

Draft - Evaluation Report

“Parliament’s Constituency Relations Network” (PCRN)

Bern and Skopje, January 31, 2012

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List of Abbreviations

CO	Constituency Office
COA	Constituency Office Assistant
IPD	Institute of Parliamentary Democracy
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCRN	Parliament's Constituency Relations Network
SC	Steering Committee
SCO	Swiss Cooperation Office (Office of SDC in Skopje)
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDSM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VMRO-DPMNE	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
ZELS	Association of Local Self-Government Units

Executive Summary

Evaluation. The evaluation is taking place at a crucial phase of the project implementation, just before the start of the last year of the current phase. This evaluation is at the same time backward and forward looking. According to the ToRs the evaluation should look at the achievements of the project so far, should assess which approaches have proven successful and which have not and the lessons learned as well as provide conclusions and recommendations for the future. The recommendations are supposed to focus on actions that can ensure a smooth transfer to parliament as well as still possible improvements to the PCR network during the last year of the current phase from the perspective of the citizens and of the MPs.

General satisfaction and appraisal. All discussion partners were supportive of the PCRN. They underlined the importance of the project for better communication between MPs and citizens and also stressed that the constituency offices are one of the few avenues for citizens to get into contact with elected representatives. At the same time, there is some lack of clarity about the strategic orientation of the project (the constituency offices as personal offices of the MP or as regional service-centers of parliament) and the project is 'high maintenance', requiring substantial financial means and human resources. Procedures, e.g. for setting up offices are time consuming and tedious.

Overall Goal of PCRN. According to the project documents, the overall goal of the current phase of the project is that "Democratic practices of constituency communication become a sustainable, integral fully functional system of the Parliament, further increasing the practice of accountability and regular consultation of MPs with constituents regarding legal proposals."

Project Outcomes. The expected results on outcome level are the following:

1. Parliament has fully integrated the constituency office network within its Services as a functional service, facilitating contacts between MPs and citizens.
2. Citizens and NGOs have access to the constituency offices in their Municipality enabling them to place legislative ideas and concerns
3. MPs have conveyed citizens' and NGOs' needs and concerns, obtained from constituency offices, in Parliament and built on them in proposals of new laws or amendments.

Outcome 1. The project is already partly in the hands of state institutions. The main steering and oversight is provided by a Steering Committee composed of the Coordinators or Deputy Coordinators of the Parliamentary Groups and two representatives of SDC. In general, MPs and parliament show support and ownership of the project. Based on a tripartite MoU between SDC, ZELS and the Parliament, the municipalities provide the furnished office premises, the Parliament pays the salaries of COAs as well as operating costs, and IPD (through SDC) finances some office equipment (computer and multifunctional printer), training, promotion material (mainly business cards). The costs for the IPD staff are paid by SDC. However in respect to the planned complete hand-over there are some serious delays. For instance, the setting-up of the Support Unit for the PCRN in parliament, a pre-requisite for the hand-over, is delayed by more than a year. It seems that there are also some systemic challenges in the project design and project procedures. For instance, procedures for establishing offices are often long and cumbersome. Thus the expected outcome 1 is not fully achieved, yet and remains the most challenging.

Outcome 2 and 3. As documentation by IPD shows, outcomes two and three have been largely achieved though with some important limitations. Citizens have access to constituency offices and make use of this opportunity. Most citizens however remain sceptical about the influence of individual MPs and in general knowledge about the role of MPs as well as of constituency offices seems to remain relatively low. MPs posed parliamentary questions based on discussions with citizens. The number of offices in operation has remained limited (75 before the early

parliamentary elections, 25 at the time of visiting, 29 by the end of the year) but at a certain time during project implementation the aim of having an office within 30km of all settlements was almost achieved.

Sustainability. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Swiss Federal Council and the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia highlights some issues that the stakeholders are considering as crucial for the sustainability of the PCRN:

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Swiss Federal Council and the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia highlights some issues that the stakeholders are considering as crucial for the sustainability of the PCRN:

1. the creation of a PCRN steering committee,
2. the assignment and training of skilled Parliamentary staff,
3. the definition of adequate procedures for the transfer of offices and knowledge to newly elected MPs.
4. In addition, SDC and parliament identified the availability of adequate financial resources as key for sustainability.

The experiences with the early parliamentary elections and the challenges to re-establish the constituency offices suggest that there are further issues that are crucial for sustainability in particular the:

5. establishment of adequate procedures for the setting up of offices (not only for the transfer of offices), additional transfer issues like transfer of mobile phones, office equipment, or the operating budget
6. Furthermore the status of COAs could become a challenge for sustainability if there is no clarity how to legally employ them after the hand-over of the project.

Of these issues, only the creation of the PCRN steering committee (1) was so far achieved. The assignment and training of skilled Parliamentary staff (2) did not yet take place. So far only the systematization for the Support Unit was created. Procedures that are in place are not necessarily compatible with parliamentary procedures and are time intensive (3 and 5). Current financial resources for the PCRN (4) would be more or less sufficient for maintaining the status quo – at least for a certain time - but also limit options for adjusting the project design, e.g. for regulating the status of COAs or for increasing the number of COAs.

First priority: Adjusting the strategic approach. It seems to the evaluation team that it would be of merit to discuss and review the future strategic approach of the PCRN in the Steering Committee. Our recommendation is to adapt the project approach and either to go all the way to have the COAs as the personal assistants of the MP or of having the COs as service centers of parliament in the regions. Once this decision is taken, also more satisfactory decisions on procedures can be taken. The first approach requires more financial resources than the second. Transactions costs for parliament can be similar in both cases.

Second priority: Preparing for hand-over. Once the future strategic orientation is decided, the current IPD procedures (e.g. the opening of offices, the employment of COAs, the management of operational costs) will have to be reviewed and adjusted so that they are manageable for parliament with the resources at hand and compatible with parliamentary procedures. This can be done jointly by Parliament and IPD. It is recommended to all involved to do whatever is possible to quickly establish the Support Unit of Parliament with reasonable human resources and/or to clarify what other units in Parliament can take over management tasks for the PCRN. In addition, the status of COAs after 2013 should be decided on in order to avoid that for legal reasons no contracts can be provided to COAs once IPD is no longer involved. It is also proposed to review the training schedule of the Support Unit so as to be able to provide (on the job) training even after the envisaged end of the project.

The following are conclusions and recommendation from the evaluation report:

Conclusions:

- ▶ There is some kind of a **(con-)fusion of two approaches visible**: the constituency offices as the personal office of the MP or as service centre of parliament. It seems that also stakeholders have different visions in this respect.
- ▶ The **Steering Committee** is an important addition to the project set-up. It can increase ownership and with it political will, it can give strategic direction, it can help to coordinate between different stakeholders, it can help to find approaches compatible with parliamentary procedures and realistic in light of financial and human resources, it can help lobby for additional financial and human resources and thus can make an invaluable contribution to the sustainability of the project. So far the SC performed well (except for the period of parliament boycott) and was a valuable addition to the project. However it did not yet address major strategic questions concerning the future direction of the project.
- ▶ **IPD** is a dedicated project implementer with a strong feeling of ownership. They are appreciated for their hard work and accessibility. IPD seems to have some reluctance to 'let go' because they fear that major achievements will be jeopardized with the hand-over of the project to parliament.
- ▶ **Parliament** already took over some responsibilities for the management of the project and major responsibilities for the financing of the constituency offices. In general parliament seems supportive of the PCRN. The establishment of the **Support Unit for the PCRN in Parliament** is already more than one year behind schedule. In addition, it is questionable whether the envisaged staffing is sufficient to maintain the management of the project as it is. To the evaluation team it seems that at least with current procedures for the setting up, maintenance, and transfer of offices as well as for the employment, training and the support of the COAs the currently envisaged human resources in the Support Unit are not adequate. Either the procedures will have to be substantially revised or the human resource situation within parliament has to change. Adequate human resources within parliament could become one of the major challenges for sustainability. At least for the coming months, only minimal human resources will be available at parliament.
- ▶ **MPs** are the most direct beneficiaries and seem to be highly supportive of the PCRN as such. A majority of MPs wants an increase of COs and COAs so that each MP can have a CO and a COA. With the current project set-up and the available financial resources, such an increase seems unrealistic in the coming years.
- ▶ **Constituency Office Assistants** are perceived as very important and helpful for the MPs' communication with the citizens. Therefore, although permanent regularization of the COAs status will be an additional challenge for the Parliament with financial implication, finding a sustainable model that will establish the relationship between the COAs, MPs and the Parliament will be necessary and highly beneficial for the three parties.
- ▶ Although **Constituency Offices** are one of the most important tools of the project, organizing premises is time consuming and requires political will from many actors. Therefore, finding long-term solutions, which will include automatic or at least easy to handle procedure for providing offices to the MPs would make the functioning of PCRN project more effective on a long term. Though we only heard indirect complaints from **Local Government** there is still reason to put question marks whether the role of local governments as provider of free office space for the PCRN (with only very limited direct benefit for the local government) is justifiable and whether long term cooperation of local governments under the current conditions can be expected.
- ▶ For a short to midterm period the status quo of the PCRN can more or less be maintained with the current **financial resources** for the PCRN in the budget of the Republic of Macedonia. Changes in the number of COAs, upgrading of infrastructure, the reimbursement of office costs to local governments or the renting of office space on the free market would however need an increase of funds.

Lessons and recommendations for future projects

- ▶ In general, for a future, similar project it seems worthwhile to reflect on and clarify the **strategic approach** of constituency offices as personal offices of MPs or as service-centres

of parliament already during the conceptual phase. Hybrids of the two systems are possible but easily lead to unwanted negative side-effects.

- ▶ A **Steering Committee** is an important element to build and maintain ownership and to provide guidance on strategic orientation and to support realistic decision-making. Thus, such a steering committee should be created as early as possible during the project. The SC should include representatives of all major stakeholders, in particular of all who are expected to contribute to the project financially or in kind.
- ▶ As **indicator of success**, it seems recommendable to give greater relevance to project sustainability, MPs initiatives based on citizens' needs as well as citizens satisfaction, than to quantitative indicators like the number of open offices and employed COAs.
- ▶ For the project implementation and for its sustainability it is worthwhile to establish **close working relation between the administration of parliament** and the project implementer earlier in the project so that procedures are defined that are compatible with parliamentary procedures, e.g. if space allows consider establishing the project office within the premises of the administration of parliament and encourage close cooperation.
- ▶ Clarify the **role of COAs** early on in the process and define the selection process and employment conditions accordingly.
 - If the COA is the personal assistant of the MP, the MP needs to be involved in the selection of the COA and the employment contract is only for a limited time.
 - If the COA is supposed to represent parliament, parliament staff should be involved in the selection and employment contracts can be permanent.
- ▶ **Limit the tasks of the COA** clearly to the mandate of the MP/of Parliament and sensitize COAs to respect the role of local government.
- ▶ With the involvement of the MPs and/or the Parliament, develop a clear **code of conduct** for the COAs and make this code of conduct known, e.g. display it in the offices.
- ▶ Respect the **logic of decentralization** and the rule that the one who receives services covers the costs.
- ▶ Make a **base-line study** at the start of the project.
- ▶ **Invest in the information of the citizens** concerning the constituency offices.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond

- ▶ It is recommended to conduct a discussion on the **vision of the PCRN** in the Steering Committee in order to come to a common understanding or at least to clarify differences in vision. Such a discussion might help to find manageable approaches for the future of the PCRN. It should take place as soon as possible. It is recommended that the SC considers the question of the strategic focus of the PCRN in light of the potential financial and human resources of parliament in the coming years.
- ▶ Additional focus of activities of the Steering Committee should be to **help find workable solutions** for the opening and transition of offices, for the status of COAs, for setting up the PCRN Support Unit in Parliament and for acquiring additional financial resources if so required.
- ▶ It is recommended to include a **representative of local government** (e.g. the secretary general of ZELS) as full member in the Steering Committee.
- ▶ Provide for an occasion (e.g. a workshop) for **IPD** and the administration of parliament to look at current IPD and parliament working procedures and to identify incompatibilities and possibilities for adaptation in accordance with the strategic orientation and the resources at hand. Have IPD and Parliament jointly draft a **comprehensive take over plan** that lists all work that is currently done to implement the constituency offices, shows the resources needed and identifies by whom and how the tasks can be managed in the future. Have IPD jointly with the to be created Support Unit or other staff of parliament draft a **new handbook with new procedures** for the parliament unit once parliament takes over
- ▶ If no solution to the **staffing challenge** can be found, and if the financial situation by the Swiss side allows, a secondment of one or two persons at the intermediate level with Swiss financing could be envisaged – with the understanding that Parliament will take over their salaries as soon as possible.

