

**CIVIC EDUCATION AND
PARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE
IN ALBANIA
1991-1994**

*A Report on Grassroots and Parliamentary
Approaches to Political Transformation*

National Democratic Institute For International Affairs

conducting nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions



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NDI's democratic development program in Albania, including publication of this report, is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. Initial support for the program in 1991 was provided by the National Endowment for Democracy.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report details the work undertaken by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and its Albanian partner organization, the Society for Democratic Culture (SDC), to initiate a civic education and parliamentary dialogue program from 1991 to 1994.

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The program was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) embarked on a program of civic education and parliamentary consultations in Albania in 1991 just as the country began to emerge from the harshest autocratic regime in Eastern Europe. After 50 years of iron rule by Enver Hoxha's Party of Labor, the country was bereft of any experience with the most basic elements of representative democracy. When it finally came, the collapse of the old despotism triggered anarchy and social disintegration on a scale not seen in Albania since the invasions of the Italian and German armies in World War II.

The elections of 1991, though not without irregularities, represented the first expression of public will since the 1920s. Citizens had no history of civic participation, no experience of representative democracy and little vocabulary for public debate. In response, NDI initiated a two-pronged strategy for contributing to the development of civil society in Albania: 1) nourish public dialogue at the grassroots level; and 2) strengthen democratic practices within the parliament.

In September 1991, NDI convened a symposium on the functioning of multiparty parliaments with members of the newly elected People's Assembly. The program helped deputies to professionalize the work of the parliament. It also established contacts between the People's Assembly and various Western legislative bodies that eventually led to substantial material grants from the U.S. House of Representatives Special (Frost) Task Force on the Development of Parliamentary Institutions in Eastern Europe.

In January 1992, NDI helped a group of Albanians found an indigenous civic group called the Society for Democratic Culture (SDC). Its mission is to promote tolerance, openness and understanding in Albanian society through a program of nonpartisan civic activities. With NDI's help, SDC organized more than 2,100 volunteers to monitor the second multiparty elections in modern Albanian history, on March 22, 1992. SDC also conducted a successful quick count that provided the international community with the first indications of the election's outcome.

Although the elections brought to power Albania's first popularly chosen government in decades, the country faced tremendous challenges as it sought to establish democratic institutions where none had existed before. SDC's volunteers were eager to continue to contribute to their nation's historic transformation. With an organizational network already in place, these volunteers asked NDI to assist them in the furtherance of their goals, specifically in the area of building civil society. Consequently, in June 1993 NDI established a field presence in Tiranë to help SDC refocus from election work to civic education. In October 1993 and again in June 1994, NDI sent trainers to Albania to work with seven of SDC's 36 branch clubs to strengthen the organizational and programmatic aspects of the Society's network.

During the past two years SDC has encouraged public dialogue around the country by convening dozens of community meetings on topics such as privatization and education. These

activities have been reinforced by continued work with the parliament to encourage lawmakers to communicate effectively through mass media and to respond to citizen needs with constituent service. In February 1994, NDI and SDC sponsored a workshop for deputies on parliamentary communications as the first step in a three-phase project that includes seminars for journalists and representatives of indigenous, nongovernmental organizations.

Since July 1993, NDI's field representative in Tiranë has worked directly with SDC to strengthen and focus the organization, and to conduct day-to-day work with parliamentarians. A field presence has enabled NDI to monitor more closely the political currents of Albania's continuing transformation. This presence is important to the evolution of strategic goals for the coming year as NDI and SDC continue to support the development of Albanian civil society.

In only three years Albania has made great strides toward joining the European family of nations. The government of President Sali Berisha has preserved public order, stabilized the monetary system, reined in inflation and established wide recognition of Albania's strategic importance in the world community. Significant problems remain, however, particularly in terms of government responsiveness and accountability. There are also obstacles to the free conduct of public debate, especially in the mass media.

In order to address these problems effectively, Albania must develop further a political system that allows competing interests to express themselves freely. It must establish broad rules to protect public debate and create mediating structures to provide citizens with vehicles for civic participation. This kind of system, what Westerners define as a "civil society," can best be achieved by enlightened consensus.

NDI's program in Albania promotes the development of civil society by informing citizens about democratic practices and seeks to involve them in the country's political process. At the same time, it engages elected representatives in discussions about responsiveness and accountability. Civic education and parliamentary dialogue have been at the heart of NDI's work in Albania for more than three years. This report provides details of the program.

II. BACKGROUND

The Ottoman Empire, which ruled the Balkans for 500 years, left a lasting imprint on the area's culture and peoples. The modern states that emerged from the region gained autonomy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, yet frequently defined themselves in the context of their relations with Turks. In 1912, Albania gained independence from the Ottomans, the last Balkan nation to do so. With no prior history as a unified or independent country, its survival as a sovereign state was far from assured.

During its first decade of independence, Albania's problems were compounded by successive invasions by the armies of Greece, Serbia and Montenegro. Italy occupied the country from 1914 to 1920, until Albanian nationalists seized the initiative to halt the

dismemberment of their nation under the terms of the Versailles settlement following World War I.

