

THE CHALLENGE OF ORGANIZATION THE RESEARCH SERVICE AND THE LIBRARY OF ALBANIAN ASSEMBLY*

By Zana Bufi

The Library of the Albanian Assembly was established on January 1992, as part of the administration of first pluralist parliament that came out of first free and democratic elections held in Albania. Nevertheless, the research and information service of Library was introduced much later on.

Since then, the library has gone through several phases of its establishment and development of which I would highlight the following:

- The stage of the establishment of the parliamentary library in compliance with well-known standards. This stage covers the period 1993-1996. This process was carried out with the assistance of the Library of the American Congress through the Frost Task Force Project, in the framework of providing assistance to the legislative process, so as to make of the Parliament an important institution during the process of the democratization of the whole life of the country.
- The years 1997-1999 is the period during which serious efforts were made by the staff of our Library to give effect to changes in the Regulations of the Parliament of Albania so that the Library should be recognized as a separate department. At the same period, the research services were attached to the Library.
- The period starting from January 2000 marks the establishment of the Committee for the Control of the Research Service and the Library, which is manned by MP's as well, in order to impart a powerful impulse to the activity of the Library and the parliamentary research service.

Assistance of the US Congress Task Force was so fundamental in providing our Library with the most necessary equipment and software, and the staff training, in particular. On the other hand, contacts with our colleagues from Eastern and

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Central European Parliaments have also been found very helpful because of similar post-communist history and the same challenges we have to deal with.

For us, the challenge was at making parliamentary members and their supporting staffs understand why parliamentary research service and Library are the heartbeat and pulse of the parliamentary activities. But, how to do it!

Among the primary objectives of the Library is to make the parliamentary deputies and their staff aware of its services and facilities, and to encourage library use. To meet this objective, the library, in conjunction with the Standing Commission of the Assembly, periodically organizes and presents a seminar entitled: "Library and Parliamentary information" As this name implies, the purpose of this seminar is to brief parliamentary members about various library resources and services, including new and pending developments that will better assist members in their work.

In the absence of a reading room directly in the parliament building, the Library staff continually works to advertise the Library's services and to improve the distribution of publications to the deputies. In keeping with this purpose, the Library stays in contact with the deputies through the staff of the Standing Commission.

By the Library of the Parliament of Albania are undertaken efforts to provide legislative assistance to the MP's, thus aiming to become a significant part of the Parliament of Albania during the transition period towards a pluralist society. We are aware that this process is not an easy one, and the events that took place in Albania during 1997 and 1998 proved this.

Thanks to our efforts, following the events in 1997 the equipment and the database in the Library was not damaged, and it was made sure that work proceeded under normal conditions. However, during the events in September 1998, nearly the entire database of the Library was unfortunately destroyed: the central server in which the TINLIB program was installed, was destroyed; the four PC's and the photocopy and the fax machines were taken away, and the place was looted. However, all the information fed into the databases in the ProCite program from 1994-December 1996 was saved in diskettes. The data for the years 1997 and 1998 that were saved in the central server in which the TINLIB program was installed, were entirely lost.

The main thing we had to do at that time was to recover the losses, at the same time continuing to provide services to the Members of the Parliament and the staff of the Parliament.

Proceeding from the very developments of the Balkans, we are aware of the contribution of the Research Service and the Library might promote this democratization process, as well as develop a set of suggested standards for effective parliamentary research services.

To this end, the Library decided to take on the responsibility to play the role of the mediator between ideas and action. This was not an easy thing to do. It required efforts, persistence, and above all, quick action. In this time the Parliament of Albania was faced with the emergency situation following the 1998 events and the 1999 Kosova crisis, priority was continuously given to the work in the parliamentary committees and plenary sessions.

At the same time, during these years the Parliament focused on the improvement of its Regulations, and the Regulations on the Organization and Functioning of the Staff of the Parliament. It was precisely at this time that we started to insist firmly in order to achieve several of our long-term goals:

- The change in the organigram of the Parliament, which would bring about the separation of the Library from the Publications Department, so that it could stand on its own;
- Attachment of the Research Service to the Library;
- The establishment of the Committee for the Control of the Research Service and the Library, manned also by Members of the Parliament whose participation in it would impart a powerful impetus to settlement of the problems of Research Service and the Library.
- Recruitment of the parliamentary staff to be involved in the Research Service.
- Manage change for upgrading traditional library service and service of information to an electronic library and computerized information service;

The Library offer their services only to the MP's of all the parliamentary Legislatures, the members As a result of these efforts, by decision of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania, dated 9 April 1998, the Regulations of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania was adopted. Article 116 states explicitly that: *"... amongst the services offered by the staff of the Parliament are the legal service and the research and information service, to help the Members of the Parliament in the process of the drafting and examination of the draft laws."*

In October 1999, the Regulations on the Organization and Functioning of the Staff of the Parliament were adopted. Its organogram provides that the Research Service and the Library are a separate department. For the first time, the new Regulations

highlight the establishment and functioning of the Committee for the Control of the Research Service and the Library

In July 2000, by decision of the Speaker of the Parliament, the composition of this Committee made up of seven members: four Members of the Parliament, and three members of the parliamentary staff, were adopted.