- ▶ IPD will have to show huge flexibility for the **training of the personnel of parliament** as it is not clear when the staff will start working, what their qualifications will be and how much time they will have at their disposal for actually providing support to the PCRN. On the job training seems more realistic than a full-fledged training program. In case the staff composition of the Support Unit shall be maintained, it is even more important to develop simple, standardized procedures so that they can be followed by Junior Associates. Depending on the progress in the staffing of the Support Unit it might be necessary to continue the training after the official termination of the current phase.
- ▶ It will need some **contingency planning** how and whether the PCRN can be managed with such limited human resources.
- ▶ Clarify the **status of the COAs** taking the future strategic orientation of the PCRN into account. Create at least a vision of how the status of COAs shall look like in the future, even if for financial reasons the status cannot be provided at once – so as to have direction for future changes. As a minimum, a procedure has to be developed soon based on which someone other than IPD will contract the COAs after the end of this project phase. SDC should signal clearly to MPs and Parliament that from 2013 onwards COAs cannot any longer be employed by IPD and that therefore some kind of a mechanism for employing COAs will be needed soon.
- ▶ Rethink the **categorization of the cases** on which COAs work based on the planned use of the data and provide for an internet platform to access the case work.
- ▶ Provide for **information material/an information campaign** on the role of COAs and the COs.
- ▶ Agree with parliamentarians/with parliament on a **code of conduct** for the COAs, e.g. to define in how far they should be involved in political activities.
- ▶ Reassess the **process of negotiating office space and of managing office expenses** in order to find a more manageable solution. Find ways to **minimize interaction costs** either by introducing automatisms (fixed agreements with local governments on specific offices for an undetermined time in the future) or by renting offices on the free market.
- ▶ Consider **assessing the perception of mayors** (and local councilors of the PCRN and the COs). Increase benefits for **local governments** or reimburse local governments for services provided.

I. Background

Two sections are included in this background chapter. First (A.) some basic information on the reviewed project, on the Terms of Reference of the evaluation and on the evaluation methodology will be provided, then (B.) some introduction of the relevant political context is given.

A. The Reviewed Project, ToRs and Methodology of the Evaluation

Background. The project “Parliament’s Constituency Relations Network” (PCRN) is jointly financed by SDC and the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. The project builds on a previous project for constituency relations offices which had been implemented by NDI under USAID funding (2003-2006). The first Swiss funded phase (2007 to 2009) was mainly implemented by NDI. The current, second phase under Swiss funding (2009 to 2012) is mainly implemented by the Institute of Parliamentary Democracy (IPD). IPD is a legacy organisation of the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

Overall Goal. According to the project documents, the overall goal of the current phase of the project is that “Democratic practices of constituency communication become a sustainable, integral fully functional system of the Parliament, further increasing the practice of accountability and regular consultation of MPs with constituents regarding legal proposals.”

Outcome. The expected results on outcome level are the following:

1. Parliament has fully integrated the constituency office network within its Services as a functional service, facilitating contacts between MPs and citizens.
2. Citizens and NGOs have access to the constituency offices in their Municipality enabling them to place legislative ideas and concerns
3. MPs have conveyed citizens' and NGOs' needs and concerns, obtained from constituency offices, in Parliament and built on them in proposals of new laws or amendments.

Major expected outputs. During the current project phase, it was planned to have 75 constituency offices open and running, to have 75 trained Constituency Office Assistants (COA), to train staff of the Parliament and to shift management responsibilities step by step to the Parliament, to accompany parliament in the management of the PCRN so that by the end of this project phase the project is entirely managed and financed by parliament.

Major tasks of the evaluation. The evaluation is taking place at a crucial phase of the project implementation, just before the start of the last year of the current phase. So far it is planned that at the end of the current phase, the Swiss will stop financing and IPD will have handed over the management of the project to Parliament. This evaluation is at the same time backward and forward looking. According to the ToRs the evaluation

1. should look at the achievements of the project so far,
2. should assess which approaches have proven successful and which have not and the lessons learned as well as
3. should provide conclusions and recommendations for the future. The recommendations are supposed to focus on
 - a. actions that can ensure a smooth transfer to parliament as well as
 - b. still possible improvements to the PCR network during the last year of the current phase from the perspective of the citizens and of the MPs.

Structure of the evaluation report. The evaluation report will follow the structure provided by the ToR to a significant extent. After a short situation of the project in the overall political context (below B), in a first step (II.) the major aspects and achievements of the project will be analyzed. Furthermore, (III.) the evaluation report will provide conclusions on the approach

used and draw lessons and concerning the sustainability of the project. It will (IV.) provide recommendations for similar types of projects as well as (V.) recommendations for the end of the project phase and the hand-over period.

In the report, some options are mentioned how the certain aspects of the project could be organized in the future. These are very initial ideas. The further development and validation of such options would require additional research. This is the reason why the options were not included in the Executive Summary (to be made available to the Steering Committee) so that the Steering Committee can discuss freely. The options are mainly thought for SDC and IPD to provide input for the discussions with the Steering Committee.

Evaluation team and methodology. The evaluation was conducted by a team of evaluators composed of Dr. iur. Nicole Töpperwien and Mr. Vladimir Misev, MA. The evaluation team was further supported by an interpreter, Ms. Elisabeta Mladenovska. The evaluation report is based on a desk study of relevant documents, semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders in Macedonia (MPs, staff of parliament, COAs, a mayor, a representative of ZELS, IPD) and some field visits to COs. As far as possible we tried to cross-check results in different interviews or with the documents provided. The interviews and field visits were mainly conducted from December 12 to December 16, 2011. Vladimir Misev conducted an additional interview with IPD on January 30, 2012.

Interviewees. We met with most coordinators of the parliamentary groups. Unfortunately, during the mission, we did not have the chance to talk to MPs from SDSM (the main opposition party). In addition, we only had contacts with MPs who are supportive of the project and have (or are about to have) a constituency office, though we had asked in advance to include MPs who are inactive. The Mayor, whom we met, was a COA during the initial phase of the project implementation. He provided more input from the perspective of a former COA who used the opportunity to build his own political career than as a mayor from a municipality. We met with a good mix of COAs, having different levels of experience and working for MPs from different parties. The overall feedback that we received was positive. Here the selection of interlocutors might have contributed. However, the group of interlocutors was diverse enough to suggest that there is broad support for and satisfaction with the project.

Thanks. We want to use the opportunity to thank SDC and IPD for organizing this evaluation mission, for their input and support. We very much appreciated the good cooperation. Thanks are also due to all discussion partners who provided time and information.

B. Relevant aspects of the political background

Polarization of the political landscape. There is strong polarization of the Macedonian political landscape along political party and ethnic lines. Taking this specific context into account, it represents an extremely challenging task to implement a project, which presupposes the support from and cooperation of actors from all political parties and ethnic groups and thus can easily be affected by polarization. The PCRN project during the course of its implementation faced several serious challenges, which were the result of the broader political events and the strong political division. In general, the project managed to overcome tensions and – according to the discussions we had – is well accepted and appreciated by stakeholders from different political parties and different ethnic groups.

Influence of the political system. The overall political system is not very conducive for such kind of a project. In general, politics are party driven and among the political institutions, central government dominates political decision-making. Parliament – and also local government – are still struggling to assert a strong role in the current set up. The electoral system in Macedonia with a proportionate, closed list-system does not provide strong incentives to MPs to have permanent contacts with citizens. It is mainly the party's decision whether the MP will have chances for re-election. An MP will not be re-elected if he or she has high support of citizens but is allocated a low rank on the ballot paper by the party. In practice, the system provides mechanisms for stronger party control over the MPs instead of possibilities for MPs

accountability towards voters. The largest political parties all support the existent electoral system. At least, though not providing positive incentives it also does not provide negative ones: the current system does not prevent more active MPs to use the COs for contacts with citizens and to bring the citizens' needs to the attention of the respective institutions, though it is normally the party that decides who poses a question in parliament. In addition, the law on parliament establishes the Friday as constituency day. It seems however that still some parliamentary committee sessions and other meetings take place on Fridays.

Specific political challenges in 2011. During most parts of 2011, the Parliament was not fully operational and its work was not very efficient. In January 2011, there was a boycott of the Parliament initiated by several political parties and led by the biggest opposition party SDSM. In the beginning, the governmental parties ignored the boycott and more than 200 legislative acts and some constitutional amendments were adopted during this period. Later, the Parliament was dissolved and early elections were scheduled for June 2011. The constituent session of the new Parliament took place at the end of June. At this time, also the parliamentary groups were formed and the necessary basic preconditions for project continuation were provided. During the times of parliament boycott and elections, the project could continue only in a very reduced way. In addition, the early parliamentary elections brought a high number of newly elected MPs who had not served previously. This had consequences for the project in so far as constituency offices and constituency office assistance had to be reallocated, resulting in many hours of unplanned work for IPD. On the positive side of the Parliament work it can be noted that within the Parliament's budget of 2011 the operational budget of the PCRN was increased by 40% in comparison of the budget 2010 which gives possibilities for feasible project continuation under Parliament supervision.

Conclusion. 2011 was not the most favorable year for the continuation and successful implementation of project activities. Therefore, most of the activities had to be postponed, adjusted or downgraded. Even so, the evident flexibility of the implementation team (IPD) and of other involved stakeholders has contributed to the overall successful continuation of the planned activities. In addition, the early elections demonstrated the scope of managerial and administrative work necessary in the aftermath of elections to sustain the PCRN and thus brought some weaknesses in the project design to the forefront.

II. The major aspects and achievements of the project

General satisfaction and appraisal. All discussion partners were supportive of the project. They underlined the importance of the project for better communication between MPs and citizens and also stressed that the constituency offices are one of the few avenues for citizens to get into contact with elected representatives. To our knowledge there are also some instances, in which the communication with the citizens had impact on parliament's control over government (MP questions) and on national policy making (citizens' initiatives, MP proposals). At the same time, the project is 'high maintenance', requiring substantial financial means and human resources. Procedures, e.g. for setting up offices are time consuming and tedious. It is questionable whether the project – despite the high level of political support – is sustainable in its current form. However, already smaller adjustments could most likely improve sustainability substantially.

A. Strategic orientation and major goal of the project

Two poles. In the framework of PCRN, Constituency Offices (CO) were established and Constituency Office Assistants (COA) were employed. The project approach is meandering between two poles: COAs as the personal assistant and even representative of the MP and COAs as neutral service providers and representatives of the institution 'parliament'. In respect to the main project approach three phases can be distinguished:

- **2003 - 2006.** Initially, from 2003 to 2006, under US American funding, the constituency relation network had a strong political basis. For instance, constituency offices were located in party premises. This was considered as deterring some citizens from seeking contact with the MPs.
- **2007 - 2009.** In the phase from 2007 to 2009, the first phase with Swiss funding, the implementer tried to establish the constituency offices as a neutral space, outside of party premises, without any party insignia and with professional assistants who were primarily selected based on merit. However, the implementer did not go all the way. The constituency office assistants (COAs) were considered as the (personal) assistant of the MP. This created some tensions in respect to their role: (a) they were supposed to be the personal assistant of the MP and b) a neutral in-between between MP and citizens. Furthermore, it can be argued that COAs had a double mandate: (a) they served as personal assistant to the MP and (b) they served as some kind of service centre for attending to the concerns of citizens, implicitly aiming at providing citizens with access to the administration at central and local level. In some instances this created tension between MPs and COAs¹. Also some municipalities experienced the COAs work as interference into their affairs. MPs and COAs became the Mayors' and local councillors' competitors for political space at the local level².
- **2009 - 2012.** In the current phase, from 2009 to 2012, in order to address the challenges of the previous phase, the constituency offices became somewhat more political again, e.g. MPs are directly involved in the selection of their COAs. In addition, project documents give somewhat more direction what kind of services COAs shall assist to provide. The documents refer to assistance in respect to legal proposals as well as legislative ideas and concerns, thus, the focus is stronger on activities directly related to the parliamentarians' mandate. It seems however that in effect COAs still spend a considerable time on dealing with the central and local administration to follow-up on cases brought forward by citizens.