The first truly national Albanian Congress convened on January 21, 1920, in the town of Lushnje. The group drafted a constitution that provided for a parliamentary republic, designated Tiranë as the capital and elected a council of regency. Ahmed Bey Zog, 24 years old, was appointed minister of the interior, a post that included control over the armed forces. In December 1920, the fledgling republic was admitted to the League of Nations.

The period 1920 to 1924 constituted Albania's only experience with democratic governance until recent years. A complicated power struggle between Zog's conservative landed gentry and the liberal, reformist alliance headed by émigré bishop Fan Noli, resulted in a putsch on Christmas day 1924. Zog, with the backing of elements of the displaced Russian White Army and Yugoslav forces, took control of the government. In 1928 he proclaimed himself king.

Italy remained the dominant economic and military power in Albania during Zog's reign. In 1939 Italy annexed the country, deposing Zog, and opening the door to a subsequent German invasion. Albania became nominally an Italian protectorate, backed by German military force.

Three anti-Italian resistance groups sprang up in 1940: the royalist clans of north and central Albania led by Abaz Kupi; the communist organization's National Liberation Front, headed by Enver Hoxha; and the republican, anti-communist nationalist Balli Kombetar "National League" organized by Midhat Frasheri. As the wartime fortunes of the Axis powers waned, these three groups turned their struggle for power on each other. In 1944, the National Liberation Front, with the help of Marshall Tito's Yugoslav partisans, liberated Albania from all foreign rule.

In 1945 Hoxha became prime minister, foreign minister, defense minister, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and general secretary of the Albanian Communist Party. The National Liberation Front renamed itself the Democratic Front and ran a slate of candidates in the December elections. In what has been widely regarded as a rigged process, the Democratic Front garnered 93 percent of the vote. On January 11, 1946, the new Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy and proclaimed the People's Republic of Albania. The Communist Party later renamed itself the Party of Labor.

The communist takeover led by Enver Hoxha represents the defining event in Albania's history. His brutal and xenophobic regime impoverished and terrorized three generations of Albanians. Even as he borrowed ideas from communist counterparts abroad, Hoxha invariably managed to alienate his allies. The official obsession with the supposedly imminent invasion of Albania provided Hoxha and his successors with the rationale for their regressive policies. In the end, the preoccupation with a phantom invasion precipitated Albania's near total isolation from the rest of the world.

Following the accession of the communist regime, relations deteriorated between Albania and Yugoslavia, in part aggravated by the large ethnic Albanian population in the Yugoslav territory of Kosovo. In 1948, Albania sided with the Soviet Union in a dispute between Joseph Stalin and Tito, which resulted in Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform. Albania renounced all economic agreements with Belgrade, expelled pro-Tito communist leaders from the party and joined the Soviet-led Council on Mutual Economic Assistance.

Albania's allegiance to the Soviet Union remained strong until the Soviets initiated conciliatory gestures toward Yugoslavia following Stalin's death in 1953. Relations deteriorated rapidly in 1960, leading to the severance of diplomatic ties between the two countries in 1961.

China quickly offered Albania ideological, political, technical and economic support, in effect claiming the latter as a client state in the larger struggle with the USSR. The courtship with China lasted only until China resumed relations with the United States in 1971. After Mao Tse Tung died in 1976, Albania broke off relations with China and quietly revived contacts with Yugoslavia and Greece.

Hoxha never allowed his fluctuating external relations to affect the Stalinist system he built at home. With the exception of second-echelon purges in the mid-1970s, very little change occurred in the top political leadership before the November 1981 Politburo shake-up that elevated Ramiz Alia to president of the parliamentary Presidium, making him head of state. On April 11, 1985, Hoxha died in Tiranë after serving 41 years as supreme ruler of his country. No foreign delegations were invited to attend his funeral, and Soviet condolences were rejected. Two days later, Alia, who had assumed several of Hoxha's functions during his final illness, was designated first secretary of the Party of Labor (PLA).

Alia immediately embarked on a more benign course for Albania. For example, in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Republic in January 1986 Alia announced an amnesty for certain categories of prisoners. Although he had pledged not to undertake relations with the USSR or the United States, Alia was forced by the increasing desperation of Albania's economy to sign several economic cooperation agreements with Greece. The Albanian-Greek border crossing at Kakavije was opened in January 1985.

Despite this limited opening, Albania's economic situation worsened. Simultaneously, Albanians were turning increasingly to foreign media to follow the revolutionary events in Eastern Europe. Broadcasts from Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia disclosed unprecedented news coverage, such as the famous footage of the execution of Romanian dictator Nicolai Ceaucescu. This contact with the outside world suddenly and dramatically opened horizons for ordinary citizens, revealing Albania's relative poverty and isolation.

In December 1989, students at Enver Hoxha University in Tiranë protested against living conditions in the dormitories. This action was followed a month later by a student-led demonstration in Shkoder, during which a restive population tried to topple a statue of Stalin.

Police arrested 400 demonstrators, but the opposition movement had been born, and Shkoder, long a center of resistance to outside influences, emerged as an important focal point for the democratization movement.