The Research Service and of the President's cabinet, the members of the Cabinet of the Minister who is in contact with the Parliament, the part-time adviser of the Parliament, and the secretaries of the parliamentary groups.

In order to provide the necessary information to the Members of the Parliament, we cooperate with the National Library of Albania, Albanian NGO's, different international organizations operating in Albania: the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations High Commissions for Refugees etc.

The Secretary General of the Parliament of Albania addressed a letter to these organizations and institutions, as well as all the Ministries and other Albanian Central Departments, requiring that they sent their publications to the Library of the Parliament. Thus, the Library began to collect the documentation on the period of the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic State. These publications will help the lawyers and the support staff in the parliamentary committees with their analytical studies, thus enabling them to contribute to the legislative process. A leaflet is distributed to the Members of the Parliament which provides comprehensive information on the Research Services and Library and the services it offers.

- Service and the Library offer the following services to their users:
- The information and bibliographical service.
- The consultation service on the classic catalogues, the collections of books, and the way of accessing to the Library services.
- Information on the Library services' users on the accessing to the resources of electronic information.
- Information on every legislature, including the three last electoral elections: 1992, 1996, and 1997.
- Information on the CV's of the Members of the Parliament in every legislature.

- Advisory service to the parliamentary committees, with an anticipation of preliminary information in compliance with the agenda of the parliamentary activity.
- Selected titles of articles, of interest to the Parliament and on each and every Member of the Parliament, taken from the magazines and newspapers to which the Library is subscribed.
- Preparation of "info-packs", being this an initiative undertaken by the Research Services and Library to provide the parliamentary delegations attending international events with various historical, economic, legislative, executive and judiciary data. In specific cases, at the request of the Members of the Parliament "info-packs" on a particular subject are prepared.
- Preparation of "info-packs" with abstracts from the reference books, especially on Albania, and various subjects of parliamentary interest.
- In specific cases, research has also been undertaken in the framework of the ECPRD.

The legislative research is one of the research services in which the Members of the Parliament and their support staff have also taken an interest. The request is usually put forward by the Parliamentarian concerned, either depositing it directly at the Library or by telephone. In order to be able to provide a quick and accurate service to the Members of the Parliament, we make use of our own reference resources, the database of the Library, the electronic resources, and in given cases, we cooperate also with foreign Embassies in Albania. Research on the Albanian legislation has also been undertaken at the request of foreign Embassies in Albania.

We have recorded an increasing number of requests for our services. During the January-July 2000 only, 130 requests have been filed. Whereas during 1997, 70 requests were recorded.

The Members of the Parliament take a special interest in the press service, as well. After having taken a look at the daily press, we prepare the relevant indexes for the articles, which are then clipped. The files for the articles covering the parliamentary activity are prepared on the basis of their subject. The debates in the Parliament published in the press, the press conferences, interviews, opinions and statements are entered in a special index under the relevant name of the Member of the Parliament (clips from the daily press). At the same time, they are entered into the respective database. At the end of the summer and winter sessions, beginning from the year 2000, bibliographies of their activities published in the Albanian

press are prepared, which are distributed to them at the beginning of each new session.

The Library publishes:

- At the beginning of the year, a list of the titles of the newspapers and magazines to which the Library is subscribed;
- A list of new entries;
- Thematic and chronological bibliography of the legal and normative acts published in the Official Gazette for the period 1991-2000 (Albanian-English);
- Thematic bibliography of the articles selected from Albanian newspapers and magazines;
- Thematic bibliography of the books;
- CV's of the Members of the Parliament in every legislature;
- Manuals with information and data on every legislature

The number of the Members of the Parliament (MP's) who use the Library services, has kept increasing:

February 1997: 127 MP's

February 1998: 137 MP's

February 1999: 174 MP's

February 2000: 329 MP's

For the index system of the legal acts, the press and the books the same EUROVOC system is applied. The work on the EUROVOC index system will be finished soon. The beginnings of the work on it go back to 1995.

Referring to future trends, we intend to:

- Manage change for upgrading traditional library service and service of information to an electronic library and computerized information service;
- The library is continuously searching for means to develop a modern information system. Automation of the library work has advanced slower than staff would like, not of any reluctance to organize in a new way, but preliminary due to lack of sufficient funding;
- Develop and maintain the Albanian Assembly Home Page, including Albanian legislation database in (the later developed by the Library own resources);

- Interface the Library system with Plenary Session Hall that will allow parliamentary members to access the library database system on line (Library is physically located in the building of the Presidency of the Albanian Assembly);
- Start with computerization of Plenary Sessions.

Zana Bufi
Kuvendi Shqiperise
Bul. "De"Shmoret e Kombit, NRC,
Terana
Albania