Different visions. Differences in vision about the PCRN have been apparent in many of the discussions. For instance, one COA who is involved in the project already for a long time mainly emphasized the support given to the citizens and expressed her regrets that the COs in her view became more politicized lately. She mentioned that the citizens and her colleagues often assume that she is a party member though she is not. Another COA who was present at the same discussion was surprised because she had taken the party link for granted and had - as personal assistant to the MP - also actively supported his election campaign. Similarly, some MPs clearly wanted the COAs as their personal assistants while one MP pointed out that she would support the pooling of COAs from various MPs from different parties so as to allow for more specialisation of COAs. This would only be possible in a system that relies on COAs who are politically relatively neutral. Also high-level staff of parliament does not seem to share one vision. One person envisaged the PCRN as a network that provides information about parliament and can feed information on citizens' needs and interests back into the law making procedures of parliament while another high ranking official saw the PCRN mainly as a service to and in the interest of the individual MPs.

Consequences of different vision. Such different visions will of course have consequences on decisions how to shape the PCRN in the future including for instance on the staffing of the parliamentary Support Unit for the PCRN and the role of MPs in the implementation of the PCRN³. These differences in visions are often not explicit perhaps not even reflected upon by the major stakeholders. They can however hamper the future sustainability of the project. A

¹ For instance, despite that MPs were not necessarily involved in the selection of 'their' assistant the COAs used business cards with the name of the MP, sometimes without the MP's direct consent. In several cases, office assistants were working in the name of the MP without the knowledge or full approval of the MP.

² See the previous evaluation report.

³ For instance, those who see the PCRN mainly as the personal offices of the MPs also tend to envisage more responsibilities for the MPs, e.g. in the selection of COAs or the managing of the CO.

clarification of the vision on the other hand might help to come to a manageable solution for the future life of the PCRN.

Major goal of the PCRN: accountability of MPs. The project aims at encouraging more frequent consultations with citizens and through it at increasing accountability (of MPs towards citizens). Accountability has two main facets: On the one hand, accountability demands transparency in actions, on the other hand there must be possibilities to sanction, e.g. deny reelection. Because of the electoral system – a closed list system, MPs main accountability is still towards their political parties. Thus, systemic incentives for MPs to increase consultations with citizens and to act upon the outcome of the consultations are rather weak. Party politics are more important. Citizens can only sanction the party in the next election, not the individual MP. Transparent decision-making in parliament does not necessarily bring political benefit to the individual MP. Incentives would only be provided if the political party rewarded the individual MP's good relations with citizens. Otherwise, it will depend on the personal motivation of the MP.

Accountability of government and parliament. It can however be argued that the project contributes to strengthening the accountability of government towards parliament because the consultations with citizens can help MPs to detect weaknesses in government performance which the MP can bring up in parliamentary questions. Furthermore it can be argued that the project helps to improve the accountability of parliament/government towards the citizens because the project might encourage citizens to launch citizens' initiatives. Here, two scenarios are thinkable: The MP uses his or her constituency office to encourage citizens to launch a citizens' initiative - in the classic vision of a constituency office, or the COA by him- or herself can encourage the citizens - as the number of citizens' initiatives is taken as indicator of performance of the CO (and with it of the COA), in this case the COAs act could clash with the MPs interests.

Influence on the relationship between MP and citizens: Responsiveness. The project's success in respect to accountability of the MP has to be seen in light of this major given limitation. The project envisages the outcome that "MPs have conveyed citizens' and NGOs' needs and concerns, obtained from constituency offices, in Parliament and built on them in proposals of new laws or amendments". The project document sees the number of questions posed by MPs in parliament and also legislative proposals related to citizens' concerns as indicator for the achievement of this outcome. The indicator might not be able to fully show whether accountability is improved however it at least shows whether MPs are responsive to citizens' concerns. Questions of MPs in parliament therefore are not so much an indicator of the MPs accountability but much more of his or her responsiveness to citizens' demands.

Conclusions:

- ▶ There is still some kind of a (con-)fusion of two approaches visible: the constituency offices as the personal office of the MP or as service centre of parliament. It seems that stakeholders have different visions in this respect.
- ▶ The project approach in general seems apt to increase the accountability of parliament and of government and in particular to improve the responsiveness of MPs.

Lessons and recommendations for future projects:

- ▶ In general, for a future project it seems worthwhile to reflect on and clarify the strategic approach of constituency offices as personal offices of MPs or as service-centres of parliament already during the conceptual phase. Hybrids of the two systems are possible but easily lead to unwanted negative side-effects.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond

- ▶ It is recommended to conduct a discussion on the vision of the PCRN in the Steering Committee in order to come to a common understanding or at least to clarify differences in vision. Such a discussion might help to find manageable approaches for the future of the PCRN. It should take place as soon as possible.

B. Steering committee

Creation and composition of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee (SC) was created in April 2010 (in the project proposal documents it was envisaged to be created in December 2009). The composition of the SC in this stage mirrors the ownership of the project with involvement of most of the relevant stakeholders in the project. Namely, the coordinators of all parliamentary groups in the Parliament, the Secretary General of the Parliament, the Chief of the Cabinet of the President of the Parliament and two representatives of SDC are members of the SC. Also, representatives from IPD, ZELS and other relevant members of Parliamentary Staff are allowed to participate in the work of the SC in a role of advisors or observers. Representation from local government (ZELS) though an important stakeholder is not a full right member of the SC and does not have a right to vote on the matters..

Gender and ethnic representation. The members of the SC are selected based on their function. The representation of the coordinators of parliamentary groups also leads to the representation of different political parties and ethnic groups within the SC. Such representation is also crucial if the steering committee shall be able to support the sustainability of the project irrespective of changes in the political power-balance. Currently, one member is a woman: one of the coordinators of the parliamentary groups. In addition, the secretary of the SC is a woman.

Continuity. In the June elections, some of the MPs who previously had been members of the SC were not re-elected or were not any longer chosen as parliamentary group coordinators. Therefore, the composition of SC changed after the elections. Nevertheless, SC in its new composition efficiently continued the work on the basis of the legacy of the previous committee. However, the SC reserved the right to come back to some earlier decisions, e.g. on the selection process of staff members of the Support Unit in Parliament. Most of the interlocutors whom we met, expressed high levels of satisfaction with the work of the SC. In addition, all of the members of the SC with whom the evaluation team had meetings are actively involved in the project activities and have a positive attitude towards project continuation after the involvement of SDC in the project.

Decision-making by the SC. In the previous mandate of the SC, Rules of Procedures for the SC were adopted (prepared by IPD). The decisions in the SC are made by consensus.

Role of the SC. According to the MoU between the Parliament and SDC, it is SC's role to perform oversight and to make strategic decisions regarding the project. Therefore, in our view, SDC should encourage the SC to reflect on the future strategic orientation of the project as well as to look into the major issues for take-over.

The SC and project hand-over. The positive work of the SC and consensual understanding for the major issues among the members of the SC is important from the aspect of smooth transition and full integration of activities of PCRN project within the Parliament. In addition, the relatively smooth work of the SC is an achievement in light of the polarization of the political process in general. The willingness of the SC to takeover and continue with the project activities provides the most important and solid basis for the successful integration of the project within the Parliament. The SC has some important tasks at hand, in order to promote the complete handover of the project to parliament. For instance, it will have to support the process of finding workable solutions for the

- opening of COs,
- the status of COAs
- the setting up of the Support Unit for the PCRN and
- for acquiring additional funds if needed (on these issues, see more below).

Conclusions:

- ▶ The SC is an important addition to the project set-up. It can increase ownership and with it political will, it can give strategic direction, it can help to coordinate between different stakeholders, it can help to find approaches compatible with parliamentary procedures and realistic in light of financial and human resources, it can help lobby for additional financial and human resources and thus can make an invaluable contribution to the sustainability of the project.
- ▶ So far the SC performed well (except for the period of parliament boycott) and was a valuable addition to the project. However it did not yet address major strategic questions concerning the future direction of the project.

Lessons and recommendations for future projects:

- ▶ The SC is an important element to build and maintain ownership and to provide guidance on strategic orientation and to support realistic decision-making. Thus, such a steering committee should be created as early as possible during the project.
- ▶ The SC should include representatives of all major stakeholders, in particular of all who are expected to contribute to the project financially or in kind.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond

- ▶ It is recommended that the SC considers the question of the strategic focus of the PCRN in light of the potential financial and human resources of parliament in the coming years. For this it could be useful to organize a retreat in order to allow for focused discussions.
- ▶ Additional focus of activities should be to find workable solutions for the opening and transition of offices, for the status of COAs, for setting up the PCRN Support Unit in Parliament and for acquiring additional financial resources if so required.
- ▶ It is recommended to include a representative of local government (e.g. the secretary general of ZELS) in the SC as a full member.

C. IPD

Main implementer. In the current phase, IDP is the main implementer of the project. The core members of the current project staff were previously employed by NDI and were already involved in the implementation of PCRN at that time. Step by step, some responsibilities have been handed over to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. However, the main management tasks so far remain with IPD⁴. Most interlocutors did not make a major distinction between NDI and IPD, some even confused the two.

Perception of IPD. In particular, COAs underline the good relations that they have with IDP. They emphasize that IPD is always available and helpful when they encounter challenges. One COA who faces problems because electricity was cut off mentioned for instance that IPD stopped by twice already to try and settle the problem. IPD staff frequently travels throughout Macedonia in order to keep in contact with the different COAs. The reaction from Parliament side was also positive though a bit more reserved. They stressed that relations were correct, however that they would appreciate more proactive and timely information, e.g. documentation on contracts or information to be put on the website.

IPD's ownership of the project. In discussions with IDP it became clear how strongly they identify with the project. IPD and IDP staff developed a strong ownership of the project and they are willing to invest considerable time to manage the project. They want to hand over the project with as many open, staffed and equipped offices as possible. They are dedicated

⁴ For instance, it was planned to hand over the management of the operating costs to parliament. However, for the financial services of parliament, it would be time consuming and complicated to fully manage the disbursement of operating costs to the various COs in line with parliamentary financial procedures.

clarifying the status of COAs, to seeing the Support Unit of Parliament for the PCRN established and to providing parliament staff with training so that they are prepared for taking over the management of the project.

Consequences of feeling of ownership. This strong feeling of ownership also led to some strong reactions when preparations did not go as planned, for instance when it became apparent that parliament will provide only limited human resources and mainly junior staff (see on this specific issue below)⁵. Their strong feeling of ownership can make it difficult for them to find workable solutions with parliament because in some instances they might have to compromise initial ideas, e.g. in respect to the selection, qualification and number of support staff within parliament. In addition, they will have to adapt their own procedures to bring them step by step closer to parliamentary procedures and thus facilitate the hand over. Their greatest service to sustainability in the current phase would be if they managed to revise the project set-up and procedures so that they are manageable by parliament with the resources at hand and compatible with official parliamentary procedures. IPD might need (moral) support to find the right degree of pragmatism to move the hand-over forward without jeopardizing core-features or values of the constituency offices.

Priorities for 2012. So far, IPD strongly focused on increasing the number of COs and COAs. They spent and are spending considerable time to discuss with Mayors, MPs, COAs and find adequate office space within municipalities. Based on the current set-up, elections at the local and at the central level will necessitate new negotiations for office space. This makes the COs high maintenance. In addition, any change in COAs - and job fluctuation is high - causes considerable work as e.g. mobile phones and internet are in the name of the COA. In particular in view of the sustainability of the project it is recommended to give less priorities to the number of offices that are open and running and more priority to the development of less-time consuming procedures.

Conclusions

- ▶ IPD is a dedicated project implementer with a strong feeling of ownership. They are appreciated for their hard work and accessibility.
- ▶ IPD seems to have some reluctance to 'let go' because they fear that major achievements will be jeopardized with the hand-over of the project to parliament.