Alia and the PLA Central Committee tried to curb the spreading discontent by embarking on a program of limited democratization of the country's social and economic institutions. Reforms included contested, but still one-party, elections by secret ballot for certain offices; public debate on proposed changes in higher education; and a transfer of some decisionmaking power from the national level to local government. Alia, however, kept the borders closed and continued to exercise complete control over the media. He reiterated his intention not to allow Albania to imitate the other Eastern European countries, maintaining instead that the nation would follow its unique socialist path.

On March 25, 1990, Albania established direct dial telephone service with 54 countries in a project financed by the United Nations Development Fund. Suddenly, foreign journalists began interviewing a variety of Albanians about daily events and living conditions. These reports were heard in Albania through the broadcasts of international media, such as Voice of America's Elez Biberaj.

Following the parliamentary session of May 7 to 8, Prime Minister Adil Carcani announced the enactment of a liberalization program that included freedom to travel abroad, freedom of conscience and penal code reforms to reduce the number of offenses punishable by death. Carcani also stated Albania's intention to establish relations with the European Community and to participate in the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

On June 28, hundreds of Albanians climbed over security fences at foreign embassies in Tiranë. They occupied embassy grounds for days, protesting the government's refusal to process their applications for passports that would allow them to travel abroad as stated in the new law. A week later a new regulation took effect to speed passport processing, but the action came too late to ward off growing agitation. On July 6, 10,000 people took to the streets of the capital, protesting the dilatory pace of reform; an estimated 3,000 people crowded in Western embassies. Though demonstrators were initially beaten by the secret police -- as many as 30 deaths were reported by *Agence France Presse* -- authorities eventually retreated, allowing demonstrators to enter embassy grounds freely.

Throughout most of 1990 and 1991, Alia's intentions were ambiguous, but the changes he was forced to make only roused expectations for further, more meaningful reform. Economic pressures, compounded by heretofore unavailable access to information from the outside world, accelerated the rate of change. The sudden loosening of PLA power also produced an atmosphere in which new leaders, riding popular sentiment for speedy reform, rose to public attention. These included cardiologist Sali Berisha, economist Gramoz Pashko and a number of others who would soon found the Democratic Party.

On December 9, 1990, another power failure at the Hoxha University dormitories ignited a student demonstration that soon escalated into a major confrontation with the state. Many student demonstrators were injured in clashes with police, and more than 150 were quickly convicted of vandalism and imprisoned. Alia shook up the upper echelons of the PLA behind closed doors and sent troops to the university.

On December 11, dissident leaders Sali Berisha, Azem Hajdari, Arben Imami, Gramoz Pashko and Eduard Selami met in Pashko's home to draft the founding charter of the Democratic Party. On December 12, the five Democratic Party founders announced to the assembled crowd at the university the formation of Albania's first opposition party. During several days of government silence that followed their announcement, the founders moved gradually from a posture of defiant fatalism toward an emboldened stance from which they began to mobilize their supporters. Abruptly, on December 19, the Democratic Party was informed that it had been accorded legal status by the Ministry of Justice.

Before the year's end, a number of significant changes took place: the government began to dismantle the hero-worship of Joseph Stalin; the nation's Roman Catholics legally celebrated Christmas for the first time since 1967; and the Democratic Party was authorized to publish a newspaper. Finally, on December 31, the PLA published the text of a new draft constitution that avoided communist rhetoric and no longer codified totalitarianism. It included new guarantees of freedom of religion, expression and travel, and permitted foreign investment in Albania.

On January 1, 1991, Alia announced that the country's first competitive elections, then scheduled for February 10, would be "completely free." Less than a week later, however, workers at the country's largest coal mine went on strike, demanding that the elections be postponed in order to give the opposition more time to prepare. The government soon yielded, setting the elections for March 31. In return, opposition parties agreed to ban strikes until May.

Announcement of the elections prompted a burst of activity. As Albania moved to lay the foundations of civil society, several other political parties were born, as was the country's first independent worker's organization and at least one newspaper. Meanwhile, countervailing influences -- the closing of the university, the flight of tens of thousands of Albanians to Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia -- further destabilized the rule of the PLA. It was in this period, on February 20, 1991, that more than 60,000 people gathered in Skenderbeg Square in Tiranë to topple the giant statue of Enver Hoxha and to burn his published works. Shortly thereafter, the Party of Labor changed its name to the Socialist Party.

The elections of March 31 and April 8, 1991 produced a unicameral People's Assembly in which the long-ruling communist PLA won 170 of the 250 seats. The newly legalized opposition, which had coalesced into the Democratic Party, won 75 seats. A Greek ethnic movement, called Omonia, won the remaining five seats.

While many international observers concluded that voting took place under reasonably free conditions, Democratic Party leaders and many of their supporters believed the elections process was so unfair as to be illegitimate. They based their complaints on the substantial infrastructure advantages enjoyed by the PLA, as well as on the design of the voting districts, which disproportionately favored largely conservative rural voters. The latter circumstance prompted Democratic Party activists to consider adopting a strict proportional representation system for the next elections.

