parliaments and civil society in promoting region wide compliance with EU standards

The afternoon session, chaired by **Mr. Zoran Sapurić**, Member of Parliament, Minister of Environment, Liberal Democratic Party, Macedonia and EWPPP Steering Committee member, addressed common approaches of parliaments and civil society in promoting region-wide compliance with EU standards through a panel discussion which included members of parliament and NGO representatives from the Balkans and Western Europe. **Mr. Sapurić** opened the session, stating that some countries in the region are further along in the accession process due to difficulties which are evident when comparing Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic with the Western Balkan states. There is however, throughout the region, a consensus among citizens that EU integration is the only way. He discussed the need to strengthen the regional position of the Western Balkans. He further mentioned a policy of the EU, improving cooperation among all countries, at all levels. This policy includes cooperation with civil society, which is improving through the work of local and international NGOs. He also mentioned that there is still a great need to build the capacity of both parliaments and NGOs.

Mr. Dragan Antonovski, Citizen's Association MOST, Macedonia, stressed that the Balkans are still far from the European Union and that all laws will eventually be adopted, but the implementation of those laws is just as important for the region.

Mr. Lilić elaborated on the common aim of meeting EU standards and some issues relating to that aim. There is a need to be critical of NGOs and civil society as they have a major role to play in fighting regimes. Also, it is important that the government meets specific standards, e.g. fighting against unfair competition.

Mr. Goran Đurović, Center for Development of NGOs, Montenegro, spoke about the creation of preconditions for future joint activities of Parliaments and NGOs. He also spoke about European integration, noting that what is of particular importance is that the Western Balkan states must do the work alone. The states are responsible for themselves.

Mr. Paul de Krom, Member of Parliament, The Netherlands, offered his views on the issue of regionalization in relation to the EU. He emphasized that the Balkan countries should first strengthen their regional framework before focusing on EU membership. He added that setting up a regional cooperative framework might be helpful in achieving the goal of EU membership more quickly and efficiently.

Mr. Petro Koci, Member of Parliament, Albania, spoke about how the Balkans are facing common challenges which result in a need for common approaches. The most important of these challenges is EU integration. The EU is more aggressive in helping economic development and regional cooperation. He added that the fight against crime and corruption is another common challenge, which is very important for future integration.

Mr. Ivo Miro Jović, MP, House of Representatives, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, commented about EU standards and criticized the fact that the EU will not allow BiH to have three different languages, despite the fact that Ireland has different religious schools set up for minorities which make up only 4% of the population. In France in 1939, their regional language was abolished; however, in 1992 they began teaching it again. He stated that the reason the EU will not allow all three languages in BiH is because it is too costly. He stressed that the focus should be on democracy and values and not on Euros. He questioned how the EU could support universities for the Serbs and Bosnians and not for the Croats. He stated that all people should be able to use their mother tongue. He added that he would not gladly go to Europe and that it is not the only way to reform.

Mr. Remzija Kadrić, Speaker, S BiH, Council of People of Republika Srpska, drew three conclusions: one, participants believe all activities towards EU integration in the Western Balkan countries should be accelerated; two, there should be full implementation of citizens' rights; and three, the participants are grateful to the Dutch Parliament for its important contribution.

Mr. Sabri Hamiti, MP, Democratic League of Kosovo, spoke about working as a representative of democracy for Kosovo, stating that it is their task to implement programs. The Kosovo Assembly will realize norms, standards, and all other conditions to complete integration for Kosovo's citizens.

Mr. Zoran Vacić, Center for Liberal-Democratic Studies, Serbia, suggested three things which NGOs should advocate: one, respect and protection for civic freedoms; two, ideas to modernize states; and three, maintain good parliamentary/civil society cooperation. He expanded on the cooperation between parliament and civil society, noting that his Center was involved in an anti-corruption draft law which was adopted, without any imposition, and reduced corruption by 70% at the highest level.

Mr. Mediu noted that the Balkan countries can share common problems as they have a common future. In order to do so, the countries must start with understanding, common work, the fulfillment of obligations, and respect for one another.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Lord Roper concluded the two-day workshop. He mentioned that he had worked closely with the Balkans in the 1990's through international commissions, and stressed how extraordinary it was to come back and see such progress. Parliamentarians and civil society representatives are reacting more. There are disagreements and a continued dialogue which are both signs of maturity. There are parallels with Western European country debates.

He quoted from an article in the *Economist* printed 14 April 2005, "the European Union is suffering from enlargement fatigue, and fretting over the fate of its draft constitution. There is little enthusiasm for the entry of Romania and Bulgaria, or Turkey—let alone any of the Western Balkans. But EU leaders are also slowly coming to realise that it is better to absorb and rehabilitate the Balkan countries than to leave them behind on the platform, as destitute troublemakers."

He encouraged participants to speak to an audience that wants to listen. It is easy for parliaments to pass laws but it is the implementation of those laws that is key. He suggested some mechanisms for post-legislative scrutiny. Ministers should report how far laws have come and there should be an assembly monitor. He stressed that it must be realized that there are responsibilities; the countries of the Western Balkans must be able to explain why they want to become members. Further, people must know how to use their rights. He encouraged the development of political programmes and stressed the need for civil society to take initiatives.

The paradox of parliament which on the one hand passes government's laws and on the other scrutinizes government allows for civil society to play a role in the process. He emphasized that challenging parliament is important. It is necessary to secure advice from different people and coordinate efforts. He further suggested creating a network of interaction with committees on EU integration. It is important to start with improving home affairs such as the justice system. He referred to Mr. Jović's criticism of the international community and noted that it is valuable to have skepticism. As an example, he explained that the English have given power to two entities, which shows that the European Union does not automatically lead to an auto-culture.