Lessons and recommendations for future projects:

- ▶ As indicator of success, give greater relevance to project sustainability than to quantitative indicators like the number of open offices and employed COAs.
- ▶ Establish close working relation between the administration of parliament and the project implementer earlier in the project so that procedures are defined that are compatible with parliamentary procedures, e.g. if space allows consider establishing the project office within the premises of the administration of parliament and encourage close cooperation.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond

- ▶ Have IPD focus on aspects of sustainability and on revising working procedures instead of on the numbers of offices open.
- ▶ Provide IPD with moral support for hand-over work.
- ▶ Provide for an occasion (e.g. a workshop) for IPD and the administration of parliament to look at current IPD and parliament working procedures and to identify incompatibilities and possibilities for adaptation (before such a workshop, the Steering Committee should take some decisions on the future strategic orientation, in order for IPD and the administration of

⁵ One staff member said that it would be a no-go for IPD if parliamentary staff in charge of managing the PCRN were burdened with additional duties. Of course it is not within the decision-making power of IPD to decide on human resource issues of parliament. IPD's concern, that the sustainability of the PCRN might suffer due to inadequate human resources on the side of parliament is however genuine.

parliament to be able to devise procedures that are in line with the strategic orientation, otherwise they would have to work with options).

D. Parliament

Parliament as beneficiary. According to the project document the parliament as an institution is one of the beneficiaries of the project. In particular, PCRN shall strengthen parliament as an institution by improving the accountability of its members through increased contacts between MPs and citizens. Along these lines, one discussion partner strongly emphasized that PCRN shall help to empower parliament in the overall political system. The political system is strongly dominated by the central government in Skopje. Parliament and local governments in fact play only a secondary role – though at least power of local government is increasing.

Opinions diverge whether or what kind of additional benefits PCRN should bring to parliament. One public servant mentioned his vision that the COs should be used to gather information about the concerns of citizens and that the amalgamation of information from all COs could be used by the parliamentary services (or a parliamentary institute) when developing proposals for the adoption or amendment of laws. Another public servant did not see additional benefits for parliament. He has a vision of the PCRN as a network driven by the MPs, primarily for their sake, with as little involvement of parliament as possible. Here again the clashing visions as COs as service centers of parliament or as the MP's personal office become apparent.

Parliament as financier and manager. Already for some time Parliament is the main financier of the PCRN. They pay the salaries of COAs as well as the operating costs. The management is still mainly done by IPD, e.g. IPD concludes contracts with the COAs and provides parliament with a list of the names and bank accounts of all COAs each month. Payments are done by the parliament directly to the COAs. Also in respect to the operating costs parliament pays directly to COAs, however, IPD takes care of the main monitoring and management, this amongst others because based on current parliamentary procedures it would be difficult for parliament's financial services to reimburse COAs directly for their expenses. At one time, MPs were meant to pay for certain operating costs. This approach however was not further pursued.

Involved offices of parliament. At the current stage, several offices of the administration of parliament are involved in the implementation of the PCRN. From the very beginning onwards the project received support from the cabinet of the president of parliament. A member of the cabinet serves as secretary of the Steering Committee. The General Secretary is currently actively involved in establishing a parliamentary Support Unit for the PCRN (in the following Support Unit). The financial services of parliament pay the salary of the COAs and reimburse the office operating costs to COAs. The internal audit unit amongst others reviewed the PCRN in 2011.

The establishment of the Support Unit. In the future, the Support Unit is supposed to be the main implementer of the PCRN. In a MoU between Switzerland and the Parliament signed in 2010, Parliament had agreed that the staff of the Support Unit would start working from January 2011. During 2011, extensive training of the staff was supposed to take place. So far the General Secretary revised the systematization of parliament in order to establish the Support Unit.

Composition of the Support Unit. The revised systematization provides for one head of unit and six junior associates. The systematization was discussed in the Steering Committee. IPD had proposed a different structure of the Support Unit. In particular, they had proposed a mix of positions with different required levels of experience instead of the six junior associates. One of IPD's concerns is that junior associates are not qualified for the work they will have to conduct even with extensive training. Furthermore, as there will be no opportunities for a promotion within the unit (as there are only positions of junior associates and the position as head of unit but no intermediate positions) there is a high risk that the trained staff will leave the unit as soon as they have opportunities for a promotion elsewhere.

Challenges in the process of recruitment. The process of recruiting persons for the Support Unit turned out to be more difficult than expected. Because of the general employment stop

within the administration parliament is not in the position to make an external call for application. In addition, as there is a stop to promotions because of the dire budget situation they can only fill the positions by transfers of persons who are already employed within the administration and have a position at the same level. At an information meeting, prospective candidates were informed about the broad set of duties. One of the discussion partners said that prospective candidates were scared off by the event. So far, only very few persons showed interest. Based on the rules and regulations, the General Secretary would have the right to transfer public servants to the Support Unit even against the will of the concerned persons. So far however the General Secretary as well as the Steering Committee members were against such a measure. At the time of the evaluation mission, discussions were taking place to fill at least two or three of the seven positions. It was not clear whether these persons would be fully dedicated to the Support Unit or would keep some of the duties of their current positions. So far, the employments to the unit are delayed by a year compared to the schedule envisaged in the MoU between Switzerland and the Parliament.

Tasks to be conducted by the Support Unit. There are some tasks that are currently conducted by IPD that most likely cannot be conducted by a team of Junior Associates, e.g. the training of COAs, the training for parliamentarians, the negotiations with Mayors about office space, or the selection of COAs. These tasks would have to be done by the head of the unit, would have to be given to a different unit in parliament or would have to be out-sourced. In addition, there might be other tasks that pose difficulties not because they are especially demanding but because they are not in line with ordinary duties of parliamentary staff. For instance, to provide effective support to COs, IPD spends a lot of time visiting offices. It is not clear whether the staff of the Support Unit would be in the position to do the same (e.g. transportation, flexibility of working hours).

Conclusions:

- ▶ Parliament already took over some responsibilities for the management of the project and major responsibilities for the financing of the constituency offices. In general, parliament seems supportive of the PCRN. Among (high level) parliamentary staff there are different visions about the future direction of the project.
- ▶ The staffing of the Support Unit is already more than one year behind schedule. In addition, it is questionable whether the envisaged staffing is sufficient to maintain the management of the project as it is.
- ▶ To the evaluation team it seems that at least with current procedures for the setting up, maintenance, and transfer of offices as well as for the employment, training and the support of the COAs the currently envisaged human resources are not adequate. Either the procedures will have to be substantially revised or the human resource situation within parliament has to change.
- ▶ Adequate human resources within parliament could become one of the major challenges for sustainability. At least for the coming months, only minimal human resources will be available at parliament.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond:

- ▶ For verifying the assumption that the planned staff in support of the PCRN in Parliament is not adequate it would be useful of IPD to provide a breakdown of different tasks and procedures at hand and of how much time they spend on different tasks.
- ▶ Such a detailed list of tasks and procedures would be necessary to assess which the proposed Support unit could conduct, what kind of working conditions they need in order to be able to conduct the tasks and for which tasks other permanent or transitory solutions have to be found.
- ▶ Such short analysis could also serve as a basis to see whether a revision of the systematization should be proposed for instance so as to have one head of unit, two intermediate positions and four junior associates.

- ▶ The discussion on current tasks has to be accompanied by a more general discussion on the future strategic orientation, main approach of the project and working procedures because these will have an influence on the tasks at hand.
- ▶ It is proposed to have IPD and Parliament jointly draft a comprehensive take over plan that lists all work that is currently done to implement the constituency offices, shows the resources needed and identifies how the tasks can be managed in the future.
- ▶ It is proposed to have IPD jointly (with the to be created unit) draft a new handbook with new procedures for the parliament unit once parliament takes over.
- ▶ If no solution to the staffing challenge can be found, and if the financial situation by the Swiss side allows, a secondment of one or two persons at the intermediate level with Swiss financing could be envisaged – with the understanding that Parliament will take over their salaries as soon as possible.
- ▶ IPD will have to show huge flexibility for the training of the personnel of parliament as it is not clear when the staff will start working, what their qualifications will be and how much time they will have at their disposal for actually providing support to the PCRN. On the job training seems more realistic than a full-fledged training program. In case the staff composition of the Support Unit shall be maintained, it is even more important to develop simple, standardized procedures so that they can be followed by Junior Associates.
- ▶ Depending on the progress in the staffing of the Support Unit it might be necessary to continue the training after the official termination of the current phase.
- ▶ It will need some contingency planning how and whether the PCRN can be managed with such limited resources.

E. The MPs

MPs as direct beneficiaries. The MPs are the most direct beneficiaries of the PCRN. They 'receive' a CO and a COA to support them in their contacts with the citizens with the aim to improve their work in parliament. In the case of well functioning COs, the project can help the MP to maintain and improve his or her political anchorage at the local level and it can provide MPs with an avenue to deal with the numerous citizens' requests that they are receiving. It is therefore also not surprising that in particular MPs are highly supportive of the project. The most frequent criticism from MPs is that they would like to have more resources at their disposal, e.g. we heard demands for higher qualified COAs, more COAs, a COA at 100% instead of the current 5 hours per working day. Currently, not all MPs have their own CO and COA. During this project phase, 75 MPs (out of 123) were supposed to have their own office and assistant. The limited financial resources and the often tedious process to open a CO in the present set-up renders it unrealistic to increase the number of COs and COAs in a decisive way so as to provide a CO and a COA to each MP. Because of the early elections, with an unprecedented number of newly elected MPs, the number of operational COs with COAs went down substantially (to 25 during the time of our evaluation mission).

Role of MPs in project implementation. In the last phase, MPs were normally not involved in the selection of their COAs (there was however involvement of the coordinator of the parliamentary group). MPs had criticized this approach previously⁶. The selection procedure has been changed in the current phase. Now, MPs can participate in the selection process of their COA and the term of the COA's employment contract is linked to the term of the MP. IPD however maintains a strong role in the hiring and firing of COAs. For instance, after the election, current COAs were offered an automatic extension of their contract if their MP got re-elected or in case they have a recommendation from IPD and the MP they worked for. MPs have the possibility to select a COA for an interim period until a new hiring process can take place.

Concerning the COs and their location, the MPs have only a limited role. The municipality in which the CO shall be situated is mainly proposed by IPD based on a set of criteria – in

⁶ See the previous evaluation report.

cooperation with the coordinators of the parliamentary groups. MPs criticize from time to time that they liked to choose in which municipality they would have a constituency office. The municipality decides on the location of the CO within the municipality – as the municipalities currently have to provide office space. In one instance, the MPs from one party decided to rent office space at their cost because they were not satisfied with the office space provided by the municipality. For a short period, MPs were supposed to provide for mobile phone and some other expenses for the COAs. However, not all MPs did. Then the budget of parliament was increased so as to cover the operational costs of the COs.

Role of Coordinators of the Parliamentary Groups. The coordinators of the parliamentary groups have a special role. They are members of the Steering Committee and thus can take influence on the strategic orientation of the PCRN as well as on many operational issues. In addition, IPD discusses with the Coordinators the number of COs per party, the general location of the COs and it is mainly the coordinator who selects the MPs from his/her party who will receive a CO. The coordinators' role in selecting the COAs decreased. Now the concerned MP participates instead of the coordinator. All coordinators also have a constituency office or are about to receive one. So far they all were supportive of the PCRN. They also helped to increase the budget for the PCRN in recent budget cycles. In the last budget, the amount for the PCRN was however slightly reduced.

Gender and inter-ethnic aspects. For the selection of MPs who will receive a CO, IDP developed certain criteria. The main criterion is based on election results and attributes offices to political parties proportionately. Smaller parties, in particular from ethnic minorities are slightly favored. This approach achieves representativeness in respect to party and ethnicity. In addition, it is aimed at having a good regional distribution of offices as well as to have a gender balance. During this project phase, so far 31 female MPs and 68 male MPs had or have their constituency office. Currently, according to IPD, though there are only 29 opened offices, 22 female and 27 male MPs have COAs or will very soon have a COA. Statistics collected by the COAs and IDP shows that the female MPs tend to be more active in the COs than their male colleagues.

MPs and contact with citizens. During the field visit, the evaluation team only met MPs who are in favor of the project. All of them have positive attitude and believe that the project is of importance for the MPs and citizens. According to them, the PCRN strengthens the relationship between the MPs and citizens, a major achievement of the project.

Capacity-building for improving effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability. In the discussions, IPD identified capacity building as one way to further strengthen the effectiveness of the project. They assume that the training of MPs can provide the MPs with the necessary tools to better communicate with the citizens. The usefulness of trainings is without question and also coordinators of the parliamentary groups stressed that they appreciated trainings in particular for newly elected MPs. In how far the trainings will improve the responsiveness or even accountability will however depend on whether the trainings manage to motivate MPs to seek consultations with citizens and to act upon them.