In the weeks following the voting, Democratic Party supporters claimed that the PLA had manipulated election results in the countryside. They staged demonstrations, including one in Shkoder where several of their supporters were fatally shot by police. The killings prompted the Democratic Party to threaten a boycott of parliament, though the action never materialized. Instead the two parties engaged in a protracted debate over a new constitution.

In May, Albania's fledgling independent trade unions brought to a standstill factories and public transportation throughout the country. The workers demanded better pay and working conditions, as well as an inquiry into the deaths of the Democratic Party activists in Shkoder. With the country in a state of paralysis, the government resigned on June 5, 1991. It was replaced by an interim "Government of National Stability" that was characterized by the Socialists as a coalition, but which receive only lukewarm public support from the Democrats. The new government also included representatives from the Agrarian, the Republican and the Social Democratic parties. Ylli Bufi, an economist, former minister of nutrition and member of the Party of Labor, was appointed prime minister.

Tensions mounted in early autumn as the Union of Independent Trade Unions organized a countrywide strike on September 16. Food production declined as the collective farms were spontaneously "privatized" by their workers. Public order also disintegrated, with gangs emerging, police disappearing from the streets, and a general atmosphere of insecurity prevalent among citizens. On December 4, the Democratic Party withdrew from the government. This move was precipitated by the Socialist Party's dilatory response to steps Democratic Party chairman Sali Berisha (and many of his supporters) believed were necessary to move Albania forward, among them the resignation of Albanian Television-Radio Corporation officials and the arrest of Nexhmije Hoxha, widow of the late dictator.

Out of the ensuing confusion, President Alia constructed a new 19-member caretaker cabinet of "independent technocrats." Its mandate was to organize new elections, facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid and basic services, and safeguard public order. This government helped negotiate a new election law, which provided for a proportional election system. The turmoil of the preceding year seemed to have persuaded all of the principal political actors that holding new elections represented the best guarantee of national stability.

The campaign environment in advance of the elections was both strained and tumultuous, with opposing political forces exchanging charges of coercion. The elections themselves, however -- and the subsequent transfer of power -- took place relatively quietly. On March 22, 1992, Albanians went to the polls for what independent monitors -- both

domestic and international -- declared a fair and accurate representation of the will of the majority. When all of the votes were counted, the Democratic Party had won 92 of the 140 seats in parliament, the Socialists 38, and three smaller parties the remaining 10.

Four months later, Albanians voted again, this time to choose local representatives. The Socialist Party fared much better in these elections, capturing a plurality of the seats and winning 18 mayoral races. The elections, considered a setback for the Democratic Party, did provide some balance in the political system. By the end of the summer of 1992, Albania had taken major steps to a transition to democracy. With the Democratic Party in power nationally, along with a credible opposition, Albania was poised to take on the hard work of consolidating democratic gains.

III. NDI ACTIVITY IN ALBANIA

Albania began its transformation to representative democracy in 1989 in response to complicated political currents that included the fall of the Berlin Wall, exposure to outside media and structural weaknesses within its own political system. Although an opposition to the PLA formed quickly -- and was ultimately successful -- no one person or institution within the country can claim to have planned the revolution. Albania's transformation was not carried out according to anyone's blueprint.

Ultimately, of course, a plan was not necessary to raze the old system. Planning, however, is critical to putting together the pieces again. Albanians are faced with the difficult prospect of constructing a new society out of the ruins of the old. The expertise of international organizations in the various enterprises of government can be of great assistance in helping to develop the basic institutions of government and civil society -- civic groups, political parties and legislatures.

Since its first contact with Albania in March 1991, NDI has worked to strengthen democratic processes through programs conducted on parallel tracks: civic education and parliamentary dialogue. Because NDI arrived just in advance of the country's elections in March 1992, however, the first project centered on election law reform. Through extensive consultations with political parties, government institutions and international bodies, NDI contributed to writing and revising an election law that was widely praised for its accountability and inclusiveness.

In order to engage the newly elected People's Assembly in the work of reform, NDI conducted one of the first parliamentary programs for an institution that had unquestioningly ratified legislation for generations. In September 1991, NDI convened 73 deputies for a symposium on parliamentary practices, bringing experts from Denmark, Hungary and the United States to discuss a variety of features common to democratic legislatures around the world. Agenda items included the role of party caucuses, the conduct of plenary sessions and committees, and the use of experts and advisors. In a series of individual meetings held after the seminar, the different parties were able to raise issues of particular concern.

Simultaneously, NDI helped establish the Society for Democratic Culture (SDC), an indigenous civic group comprising teachers, workers, engineers, students and ordinary citizens from many other walks of life. Initially, SDC served as an election monitoring organization. In March 1992 it successfully mobilized more than 2,100 domestic observers for parliamentary elections. The presence of these citizens at polling sites throughout the country and the quick release of SDC's independent vote count played a significant role in assuring the public that it had, at last, freely expressed its will.

NDI supported SDC's election program by helping to recruit and train observers and by preparing a voter education video entitled "*Elections 1992: Every Vote Counts.*" NDI staff members were present in Albania during the elections to advise activists.

Since April 1992, NDI has focused on civic education, with a concentration on building the structural capacities of SDC to include professionalization of staff, enhanced communications systems and assistance in organizing public events. SDC maintains its nationwide impact through the activities of its 36 branch clubs.

In July 1993, NDI helped SDC formulate a national organizing conference with representatives of SDC's clubs from throughout the country. The conference formalized the structure of the organization. NDI also placed a field representative in Tiranë to assist SDC with the day-to-day aspects of administration and programs. Periodically, NDI sent its other field representatives in the region and volunteer organizational experts to Tiranë to help train club members at the national headquarters, as well as branch clubs throughout the country.

NDI has also continued its work with the People's Assembly by conducting workshops and meetings on various aspects of communicating with the public. Consultations with deputies on topics such as constituent service and media relations have addressed the need to improve the dialogue between elected officials and citizens. NDI has also worked with journalists on covering parliament. This project on parliamentary communications has so far included two conferences, one with deputies in February 1994 and another with journalists in December of that year.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF A CIVIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

Since 1989, NDI has supported civil society in Central and Eastern Europe by fostering the development of nonpartisan indigenous civic groups. The Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFEER) and the Pro Democracy Association (PDA) of Romania are examples of civic associations NDI helped found that have a voice in the national affairs of their countries. By serving as nonpartisan participants in the political process, these organizations provide citizens a reference point from which to compare groups that enter into the public debate with ideological agendas. In addition, the town meetings and roundtables sponsored by civic associations serve as fora from which contesting groups, such as elected officials, parties and interest groups, can discuss public policy issues.

In Central and Eastern Europe these civic groups sprang from a popular desire to ensure that the first multiparty elections of the post-communist period were not unfairly influenced by powerful institutions that still controlled levers of power. Once the initial elections were over, however, groups like BAFECR and PDA turned their attention to involving the public in the ongoing political process of their respective countries. Subsequent programs involved educating people about their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, and conducting a variety of activities geared to promoting good government.

Albania, as the last country in the region to topple its oligarchy, had the fortune at least to profit from the experience of its neighbors. The Society for Democratic Culture (SDC) built on the models of BAFECR and PDA. Because of its important contributions to the March 1992 elections, SDC was well positioned to become a force for dialogue, mediation and the responsible exercise of authority. That it has not completely fulfilled its potential yet is as much a testament to the complexity of Albanian society as it is to the inevitable difficulties in funding and administering international assistance programs.

Following the elections in 1992, financial constraints prohibited NDI from maintaining its early level of activity in Albania. The nascent SDC, deprived of technical and material assistance from an outside group, faltered in its efforts to reorient itself from election-related work to civic education. In addition, internal tensions contributed to the steady degradation of SDC's ability to organize and carry out large scale-events.

Some of the branch clubs continued to organize activities, however, demonstrating by their persistence that international theories about the value of civic education were matched by local interest in participating in the new system of government. The commitment of these clubs convinced NDI to reengage in Albania once the financial barriers were overcome. In April 1993, NDI sent a delegation to Tiranë to survey the political environment and renew contacts with members of SDC. This team recommended establishing a full-time presence in Tiranë to work with SDC on a daily basis.

SDC, meanwhile, planned a national conference of all its branch clubs in order to elect a new executive council, appoint staff, and vote on new statutes. In July, 1993, the conference was held, with three NDI staff members in attendance. The new executive council and staff represented the second generation of activists, as many of the original organizers retired or assumed advisory roles. The passing of the torch alleviated much of the internal dissent.

In August, NDI placed a full-time field representative in Albania to work with SDC and to coordinate further activities with the parliament. NDI's resident program officer was able to devote considerable time to specific challenges facing SDC's new staff and leadership. Broadly defined, the challenges comprise the following categories: developing a professional staff, building an organizational structure and defining program activities.

A. Field Representative

The presence of a field representative in Tiranë allowed NDI to work closely with the new staff to restructure the organization. Much of the early work concentrated on writing job descriptions, establishing committees and developing communication networks among the clubs. NDI's first two field representatives helped the Society develop different strengths. Jonas Rolett, resident program officer from July 1993 to February 1994, emphasized the possibilities of democratic action and guided staff and volunteers in their early attempts to organize around national issues, such as privatization and education.

Christin Engelhardt, NDI's resident program officer from throughout 1994, helped SDC become more self-reliant by establishing systems and procedures Society staff could use to conduct much of its work without daily contact with NDI. During this period, SDC's financial systems and program reporting improved considerably, and schedules that had often slipped in the past were followed with greater rigor.

B. Staff Development

The new staff members of SDC were motivated by a desire, in their words, to "do something for democracy." Like most of their compatriots, however, SDC staff had little experience with political activism and limited understanding of the processes by which citizens govern themselves. Although staff members were quick to learn the techniques of grassroots organizing, they struggled to overcome certain psychological barriers. For example, adopting the basic tenet of activism -- that organizing people can alter the equations of power -- required a leap of personal and political faith.

Moreover, the new staff was relatively young. In addition to the challenges posed by practicing their new "profession," staff members had to adapt to Western standards of professionalism. They also had to overcome the widely held attitude within the political establishment that they were too young to be serious contenders in national affairs.