Conclusions:

- ▶ MPs are the most direct beneficiaries and seem to be highly supportive of the PCRN as such. A majority of MPs wants an increase of COs and COAs so that each MP can have a CO and a COA. With the current project set-up and the available financial resources, such an increase seems unrealistic in the coming years.
- ▶ In general, MPs seem satisfied that they are involved in the selection of COAs

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond:

- ▶ In case that a strategic approach is chosen, that designates the COAs as personal assistants of the MP then it could be considered to give more responsibilities to the MP, e.g. for finding office space, organizing mobile phones and so on. Parliament could for instance make a contract or MoU with the Parliamentarians on what MPs have to provide and pay them a lump sum.

F. The Constituency Office Assistants

The role of COAs. The evaluation team met several COAs during the field mission. COAs are perceived as a cornerstone of the project and the presence and visibility of the project in the field. The vision about the role of the COAs is still not fully clear. As mentioned above, there is ambiguity whether COs serve as service centers for citizens or as a personal office of the MP. Depending on the level and the approach of MPs involvement in the CO, the COAs are more or less active as well as the type of the activities differs. In some instances, MPs perceive the role of the COAs as tool for resolving local problems and most of the activities are taking place within the municipality. On the other hand, some COAs seem to deal primarily with issues within MP competences.

Number of COAs. The number of COAs varied during the course of the project and was adversely affected by the early parliamentary elections and the re-opening of the COs. During the evaluation, the number of hired COAs was 44, whereupon in January 2011 74 COAs had been employed (a decrease of 30). Currently there are 32 female and 12 male COAs. IPD does not hold statistics on the ethnic belonging of the COAs. In most cases, however, COA are from the same ethnicity as the MP they are working for.

Selection of COAs. With the transfer of responsibilities from NDI to IPD, the selection procedures for the COAs were only slightly changed. In general, the selection procedure is transparent and provides for equal treatment of all candidates applying for the position of COA. The current selection procedure involves a public announcement of the vacancy in the printed and electronic media, a written test and an interview. According to IPD procedures, MPs participate in the interviews of their prospective COAs. Previously only the coordinators of the parliamentary groups but not necessarily the concerned MP have participated. The adaptation of the method of selection is supposed to contribute towards creating a stronger link and trust between the MP and the assistant. MPs can select their own COA for an interim period until a public announcement can be conducted. In this case, the COA ad interim still has to participate in the official selection process if he or she wants to continue in the position.

Duration of employment. In principle, the COA's duration of employment is linked to the term of the MP. Procedures for continuing the assignment of the COAs after parliamentary elections is not based on the above described selection process. If the MP is reelected the COA will continue in his or her position. In case that an MP from the same political party is elected, the COA can continue if the COA receives positive recommendations both from IPD and the (previous) MP. In case that an MP from a different party is elected there will be a new selection procedure. Thus, it can happen that the concerned MP is not involved in the selection of the COA. IDP argues for this deviation from the selection process mainly because it helps to limit fluctuation and it helps to keep experienced and trained staff. This continuation of the employments of the COA without direct approval from the new MP might however cause again some uncertainties from the side of the new MP in respect to confidence and trust between the MP and the assistant.

Clarifying the role of the COAs can also contribute towards establishing the appropriate selection procedures for the COAs. If the COAs remain predominantly as personal assistants to the MPs then the role of the MP in the selection process has to be strengthened. On the other hand if the COAs function is more impartial and the responsibilities and accountability will be with the Parliament then the MP's role in the selection process should be weaker and involvement of the Parliament staff and potentially representatives from the newly formed PCRN Support Unit and SC should be considered.

Training and coaching of COAs. All COAs receive training. However, since the last parliamentary elections in June 2011 there has not yet been training organized for the COAs. IPD is still in the process of recruiting new COAs. However, most of the COAs with whom the evaluation team had opportunity to talk, previously attended trainings or the Constituency Relations Academy. Some of the more experienced COAs had also served as resource persons in

trainings for new COAs. In addition, COAs mentioned that they provide on the job support to other COAs to help their new colleagues. Recently, the COAs working with the MPs from VMRO-DPMNE received training organized by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. All COAs to whom we talked emphasized the good relations with IPD. They expressed high levels of satisfaction with the responsiveness of IPD staff when some uncertainties or unclear issues arise. The mentoring by IPD gives a solid basis for the COAs to perform their work effectively. MPs (and at least some of the COAs) would like to see more training or more in-depths training, e.g. on how to draft legislative amendments. One MPs felt that COAs are stagnating though she would like them to take over more responsibilities.

Status of COAs. The status of the COAs is one of the fundamental challenges of the PCRN project. Currently COAs have monthly contracts with IDP. They receive a rather low salary of 10'000 MKD that is paid by parliament⁷. They do not have any job benefits like pension funds or health insurance. There are two different approaches/expectations in respect to the status of the COAs. COAs hope for permanent employment by the Parliament. All of the COAs we met believe that they will be permanently employed by parliament, which is also a motivating factor to them. On the other side, according to several MPs the status of the COAs should remain based on short-term contracts linked to the mandate of the MP. They would like to see an increase in the number of COAs so that every MP has his or her COA. Also the possibility of hiring students who would work more like interns was mentioned on several occasions during the meetings. Similarly, at least some members of parliamentary staff seem to prefer to keep more or less the present status of COAs. The main concern of parliamentary staff seems to be that they want a system that is easy to manage, does not create problems with MPs and does not create additional costs. It is worthy to be mentioned that the parliamentary group of VMRO-DPMNE had an internal coordination meeting in which they discussed about resolving the status of COAs working in the CO of VMRO-DPMNE. However, there was not any decision taken.

Regularization of the status. The challenge concerning the status in respect to the takeover by parliament is a double one: on the one hand, parliament is officially not allowed to employ people on a contract basis (as temporary staff not included in the systematization). However if they included them in the systematization of parliament, parliament would have to pay higher salaries as well as job benefits, which would cause financial problems. On the other hand, the inclusion in the systematization and the employment as civil servant would also make it more difficult to link the employment duration with the term of the MP⁸. Here again, it would be useful to clarify the role of the COA – based on the planned future strategic orientation of the PCRN – and then decide whether COAs could be employed on a permanent basis with inclusion in the systematization. The funding would then remain an additional issue to clarify. The resolution of this issue would contribute towards a smooth Parliament take-over of the project from IPD and its sustainability in the future. On the other hand if the unresolved status of the COAs remains and questions about the legality of employment arise or the parliament finds the procedures of employment as too cumbersome, the sustainability of the project could be jeopardized.

Interaction between citizens and the COAs. According to the interviews with COAs, the majority of the citizens are satisfied with the assistance that the MPs through the CO and the COA can provide. In their view, according to the feedback from COAs, the idea to have such offices is very good one since there is no other place of similar character where the citizens can

⁷ In an internal audit, parliament was criticized for the payment of the salary. For most of the time the salary was paid based on a Memorandum of Understanding in which parliament pledged to pay. However there is a shorter time period without a valid MoU.

⁸ Parliament managed to find a solution for the employment of the assistants of the parliamentary groups. These were included in the systematization (and receive the normal salaries paid to parliamentary staff) but still their employment term is linked to the term of parliament. Thus a similar approach could be adopted for the COAs – which however would require more financial resources if the number of COAs is supposed to remain the same.

address their problems. In the interaction with the citizens, COAs mostly act independently on behalf of the MPs. Since the MPs are involved in the process of selection of the (new) assistants it seems that the COAs have sufficient confidence and the trust to perform their work effectively. In the cases where the help or assistance of the MPs is mandatory they inform the MP on the matter. In one visit, the evaluation team was informed that a high numbers of legislative amendments were proposed based on the COA's work.

Involvement in legislative activities. The project document now clearly states that the work of COs and COAs should concern issues related to parliament, and should feed e.g. into questions by the MP or legislative proposals. In addition, at least one COA was arguing that they mainly conducted activities that concerned the implementation of central laws – not local laws so as not to interfere in local affairs. Some MPs and representatives of parliamentary staff would want to see stronger involvement of the COAs in the legislative activities. One employee from parliament suggested to link the work of the COs and the Parliamentary Institute by aggregating information collected in the offices to be further analyzed by the Institute. The outcomes of the analysis could be used for developing legislative proposals. In his view, it should additionally be part of the role of the COAs to disseminate and test the new legislative changes adopted by the Parliament in the municipalities where COs are located. For the aggregation of data it would require that COAs categorize data in an adequate way and that more information on the cases is made available than so far. For the testing of legislative proposals and amendments the COA would have to do outreach to the citizens. For both, the information sharing between parliament and the COAs would have to be increased. So far COAs only have regular contacts with the financial division of parliament for the reimbursement of operating costs.

Casework of COAs. COAs still spend most of their time working on cases brought forward by citizens. On several occasions, it was mentioned that most of the requests coming from the citizens concern the employment needs of the citizens. One member of the Parliament staff estimated that 80% of the requests for the COAs are inappropriate or not related to the mandate of the MP. In the past, some COAs tried to help citizens in finding employment. We could not assess whether this is still the case. The COAs we met explained how challenging it is to communicate to the citizens that they cannot help them with employment, or for instance court cases. This suggests that the COAs are more sensitized for these issues than before⁹. MPs would like to see that also the public is better informed about the role of the constituency office (and of the MP). This would require more investment in information to the citizens. Only one COA whom we met had a leaflet on the CO and this leaflet was outdated (prepared by NDI). One MP mentioned, that she sees this 'inappropriate' casework as a major risk for the reputation of the MP and for the PCRN as such.

Categorization of casework. At this moment it is difficult to assess what kind of cases COAs mainly work on. COAs enter cases into a categorized database. The established categories however do not provide info whether the case concerns a local issue or a legislative proposal. The evaluation team shares the opinion that it should be clarified for what the database shall be used and that in second step the categories should be redefined accordingly. As envisaged in the project document, the development of a web-based database network providing access to data via the internet would be beneficial to all stakeholders in the project. There could be different levels of access to the information on cases so as to protect the privacy and confidentiality of MP/COA – citizen relations.

Involvement in political activities. During the elections and for some time afterwards COAs did not have a working contract. During the election campaign they participated in an NDI organized campaign on fair elections and received some money for it. In addition, some of the COAs participated in the election campaigning of their MP. This is of course the most direct involvement in the political work of the MP. Also the ordinary work of the COAs can have

⁹ See in comparison the previous evaluation report.

political connotations. The COAs we met emphasized that they are treating all citizens equally, irrespective of party affiliation or ethnic background and that their doors are open to all. This also makes sense from a political perspective. Citizens who receive support and help from the COA will most likely credit this at least partly to the MP the COA is working for. The presence of party symbols in the office will further strengthen the perception of being helped by the MP of a specific party. It is understandable that MPs have an interest to be fully informed and to have full control over the activities of their COAs.

Feedback by MPs on the work of COAs. According to some MPs they have not enough information and control over the assistants and their activities – though, as the same MPs expressed, the COAs are considered to be their face in the constituency. For instance, one MP stated that she has no track record what cases have been reported to the COA, which were resolved and which are still in process. This could create uncomfortable situations for her if citizens asked. MPs would like to see a more proactive IPD in this respect and for instance would want the above mentioned database on cases that is accessible via the Internet as well as technologies like skype to maintain better contacts with the COAs and also with citizens when they cannot come to the CO. Some of the MPs however, in particular those with assistants that are connected to their party, state that they are very well informed about the activities of the COA. Most MPs are satisfied with the quality of their COAs. Some however would want COAs that can support them even more in the substantive work, e.g. the analysis of legislative proposals.

Conclusions:

- ▶ COAs are perceived as very important and helpful for the MPs' communication with the citizens. Therefore, although permanent regularization of the COAs status will be an additional challenge for the Parliament with financial implication, finding a sustainable model that will establish the relationship between the COAs, MPs and the Parliament will be highly beneficial for the three parties.