These factors all presented obstacles to administering the civic education program. NDI addressed some of them by working with staff members on a daily basis. For example, NDI helped staff members draft a role and mission statement that directly linked abstract ideals to practical activities. (See Appendix A.) NDI also helped clarify the mediating and advocacy roles SDC could play as a nonpartisan organization. Once staff members understood the theory behind civic associations, they quickly developed practical criteria by which they could measure the success of their own activities.

NDI also contributed to SDC's development by sending staff members to consult with other civic organizations in the region and beyond. SDC staff observed the work of the Romanian Pro Democracy Association (PDA) and the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR). They also shared their experiences with activists in Guyana and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who were working with newly established civic groups.

NDI also sought to develop the organizational abilities of volunteers who ran the branch clubs. In September 1993, five NDI staff members and the PDA's executive director trained more than 300 SDC members in five cities in the basics of coalition building and event planning. In June, another small NDI delegation traveled to three cities to work directly with branch clubs on specific organizational problems. In both cases, the trainers developed written materials for the clubs to use for later reference.

The growth in staff professionalism manifested itself in SDC's enhanced organizational abilities. The number and quality of events rose steadily, as did the organization's profile within the political community. In addition, staff members display a growing competence -- in mid-1994, conducting a training seminar in Skopje on civic organizing in a post-communist society for members of the newly launched Macedonian Association for Civic Initiative.

C. Organizational Structure

The observation mission mounted by SDC for the elections of March 1992 created a nationwide network of volunteers interested in the development of democracy in Albania. In all, more than 2,000 citizens turned out to monitor elections; many of them maintained their affiliation with SDC after the votes were counted. The allegiance was weak, however, and SDC's leadership faced an immediate challenge to convert the organization from an election-monitoring group into an active civic association that promoted broad citizen participation between elections.

During the next three years, SDC created branch clubs in 36 towns around the country. Each branch club belongs to one of nine regions and each region holds a seat on SDC's executive council, with the exception of Tiranë, the country's most populous region, which has three seats.

The 11-member executive council meets once every two months to provide general guidance to the national staff and to represent the branch clubs. Because telephone service between cities in Albania is difficult, executive council members often serve as channels of information between the SDC headquarters and the clubs.

The national staff consists of an executive director, an assistant director, a press secretary, a finance manager, a district coordinator and a secretary/interpreter. The staff oversees all of the day-to-day work of SDC, plans initiatives, organizes events and publishes a newsletter.

D. Programs

Because of its reputation in Albania as an election monitoring organization, SDC enjoyed a base of public awareness on which to build a broader identity. Nevertheless, much work needed to be done to establish the organization's civic education credentials. As a first step, staff members and the NDI field representative developed a role and mission statement:

The Society for Democratic Culture seeks to promote tolerance, openness and understanding through a program of nonpartisan civic activities.

This statement was further elaborated by linking certain stated values to activities that the Society could pursue to meet those values. Goals were distilled further into more manageable tasks and placed on a chart, which translated abstract values into projects that could be undertaken by the Society. For example, tolerance became a rubric for legal issues, openness referred to media issues, and understanding encompassed civic issues. (See Appendix B.) Although the chart was by no means perfect, it did provide a concrete basis on which the Society could make decisions it believed would be appropriate. The chart became an important tool for explaining SDC both to its members and to the community at large.

SDC held a press conference in August 1993 to announce its mandate. The staff also undertook an extensive program of meetings with members of the political establishment to explain its mission and to ask for cooperation on future activities. Most of the people with whom SDC met expressed support; Albanians, it seemed, were eager for a neutral agent to balance the partisan forces that dominated national debate.

The Society also began publishing a monthly newsletter to publicize its activities and to inform the public on important issues. (See Appendix C.) Laws, such as those covering regulation of the media, were published so that people could read them directly, rather than depend on the partisan reporting of various party newspapers. The newsletter's editors also conducted interviews with a number of prominent politicians and published their views side-by-side to present a range of opinion on major issues.

Meanwhile, the branch clubs began to hold public meetings to promote dialogue on issues of particular local interest. In a country where expressing views publicly had previously led to imprisonment and forced labor, community meetings that encouraged debate seemed almost revolutionary. These fora filled two important needs: they provided important information to citizens, and they served as emblems of democratic change.

Many of the meetings centered around the raft of legislation promulgated by parliament during the transition period. Parliament passed more than 200 new laws between March 1992 and July 1993. Major changes in commerce, privatization, local government and education were poorly understood by citizens and officials alike. Public meetings afforded everyone the chance to ask questions, demand explanations and, often, vent frustrations.

A partial list of activities sponsored by SDC in the last two months of 1993 follows:

City	Activity	Date
Devoll	Training for SDC members	11/93
	Survey of high school students' problems	12/93
Durres	Coordination of women's exchange project between Bologna (Italy) and Durres	11/93

	Forum on new legislation	12/93
	Surveys and publication of civic ed materials	12/93
Elbasan	Roundtable on privatization	11/93
	Distribution of materials to local schools	12/93
Erseke	Polling on most important local problems	11/93
	Roundtable on laws governing pensions	12/93
Kolonja	Questionnaire on civic problems	11/93
	Forum on pension law	12/93
Korca	Membership drive	11/93
	Survey of civic problems	11/93
	Forum on local government role in public health	12/93
Lezhe	Forum on municipal laws and the role of local government	11/93
Librazhd	Roundtable on privatization with MP's	11/93
	Roundtable on the education law	12/93
Permet	Roundtable on the problems of education	11/93
	Local elections monitoring	12/93
Puka	Meetings with local officials on economic reform	11/93
	Membership drive	12/93
Saranda	Publication of two articles in local newspaper	11/93
	Forum on democratic culture in Albania	12/93
Shkoder	Membership drive	11/93
	Working meetings with other local branches	12/93
Tiranë	Roundtable on civics in the schools	11/93
	Lecture on the history of Tiranë	11/93
	Roundtable on privatization	12/93
Vlore	Workshop on laws protecting environment	11/93
	Workshop on education in local schools	12/93

SDC's second major focus centered on monitoring elections. In September, the Society observed local by-elections in northern Albania. Minor irregularities were relayed to the head of the election commission, and the Society was again first to report results according to its quick count.

In May, 1994, SDC observed a second round of local by-elections, noting numerous, serious irregularities, including violence, intimidation and fraud. Members of the Society's observation team were threatened -- even injured in one case. SDC's staff, with the NDI field representative, met President Berisha and leaders of all the major parties to express concern over the conduct of the elections. The staff also held a news conference to announce its findings, and released a report, detailing irregularities it had observed and documented. (See Appendix D.)

Community meetings, election observation and consistent publicity about the role of citizen action formed the most important part of NDI's civic education mission in Albania. Through these activities, NDI and SDC sought to inform and activate one side of the equation

for representative democracy -- citizens. The other half -- elected officials -- was the target of NDI's second mission: parliamentary dialogue.

V. PARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE

From the beginning of its work in Albania, NDI established contacts with the People's Assembly (parliament). In 1991, the Socialist Party still held a majority of the seats; after the 1992 elections the Democratic Party took control. In Albania, as elsewhere, NDI worked with all parties represented in the multiparty legislature. This multipartisan approach -- including assistance in writing the new election law -- led to good relationships with both major parties, as well as with the four other parties that eventually achieved parliamentary representation.

The institution of parliament faced immense challenges during the early phases of the transition to democracy. Many of the deputies had little or no legislative experience. After the Democratic Party assumed power in March of 1992, much of the government and a substantial part of parliament was composed of former political prisoners. Shortages of material goods, such as paper and fuel, also diminished the legislature's productivity.

During consultations with members of the People's Assembly in June 1991, NDI was asked to provide information to all parties about the functioning of parliaments. As a result, NDI organized a program on the functioning of multiparty parliaments in early September, to which it brought two European parliamentarians (from Denmark and Hungary) and an American congressional staff member. (See Appendix E.) The group consulted individually with the caucuses of the Democratic and Socialist parties; the leadership of Omonia, a Greek minority advocacy movement; and the president of the parliament. Following these meetings, NDI convened an all-parties symposium to discuss broader issues of parliamentary organization and procedures.

As deputies gained experience in the procedures of passing legislation, NDI began to focus more on election monitoring and the formation of the SDC. If the legislature was unprepared for the sudden shift in the political landscape, the citizenry was completely at sea. Understanding of the new system was at low levels, trust in its authenticity minimal. Apart from voting, it took the public nearly two years to become involved in politics in any meaningful way. SDC's activities contributed to bringing many citizens into the process; once the public adopted habits of popular assembly and dialogue, the need to engage deputies in the process became apparent. In December 1993, NDI designed a strategy to enhance communication between citizens and their elected members of parliament.

A. Parliamentary Communications

After a honeymoon period of about a year, strains began to appear among the political parties, the government and the citizenry in the spring of 1993. The government and parliament had, in fact, much to show for their first year. With public order, once almost completely broken down, restored, inflation curbed and significant progress made in

establishing relations with other countries, Albania appeared to be a success story to the international community. The parliament had passed more than 200 laws, establishing a framework for regulation of the nation's commerce, justice, health and property.

Unfortunately, elected officials were not always adept at communicating their successes. This factor, combined with a tradition of factionalism and the public's propensity to confuse democracy with consumerism, led to an erosion of public confidence in the new system.

In response to these conditions, NDI developed a program to enhance the process of communication between deputies and the various constituent groups. The project targeted three important communities in the political process: deputies, journalists and representatives from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NDI planned seminars for each of these groups, highlighting their respective roles. As of this writing, NDI has conducted the seminars for MPs and journalists. Seminars for NGOs will take place by mid-1995.

B. Deputies

In February 1993, NDI convened a two-day conference on parliamentary communications for 24 members of the Albanian parliament and a handful of party staff members. (See Appendix F.) The attendees were drawn from five different political parties and the independent bloc and included some of their highest-ranking members. Trainers included two Irish parliamentarians, the spokesman for the Dutch Transportation Ministry and a U.S. political journalist.