Lessons and recommendations for future projects:

- ▶ Clarify the role of COAs early on in the process and define the selection process and employment conditions accordingly.
 - If the COA is the personal assistant of the MP, the MP needs to be involved in the selection of the COA and the employment contract is only for a limited time.
 - If the COA is supposed to represent parliament, parliament staff should be involved in the selection and employment contracts can be permanent.
- ▶ Limit the tasks of the COA clearly to the mandate of the MP/of Parliament and sensitize COAs to respect the role of local government.
- ▶ With the involvement of the MPs and/or the Parliament, develop a clear code of conduct for the COAs and make this code of conduct known, e.g. display it in the offices.
- ▶ Help COAs to communicate to citizens about their role for instance by providing information material.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond:

- ▶ If possible, clarify the future strategic orientation of the project before deciding on the status of the COAs because the strategic orientation has an influence.
 - In case that the COs shall be more like service centers of parliament then it might e.g. be an option to reduce the number of COAs (have them work in teams for a group of MPs or a region) and thus to free financial means to pay the remaining COAs normal salaries and benefits. (In such a case, also more long time solutions could be found for office space).
 - In case that the COAs shall remain personal assistants of the MP, employment contracts could e.g. be concluded by the MP (based on given ToRs and a code of conduct)

- In case the strategic orientation of the project remains as it is, or as alternative to the above mentioned options, analyze the status of assistants of the parliamentary groups and see whether a comparable solution can be found for the COAs.
- ▶ Create at least a vision of how the status of COAs shall look like in the future, even if for financial reasons the status cannot be provided at once – so as to have direction for future changes.
- ▶ As a minimum a procedures has to be developed soon based on which someone other than IPD will contract the COAs after the end of this project phase. Clearly signal to MPs and Parliament that from 2013 onwards COAs cannot any longer be employed by IPD and that therefore some kind of a mechanism for employing COAs will be needed soon.
- ▶ Rethink the categorization of the cases and provide for an internet platform to access the case work.
- ▶ Provide for information material/an information campaign on the role of COAs and the COs.
- ▶ Agree with parliamentarians/with parliament on a code of conduct for the COAs, e.g. to define in how far they should be involved in political activities.

G. The Constituency Offices

Provided by municipalities. COs are provided by the municipalities. The cooperation between the Parliament, municipalities and IPD is based on a MoU between the three parties. According to the MoU, ZELS in cooperation with the municipalities is responsible for providing the premises for the COs (see more on this below). Office space remains a major challenge in the next phase of the project. Since there is no clearly established procedure, the process of office allocation is negotiated by IPD, the Steering Committee, ZELS, MPs and the respective municipality.

Number of open COs. Although in the beginning of 2011, the project reached 75 operational COs, currently, at the end of 2011, there are 29 COs open. According to IPD representatives this is because of the early elections, which have resulted in changes of the MPs as well as of the locations from where the MPs are from. In different words, parliamentary elections pose a huge set back concerning the number of functioning offices, and the re-opening of offices tends to be a work intensive process. It seems important to try to find a new approach to make the opening of the CO easier (see on this issue also below on the role of local government).

Location of COs. Some MPs would like to have more influence on the decision in which municipality their office is located. So far IPD insisted that MPs have their office in the electoral unit in which they have been elected. However, not all MPs are from the electoral unit in which they have been elected and would prefer to have their office closer to their home or in Skopje. There are good arguments in favor of the IPD's arguments as well as in favor of the MPs. In the end, for the future the SC could take a decision on the general rule, depending on the future strategic orientation. Another difficulty can arise when MPs consider the premises of their office as inappropriate. Several MPs perceive the reason for providing no office or a suboptimal office as motivated by interparty or in some cases also intra-party animosities.

Functionality of COs. Some of the COs visited during the evaluation mission do not have the necessary conditions for work (electricity, heating, water, functioning computers etc) due to different reasons. According to the MoU it is an obligation of the municipality to provide the offices with necessary working conditions. However, by now such costs can also be paid from the operational budget of the COs.

Party symbols. So far, COs are supposed to be without party symbols (whereas there can be pictures of the MP) so as to encourage citizens from all parties to visit the constituency offices. In several of the offices visited political party symbols were visible. This is probably resulting from the current (and rising) perception of the offices as the MP's personal office. It shows that the offices become more political. COAs do not seem sure how they shall respond to MPs demands to display party symbols. This is a further sign about the unclear approach whether the offices

serve as promotion offices of the MP (and his or her political party) or as neutral service provider for contacts with the citizens.

Transfer of offices. Current procedure for providing offices by the municipalities is very time-consuming and requires negotiation procedures between several parties whenever there are elections (local or general).

Operating costs. Operating costs currently are paid by the Parliament. COAs receive the sum of 6000 MKD on the basis of the bills provided. According to the COAs, the payments are done at irregular intervals on the bank accounts of the COAs. Before the payment, IPD is managing the process of bill collection. Although COAs did not voice any problem with the current procedure, legitimate concerns exist about the effectiveness of the parliament administration in performing this coordination in the future. COs do not have legal personality and therefore mobile phones (and internet) have to be in the name of the COA and the COA is liable for the bills. When the mandate of the MPs finishes and the COAs is changed all contracts with the phone company have to be changed, too. In some cases municipalities provide part of the operational costs. For the future a different solution should be found. For instance, municipalities that provide offices could be mandated to fully equip the offices and to manage the operational costs (with or without reimbursement by Parliament), the MPs could be mandated to ensure that offices are functioning and that their COA has a mobile phone – based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the MP and Parliament, or e.g. the COAs could be provided with a lump sum for mobile communication and be charged to organize the mobile phone on their own.

Conclusions:

- ▶ In conclusion, although COs are one of the most important tools of the project, providing premises is time consuming and requires political will from many actors. Therefore, finding long-term solutions, which will include automatic or at least easy to handle procedure for providing premises to the MPs would make the functioning of PCRN project more effective on a long term.
- ▶ There are several options how to facilitate the current procedures. Possible solutions might be
 - changes in the Local Government Act in order to acquire permanent offices within the municipalities,
 - clarifying article 11 of the Act on the Parliament¹⁰, in order to give this responsibility to the Support Unit or the General Secretary of the Parliament to act on behalf of the SC or
 - to directly mandate the MP to find adequate office space and to ensure that these are properly equipped.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond:

- ▶ Reassess the process of negotiating office space and of managing office expenses in order to find a more manageable solution.

H. ZELS/local governments

The role of ZELS. The general secretary of ZELS is member of the board of IPD. In addition, ZELS is signatory to a MoU with Parliament and IPD, in which local governments promise to provide office space for the COs. Furthermore, in many cases, ZELS functioned as a go-between between parliament and IPD on the one hand and local governments on the other. ZELS as such has no direct benefits from the project.

¹⁰ Article 11 of the Law on Assembly reads: 1) Local self-government units should provide equal help to the MPs for performing their function and paragraph 2) the units from the previous article need to provide working office premises for the MPs and conditions for contacts with the citizens of their respective electoral unit.

Local governments as service providers. Local governments are primarily service providers for the PCRN. They provide office space for the COs free of charge. Based on the text of the MoU, municipalities have to provide a minimum of two offices of 12 m² each¹¹. Most local governments also provide for electricity and water, some provide for internet. A majority of local governments fulfill their obligation to provide office space. Today, based on data provided by IPD, 26 out of 44 planned municipalities provide COs¹². The question of office space however also leads to many conflicts. An important number of local governments have only very limited office space for their own administration and are reluctant to provide offices for constituency offices of MPs. In some cases, political inter- or intra party disputes might also play a role. With the increasing powers of local governments also the office of mayor is rising in attractiveness and some mayors might perceive MPs as well as COAs as competitors for local political space. For instance, there are examples of COAs who became mayors or council members. This of course can create a certain level of resistance of elected local officials against the constituency offices, in some cases further aggravated because COAs normally also support citizens in their contacts with local government. Local governments might experience this as interference. We did not have the opportunity to assess how the majority of mayors perceive the COs and the PCRN in general.

Local governments as beneficiaries? From the logic of decentralization, local governments should be reimbursed for services they render to the central level. The provision of office space can be considered a service. From this perspective it is a bit problematic to put pressure on local governments to provide office space free of charge – as was done for achieving the signing of the MoU as a member of parliament openly told. Some local governments even have to provide several offices, e.g. Gostivar provides offices for 4 COAs,

The provision of office space free charge is mainly justifiable if local governments have a direct or at least an indirect benefit of the COs that compensates for the costs of the offices. The main argument is that the presence of MPs in the COs can help the municipality and the region to better protect and promote its interests towards the central government. In some municipalities this seems to be the case. For instance, in one municipality, with the help of the COs, local government representatives and MPs jointly organized support to earth quake victims in Italy who originate from their region. They had mainly taken the initiative because in their view the representative of the Foreign Ministry had remained passive and inaccessible. From the information we received, all involved experienced this as a positive and successful initiative. As for the general perception of mayors we were not able to gain a clear picture of whether or what kind of benefits mayors expect from the PCRN and from COs in their municipality.

The role of local governments in the future. The representative of ZELS emphasized that they do not question the Memorandum of Understanding and that local governments in general do neither question the usefulness of the PCRN nor the provision of office space. Still, the current set-up causes high interaction costs. After every election new negotiations with the mayors have to take place because (a) there is no automatism for renewing agreements for office space - a mayor might claim an office back and (b) changes in election results can lead to changing demands for office space. The high amount of time that IPD has to invest for negotiating office space shows this challenge. For the sustainability of the project it might be useful to re-think the role of local governments in the PCRN. It is understandable that local governments show some reluctance to provide offices free of charge when they have scarce office space and/or when they suspect to nurture their competitor in next elections and do not see much or any added value of the office for the municipality. In addition, MPs want to keep the COs as their offices and do not want to share their COAs - for instance with the Mayor or local councilors.

Conclusions:

¹¹ At a later point, stakeholders informally agreed that the offices can also be smaller than 12 m² if no other office space is available.

¹² In total there are 84 municipalities while COs are planned to be open in 44.

- ▶ Though we only heard indirect complaints from Local Government there is still reason to put question marks whether the role of local governments as providers of free office space for the PCRN (with only very limited direct benefit for the local government) is justifiable and whether long term cooperation of local governments under the current conditions can be expected.

Lessons and recommendations for future projects:

- ▶ Be aware of hidden costs of project.
- ▶ Respect the logic of decentralization and the rule that the one who receives services should cover the costs.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond:

- ▶ Consider assessing the perception of mayors (and local councilors of the PCRN and the COs)
- ▶ Find ways to minimize interaction costs either by introducing automatisms (fixed agreements with local governments on specific offices for an undetermined time in the future) or by renting offices of the free market (see also above).
- ▶ Increase benefits for local governments or reimburse local governments for services provided.

I. Finances in general

Budget of PCRN. According to the unofficial data provided by IPD, the PCRN currently has a budget of approximately 23'746'728 MKD (386'125 EUR) merging SDC and Parliament finances. Total budget for COAs is 9'200'000 MKD (150'000 EUR). Total budget for the operational costs is 5'400'000 MKD. IPD's financial component is budgeted at 9'146'728 MKD (148'727 EUR)¹³. In addition there are hidden costs, e.g. costs for offices provided by local governments. Furthermore, in the current project set-up there are high interaction costs (e.g. lengthy and complicated procedures for negotiating office space, for managing operating costs). These interaction costs cannot be quantified in this evaluation but seem to be substantial.

Costs covered by parliament and viability. Many of our discussion partners perceived the financial viability of the PCRN as the major concern and proposed that SDC continues providing funds for the project after the hand-over. This perception is however only partly shared by the evaluation team. Parliament by now pays most of the running costs of the PCRN with the exception of staff costs of IPD and some infrastructure costs for the COs, e.g. computers. Once there is an adequately and fully staffed Support Unit, the Support Unit will be able to take over at least most of the tasks currently conducted by IPD. A short analysis of tasks conducted by IPD could help to show whether there are some tasks that cannot be assumed by the Support Unit or another unit of parliament whatever the reasons may be (see above). If these tasks are considered necessary for the future survival or effectiveness of the PCRN then they would have to be outsourced which would require funds. In addition, some additional funds will be needed for office maintenance (e.g. IT updates, renovations of office space). In different words, once the Support Unit is adequately staffed so that it can fulfill all or most of the necessary tasks it will need only minimal additional funds to maintain the PCRN as it is.

Conditions of financial sustainability. At this moment, MPs do not expect an increase in available funds but they also do not expect a decrease in budgetary funds. In case that the budget from the side of parliament will not or only minimally increase in the year 2013, the project seems financially sustainable at least in short term perspective under the following conditions:

- the number of offices and of office assistants remains the same or at least does not increase
- The amount of salary and the amount for operational costs do not increase
- The offices are provided by local governments free of charge

¹³ Data provided by IPD.

- the Support Unit is adequately staffed so that the Support Unit (or other units within parliament) can assume all the tasks that are currently conducted by IPD
- No major renovations or new investments in office infrastructure are necessary.

From the perspective of sustainability of the status quo of the PCRN, the to be expected human resource constraints (in Parliament) will most likely be much more serious than the financial challenges. However, any increase in the number of offices, office assistance or their salary would necessitate additional funding from state budget or other sources. In addition, any reimbursement to local governments for office space or the renting of offices on the free market would additionally increase the needed funds decisively.

The major question is: How attractive is the PCRN to the MPs and to Parliament in the longer term if it is maintained as it is? E.g., is it acceptable that not all interested MPs can have a constituency office and thus that some MPs are disadvantaged in communicating with citizens? Will there be enough well qualified COAs who are willing to work under the current salary and working conditions? Will local governments continue to be willing to provide free office space and is this acceptable from a logic or decentralization? In case that the answer is no to any of these questions, it will need an increase in finances. In particular, if parliament wants to go all the way in establishing the COs as personal offices for all MPs a decisive budget increase will be necessary. In case COs shall be regional service centers of parliament the need for additional funds would be significantly less as in this case it would need fewer COs.

Conclusions:

- For a short to midterm period the status quo can more or less be maintained with the current financial resources for the PCRN in the budget of the Republic of Macedonia. Changes in the number of COAs, upgrading of infrastructure, the reimbursement of office costs to local governments or the renting of office space on the free market would however need an increase of funds.
- In case that COs shall be turned into service centers of parliament for instance with a team of COAs who are working for a group of MPs from different parties the number of COs could be reduced which would save costs.
- In case COs are clearly the personal offices of MPs, and the MP is charged with managing the costs of the CO and the COA, the MPs willingness to lobby for additional funds might increase. As it is problematic that only some MPs can benefit from their own office, it could even be considered to divide the available funds equally among all MPs who want a CO and a COA. In this case, unless the MPs achieve an increase in funds from the budget of the Republic of Macedonia they will have to provide own resources or third party funding in order to be able to maintain the COs and the COAs as they are.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond:

- Include a debate on finances during the discussions on the future strategic direction of the project.

J. The citizens

Citizens' satisfaction and perception as an indicator. In the period between March and May 2011, a field survey was conducted in which citizens' perceptions towards different aspects of the Parliament's work were measured. One of the surveyed aspects was the transparency and the accountability of the Parliament. The sample used for the survey was stratified respecting all demographic categories of the population in the country and therefore provides a methodologically and scientifically grounded basis for a relevant analysis of the results. Given that this was the first survey of this kind, we did not have the necessary data to compare the results and we used the findings of the survey as a base line assessment. Therefore, potential changes in citizens' perception cannot be fully examined and trends cannot be assessed.

Citizens' participation in the adoption of laws. The general perception among the respondents of the survey is that the involvement of citizens in the process of the adoption of the laws is very small or does not exist. This opinion is shared cumulatively by more than 85% of the population. When asked about how informed citizens are about the work of the Parliament, a majority of them (60%) answered that they are sufficiently or partially informed. Gender and ethnic breakdown of the survey results shows that male respondents and representatives from the ethnic Albanian community feel more informed than female respondents and representatives from the other ethnic communities.

Citizens' initiatives. The number of citizens' initiatives for the amendment of laws is very low. Although one third of the citizens state that they have faced problems arising from certain laws, the majority of them did not take any legal initiative. In this respect, representatives from both genders and all ethnic communities are equally passive in taking any initiative regarding legal amendments.

Approachability of MPs. In regard to the accountability of the MPs, almost 50% of the citizens have the impression that the MPs are not approachable. However, when asked if they ever actively tried to contact an MP from their municipality, electoral unit or region almost 83% answered in the negative. This attitude of non-approachability of MPs is mostly shared among the male respondents, citizens between 31 and 41 years of age and the representatives of the smaller ethnic communities.

Meetings with MPs. One third of the citizens answered that they had met the MP from their electoral unit. Mostly, male respondents in the age group up to 41 had met with an MP. Representatives from ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian community in an equal extent had opportunities to meet the MPs from their electoral unit. In 17% of the cases these meetings took place in the CO (and additionally 16% in the municipality premises¹⁴). This figure shows that a significant number of the citizens who would like to meet the MPs of their respective electoral unit or municipality recognize the CO as place where they can meet the MPs. It is however still far less than 50% of the citizens. A significantly higher number of male respondents compared to the other gender meet the MPs in the CO (70% male to 30% female). Representatives of the ethnic Macedonian community are also more present in the CO compared to their ethnic Albanian co-citizens while the last are visiting premises of the local municipalities to a larger extent.

Familiarity with the COs. Around 57% of the respondents state that they have heard of the CO and that they are familiar with its work. This opinion is shared by all demographic categories proportionally. Nevertheless, according to COAs and MPs perception further promotion of the CO is needed. Given the nature of the requests that are coming from the citizens (mostly about the employment or judicial matters), a public campaign should be launched which would promote the COs and educate the public about the nature of their work. Support for this argument can be found in the answers on the next questions when citizens were asked if they know where the CO is located in their municipality. A majority of them (56%) answered in the negative. Also, a majority of the citizens (61%) have never visited a CO. However, it could be considered an enormous success if really 39% of citizens actually visited a CO. This would probably be much higher than in most other countries.

Conclusions:

- Citizens are meeting with MPs, however, the number of meetings to bring forward suggestions or grievances seems to be limited. Of those, a significant number is taking place in the COs or the municipal premises. In general, citizens are not convinced, that they can effectively influence the law-making process.

¹⁴ In many cases the CO is located in the municipality premises so there might be a bit of confusion on the side of the citizens.

Lessons and recommendations for future projects:

- ▶ Make a base-line study at the start of the project.
- ▶ Invest in the information of the citizens in the constituency offices.

Recommendations for the coming year and beyond:

- ▶ It would be useful to launch a public campaign to inform citizens on the COs, their mission and location. If possible, clarify the future strategic orientation first.

III. Conclusions:

In general. The study on citizens' perceptions still shows that citizens consider MPs as difficult to approach and do not think that they as citizens have relevant influence on the activities of parliament. This demonstrates that the project is still timely and needed. The constituency offices are among the few places where citizens can meet their MP. In our opinion, the PCRN is a good project and from what we heard during the evaluation mission, all involved stakeholder appreciate the project. IPD is a dedicated implementer. Our major concern however is that the strategic direction of the project is not clear and also that major stakeholders are not clear in which direction they want to steer the PCRN in the future. There is still a certain clash between different visions. Such differences in vision make it more complicated to make the project sustainable. Concerning sustainability, the challenge is amongst others financial but more importantly challenges can arise because of high transaction costs in the management of the project (e.g. setting up and transferring offices, employment of COAs, management of operational costs) and the serious delays in setting up an effective support unit for the PCRN in parliament.

Sustainability. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Swiss Federal Council and the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia highlights some issues that the stakeholders are considering as crucial for the sustainability of the PCRN:

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Swiss Federal Council and the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia highlights some issues that the stakeholders are considering as crucial for the sustainability of the PCRN:

7. the creation of a PCRN steering committee,
8. the assignment and training of skilled Parliamentary staff,
9. the definition of adequate procedures for the transfer of offices and knowledge to newly elected MPs.
10. In addition, SDC and parliament identified the availability of adequate financial resources as key for sustainability.

The experiences with the early parliamentary elections and the challenges to re-establish the constituency offices suggest that there are further issues that are crucial for sustainability in particular the

11. establishment of adequate procedures for the setting up of offices (not only for the transfer of offices), additional transfer issues like transfer of mobile phones, office equipment, or the operating budget
12. Furthermore the status of COAs could become a challenge for sustainability if there is no clarity how to legally employ them after the hand-over of the project.

Of these issues, only the creation of the PCRN steering committee (1) was so far achieved. The assignment and training of skilled Parliamentary staff (2) did not yet take place. So far only the systematization for the Support Unit was created. Procedures that are in place are not necessarily compatible with parliamentary procedures and are time intensive (3 and 5). Current financial resources for the PCRN (4) would be more or less sufficient for maintaining the status

quo – at least for a certain time - but also limit options for adjusting the project design, e.g. for regulating the status of COAs or for increasing the number of COAs.

First priority: Adjusting the strategic approach. It seems to the evaluation team that it would be of merit to discuss and review the strategic approach of the PCRN in the Steering Committee. Our recommendation is to adapt the project approach and either to go all the way to have the COAs as the personal assistants of the MP or of having the COs as service centers of parliament in the regions. Once this decision is taken, also more satisfactory decisions on procedures can be taken. The first approach requires more financial resources than the second. Transactions costs for parliament can be similar in both cases.

Consolidated list of conclusions. In the following there is a consolidated list of conclusions as provided in the text above. They have been slightly re-arranged for better readability and to avoid repetitions.

- ▶ There is still some kind of a **(con-)fusion of two approaches visible**: the constituency offices as the personal office of the MP or as service centre of parliament. It seems that also stakeholders have different visions in this respect.
- ▶ The project approach in general seems apt to increase the **accountability** of parliament and of government and in particular to improve the responsiveness of MPs.
- ▶ The **Steering Committee** is an important addition to the project set-up. It can increase ownership and with it political will, it can give strategic direction, it can help to coordinate between different stakeholders, it can help to find approaches compatible with parliamentary procedures and realistic in light of financial and human resources, it can help lobby for additional financial and human resources and thus can make an invaluable contribution to the sustainability of the project.
- ▶ So far the SC performed well (except for the period of parliament boycott) and was a valuable addition to the project. However it did not yet address major strategic questions concerning the future direction of the project.
- ▶ **IPD** is a dedicated project implementer with a strong feeling of ownership. They are appreciated for their hard work and accessibility.
- ▶ IPD seems to have some reluctance to 'let go' because they fear that major achievements will be jeopardized with the hand-over of the project to parliament.
- ▶ **Parliament** already took over some responsibilities for the management of the project and major responsibilities for the financing of the constituency offices. In general parliament seems supportive of the PCRN. Among (high level) parliamentary staff there are different visions about the future direction of the project.
- ▶ The establishment of the **Support Unit for the PCRN in Parliament** is already more than one year behind schedule. In addition, it is questionable whether the envisaged staffing is sufficient to maintain the management of the project as it is.
- ▶ To the evaluation team it seems that at least with current procedures for the setting up, maintenance, and transfer of offices as well as for the employment, training and the support of the COAs the currently envisaged human resources in the Support Unit are not adequate. Either the procedures will have to be substantially revised or the human resource situation within parliament has to change.
- ▶ Adequate human resources within parliament could become one of the major challenges for sustainability. At least for the coming months, only minimal human resources will be available at parliament.
- ▶ **MPs** are the most direct beneficiaries and seem to be highly supportive of the PCRN as such. A majority of MPs wants an increase of COs and COAs so that each MP can have a CO and a COA. With the current project set-up and the available financial resources, such an increase seems unrealistic in the coming years.
- ▶ In general, MPs seem satisfied that they are involved in the selection of COAs
- ▶ **Constituency Office Assistants** are perceived as very important and helpful for the MPs' communication with the citizens. Therefore, although permanent regularization of the COAs status will be an additional challenge for the Parliament with financial implication, finding a

sustainable model that will establish the relationship between the COAs, MPs and the Parliament will be necessary and highly beneficial for the three parties.

- ▶ Although **Constituency Offices** are one of the most important tools of the project, organizing premises is time consuming and requires political will from many actors. Therefore, finding long-term solutions, which will include automatic or at least easy to handle procedure for providing offices to the MPs would make the functioning of PCRN project more effective on a long term.
- ▶ There are several options how to facilitate the current procedures. Possible solutions might be
 - changes in the Local Government Act in order to acquire permanent offices within the municipalities,
 - clarifying article 11 of the Act on the Parliament, giving this responsibility to the Support Unit or the General Secretary of the Parliament to act on behalf of the SC or
 - to directly mandate the MP to find adequate office space and to ensure that these are properly equipped.
- ▶ Though we only heard indirect complaints from **Local Government** there is still reason to put question marks whether the role of local governments as provider of free office space for the PCRN (with only very limited direct benefit for the local government) is justifiable and whether long term cooperation of local governments under the current conditions can be expected.
- ▶ For a short to midterm period the status quo of the PCRN can more or less be maintained with the current **financial resources** for the PCRN in the budget of the Republic of Macedonia. Changes in the number of COAs, upgrading of infrastructure, the reimbursement of office costs to local governments or the renting of office space on the free market would however need an increase of funds.
 - In case that COs shall be turned into service centres of parliament for instance with a team of COAs who are working for a group of MPs from different parties the number of COs could be reduced which would save costs.
 - In case COs are clearly the personal offices of MPs, and the MP is charged with managing the costs of the CO and the COA, the MPs willingness to lobby for additional funds might increase. As it is problematic that only some MPs can benefit from their own office, it could even be considered to divide the available funds equally among all MPs who want a CO and a COA. In this case, unless the MPs achieve an increase in funds from the budget of the Republic of Macedonia they will have to provide own resources or third party funding in order to be able to maintain the COs and the COAs as they are.
- ▶ Citizens are meeting with MPs, however, the number of meetings to bring forward suggestions of grievances seems to be limited. Of those, a significant number is taking place in the COs or the municipal premises. In general, citizens are not convinced, that they can effectively influence the law-making process. The project remains relevant.

IV. Lessons and recommendations for future projects

In general. According to IPC, the PCRN already serves as a source of inspiration for planned similar projects in other countries. The project team accumulated know-how and insights into the setting up and managing of such a project. It would be useful to request of IDP to distill their main lessons and recommendations. For future similar projects it is recommended to be clear about the main strategic approach and to define the project so that it is consistent with the approach as well as to put an early focus on sustainability.

Consolidated recommendations. In the following there is a consolidated list of recommendations as provided in the text above. They have been slightly re-arranged for better readability and to avoid repetitions.

- ▶ In general, for a future, similar project it seems worthwhile to reflect on and clarify the **strategic approach** of constituency offices as personal offices of MPs or as service-centres of parliament already during the conceptual phase. Hybrids of the two systems are possible but easily lead to unwanted negative side-effects.
- ▶ A **Steering Committee** is an important element to build and maintain ownership and to provide guidance on strategic orientation and to support realistic decision-making. Thus, such a steering committee should be created as early as possible during the project.
- ▶ The SC should include representatives of all major stakeholders, in particular of all who are expected to contribute to the project financially or in kind.
- ▶ As **indicator of success**, it seems recommendable to give greater relevance to project sustainability than to quantitative indicators like the number of open offices and employed COAs.
- ▶ For the project implementation and for its sustainability it is worthwhile to establish **close working relation between the administration of parliament** and the project implementer earlier in the project so that procedures are defined that are compatible with parliamentary procedures, e.g. if space allows consider establishing the project office within the premises of the administration of parliament and encourage close cooperation.
- ▶ Clarify the **role of COAs** early on in the process and define the selection process and employment conditions accordingly.
 - If the COA is the personal assistant of the MP, the MP needs to be involved in the selection of the COA and the employment contract is only for a limited time.
 - If the COA is supposed to represent parliament, parliament staff should be involved in the selection and employment contracts can be permanent.
- ▶ **Limit the tasks of the COA** clearly to the mandate of the MP/of Parliament and sensitize COAs to respect the role of local government.
- ▶ With the involvement of the MPs and/or the Parliament, develop a clear **code of conduct** for the COAs and make this code of conduct known, e.g. display it in the offices.
- ▶ Help COAs to communicate to citizens about their role for instance by providing information material.
- ▶ Respect the **logic of decentralization** and the rule that the one who receives services covers the costs.
- ▶ Make a **base-line study** at the start of the project.
- ▶ **Invest in the information of the citizens** concerning the constituency offices.

V. Recommendations for the coming year and beyond

In general. The coming year will be crucial for the future sustainability of the project. It is strongly recommended to focus the remaining time span on increasing chances of sustainability. For this it will be foremost necessary to clarify the future strategic orientation of the project (in view of financial resources) and to review processes so that they are manageable for parliament and compatible with parliamentary procedures. For this purpose it is proposed to engage the Steering Committee in strategic discussions, e.g. in the framework of a workshop or retreat. In a following step, it would be useful for IDP and the administration of Parliament to review processes and to adapt them according to needs.

Consolidated recommendations. In the following there is a consolidated list of recommendations as provided in the text above. They have been slightly re-arranged for better readability and to avoid repetitions.

- ▶ It is recommended to conduct a discussion on the **vision of the PCRN** in the Steering Committee in order to come to a common understanding or at least to clarify differences in vision. Such a discussion might help to find manageable approaches for the future of the PCRN. It should take place as soon as possible.
- ▶ It is recommended that the SC considers the question of the strategic focus of the PCRN in light of the potential financial and human resources of parliament in the coming years.

- ▶ Additional focus of activities of the Steering Committee should be to **help find workable solutions** for the opening and transition of offices, for the status of COAs, for setting up the PCRN Support Unit in Parliament and for acquiring additional financial resources if so required.
- ▶ It is recommended to include a **representative of local government** (e.g. the secretary general of ZELS) in the Steering Committee.
- ▶ Have IPD focus on aspects of sustainability and on revising working procedures instead of on the numbers of offices open.
- ▶ Provide IPD with moral support for hand-over work.
- ▶ Provide for an occasion (e.g. a workshop) for IPD and the administration of parliament to look at current IPD and parliament working procedures and to identify incompatibilities and possibilities for adaptation (before such a workshop, the Steering Committee should take some decisions on the future strategic orientation, in order for IPD and the administration of parliament to be able to devise procedures that are in line with the strategic orientation, otherwise they would have to work with options).
- ▶ For verifying the assumption that the planned staff in support of the PCRN in Parliament is not adequate it would be useful of IPD to provide a **breakdown of different tasks** at hand and of how much time they spend on different tasks.
- ▶ Such a detailed list of tasks would also be necessary to assess which tasks the proposed Support unit could conduct, what kind of working conditions they need in order to be able to conduct the tasks and for which tasks other permanent or transitory solutions have to be found.
- ▶ Such short analysis could also serve as a basis to see whether a revision of the systematization should be proposed for instance so as to have one head of unit, two intermediate positions and four junior associates.
- ▶ The discussion on current tasks has to be accompanied by a more general discussion on the future strategic orientation, main approach of the project and working procedures because these will have an influence on the tasks at hand.
- ▶ Have IPD and Parliament jointly draft a **comprehensive take over plan** that lists all work that is currently done to implement the constituency offices, shows the resources needed and identifies how the tasks can be managed in the future.
- ▶ Have IPD jointly with the to be created Support Unit or other staff of parliament draft a **new handbook with new procedures** for the parliament unit once parliament takes over
- ▶ If no solution to the **staffing challenge** can be found, and if the financial situation by the Swiss side allows, a secondment of one or two persons at the intermediate level with Swiss financing could be envisaged – with the understanding that Parliament will take over their salaries as soon as possible.
- ▶ IPD will have to show huge flexibility for the **training of the personnel of parliament** as it is not clear when the staff will start working, what their qualifications will be and how much time they will have at their disposal for actually providing support to the PCRN. On the job training seems more realistic than a full-fledged training program. In case the staff composition of the Support Unit shall be maintained, it is even more important to develop simple, standardized procedures so that they can be followed by Junior Associates.
- ▶ Depending on the progress in the staffing of the Support Unit it might be necessary to continue the training after the official termination of the current phase.
- ▶ It will need some **contingency planning** how and whether the PCRN can be managed with such limited human resources.
- ▶ In case that a strategic approach is chosen, that designates the COAs as personal assistants of the MP then it could be considered to give more responsibilities to the MP, e.g. for finding office space, organizing mobile phones and so on. Parliament could for instance make a contract or MoU with the Parliamentarians on what MPs have to provide and pay them a lump sum.
- ▶ Lobby with the Steering Committee to clarify the **status of the COAs**. If possible, clarify the future strategic orientation of the project before deciding on the status of the COAs because the strategic orientation has an influence.

- In case that the COs shall be more like service centers of parliament then it might e.g. be an option to reduce the number of COAs (have them work in teams for a group of MPs or a region) and thus to free financial means to pay the remaining COAs normal salaries and benefits. (In such a case, also more long time solutions could be found for office space).
- In case that the COAs shall remain personal assistants of the MP, employment contracts could e.g. be concluded by the MP (based on given ToRs and a code of conduct)
- In case the strategic orientation of the project remains as it is, or as alternative to the above mentioned options, analyze the status of assistants of the parliamentary groups and see whether a comparable solution can be found for the COAs.
- ▶ Create at least a vision of how the status of COAs shall look like in the future, even if for financial reasons the status cannot be provided at once – so as to have direction for future changes.
- ▶ As a minimum, a procedures has to be developed soon based on which someone other than IPD will contract the COAs after the end of this project phase. Clearly signal to MPs and Parliament that from 2013 onwards COAs cannot any longer be employed by IPD and that therefore some kind of a mechanism for employing COAs will be needed soon.
- ▶ Rethink the **categorization of the cases** on which COAs work based on the planned use of the data and provide for an internet platform to access the case work.
- ▶ Provide for **information material/an information campaign** on the role of COAs and the COs.
- ▶ Agree with parliamentarians/with parliament on a **code of conduct** for the COAs, e.g. to define in how far they should be involved in political activities.
- ▶ Reassess the **process of negotiating office space and of managing office expenses** in order to find a more manageable solution.
- ▶ Consider **assessing the perception of mayors** (and local councilors of the PCRN and the COs)
- ▶ Find ways to **minimize interaction costs** either by introducing automatisms (fixed agreements with local governments on specific offices for an undetermined time in the future) or by renting offices on the free market.
- ▶ Increase benefits for **local governments** or reimburse local governments for services provided.
- ▶ It would be useful to launch a **public campaign** to inform citizens on the COs, their mission and location. If possible, clarify the future strategic orientation first.

Annex 1: Program with List of Interviews

Monday, 12.12.2011

15:30 - 17:00 Briefing with SDC

Tuesday, 13.12.2011

08.00 – 10.00 Meeting with IPD

10.30 – 12.00 Meeting with Ms. Bogdanka Poposka, Head of the Finance Unit in the Parliament

13.00 – 14.30 Meeting with Mr. Toni Trajkovski, Mayor of Gazi Baba

14.30 – 15.30 Lunch Break

15.30 – 16.30 Meeting with Mr. Zarko Denkovski, Secretary General of the Parliament

16.30 – 17.30 Meeting with Mr. Marijan Madzovski, Chief of the Cabinet of the President of the Parliament

Wednesday, 14.12.2011

10.00 – 11.30 Meeting with COA Ance Karanfilovska in Gazi Baba

12.00 – 13.30 Lunch Break

14.30 – 15.30 Meeting with Vjollca Bajrami, Secretary of the Steering Committee

15.30 – 16.30 Meeting with Talat Xhaferi, Chairman of the Steering Committee

Thursday, 15.12.2011

10:00 – 11:00 Meeting with MPs and Members of the Steering Committee Goran Misovski (NSDP), Rejhan Durmishi (PEI) and Silvana Boneva (VMRO-DPMNE)

11:00 Departure for Gostivar

12:00 - 13:00 Meeting with COAs Latife Ramadani and Shasine Kasimi in Gostivar

13:00 Departure for Ohrid

15:30 – 17:30 Meeting with COAs Irena Smilevska and Kristina Todoroska – Petreska in Ohrid

17:30 - 21:00 Return from Ohrid

Friday, 16.12.2011

09:30 – 10:30 Meeting with Dusica Perisic – Executive Director, ZELS

10:30 – 11:30 Meeting with MPs Liljana Zaturaska (VMRO-DPMNE) and Nexhati Jakupi (DUI)

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch and preparation of debriefing

13:30 – 15:00 De-briefing with SDC

15:00 – 16:30 De-briefing with IPD

Annex 2: Consulted documents

1. MoU between IPD, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and ZELS
2. MoU between SDC and the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia
3. IPD Project Document
4. Project progress reports
5. Law on the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia
6. Rules of Procedure for the work of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia
7. Law on Public Servants
8. Law on Civil Servants
9. Law on Local Self-Government
10. Statistical documents provided by IPD
11. Steering Committee meeting notes
12. Previous evaluation report
13. Institute for Democracy's survey results on the citizens' perceptions for the work of the Parliament