Day one focused on working with the media. Each of the speakers provided a different perspective, discussing the challenges of communication and sharing techniques. Participants also took part in a mock press conference designed to illustrate the realities of dealing with the media. Deputies from different parties worked together to analyze and plan strategy as part of a simulated legislative "crisis." They then faced questions from a recalcitrant and skeptical mock press corps (the international experts) -- a test they passed with flying colors.

Day two was devoted to developing issues for public discussion and to communicating with constituents. The media experts covered the public relations aspects of holding office, from picking issues to stating themes. They also discussed the specifics of operating within a highly partisan, crowded political environment, such as is found in Albania.

The Irish parliamentarians focused on the realities of their respective constituent work, describing in detail, for example, a typical week of meetings with individuals, party groups, water and sewer boards, etc. They connected best with the Albanian participants when they used issues such as housing or unemployment to illustrate the process by which they represent their constituents. In talking about the "how to's" they also managed to convey the "why," that is, they made a strong case for constituent service, both as a cornerstone of representative democracy and a tactic for motives of self-interest, including reelection. In turn, the Albanians actively participated by discussing their own challenges.

On the whole, the seminar successfully advocated more and better constituent service and greater openness with the media. It also laid the groundwork for subsequent public meetings, organized by SDC, to which many of the deputies who attended the seminar were invited. The seminar bore fruit at these meetings, where direct dialogue between members of parliament and the public could take place in an open forum.

C. Journalists

The role of the media as a conduit of information and watchdog within the political process is poorly understood in Albania. Nearly all of the newspapers are closely affiliated with political parties and are, as a consequence, highly partisan. Editorials often constitute nearly 100 percent of the content, leaving little to no room for hard news. Broadcast media is controlled by the government, a circumstance that is demonstrated nightly on the news. The result is a chaotic and highly emotional mass media, with rumors and calumnies the rule rather than the exception. The public has little respect for or confidence in this kind of tabloid journalism.

The second phase of NDI's parliamentary communications project addressed these issues in a conference on how to cover the legislative process. Using European and U.S. journalists, NDI presented general principles of journalism, such as reporting the news in a nonpartisan fashion and accurately researching sources for stories, and subsequently turned to the specifics of covering the legislative process. The trainers utilized workshops, case studies and exercises in order to emphasize the practical applications of techniques.

More journalists attended than had actually been invited, demonstrating the media interest in the topics at hand. In addition to professionals, a group of 20 students from the university journalism faculty participated in the conference. Throughout, the discussions were generally lively and the audience engaged.

NDI and SDC established good contacts with a number of reporters and editors as a result of the conference. These journalists will be invited to participate in future parliamentary communications programs, such as the public meetings for constituent service arranged by SDC for members of parliament. They will also, of course, be invited to cover future programs organized by NDI and SDC, particularly the media program to educate voters that will be undertaken for the next national elections.

D. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

Albania's NGO community is in an early stage of development. Although some of the dozen or so active groups possess a clear sense of mission, most are merely angry about a particular issue. Virtually none of these associations has a sophisticated approach to advocacy, and nearly all need counsel on the mechanics of building an organization.

NDI has worked intensively with the Society for Democratic Culture to develop its structures and organize its programs for effective participation in the political process. These

same issues will be addressed in a conference for NGOs in order to increase their influence in the nation's political debate. The conference will feature NGO leaders from Eastern Europe who have experienced a similar building phase in their own organizations.

Trainers will stress the value of collective action as a means of effective advocacy, including forming coalitions, as well as initiating large-scale grassroots action. The conference will offer leaders of disparate organizations the opportunity to create a network that can be used to share ideas on program activities, as well as for mutual support.

E. Conclusion

NDI's parliamentary communications project addresses three important groups in the political process about their respective rights and responsibilities. Each aspect of the project includes theoretical discussions of the role of the institution (parliament, the media or NGOs) and specific work on the techniques that make those institutions work better.

NDI believes this kind of coordinated approach, when supported with ongoing technical assistance, can contribute to the development of enhanced communications among important members of the political process -- not least of all the public. As this project's activities are carried out in conjunction with SDC's ongoing civic education work, the effect of working with deputies, for example, is multiplied by providing opportunities for elected officials to participate in public meetings. In this way, conferences and seminars always result in a real world application that contributes to the development of civil society.

VI. FOLLOW-UP WORK

Encouraging citizens to participate in their country's political life is an ongoing imperative. NDI will continue to work with the Society for Democratic Culture to involve Albanians, particularly at the local level, in the decisions that affect their lives. But because government is a two-way street, NDI will also continue to direct its programs at elected officials, in order to promote accountability and transparency.

As SDC matures in the next year, NDI will reduce its day-to-day role with the organization. NDI's field representative will continue to provide advice and assistance where necessary, but will also promote SDC's independence. Specific goals include helping SDC raise money from other sources, both domestic and foreign, and developing a long-range plan for the organization. In addition, NDI will encourage SDC to become more involved in advocacy and problem-solving. This shift may be seen as an initiative to move the organization from an orientation toward civic education to one that subscribes more to civic action.

NDI will also complete the third phase of its parliamentary communications program by holding a conference for NGOs on how to participate in the legislative process. Participants from the first two seminars will be included in this activity in order to provide

participants with the opportunity to exchange ideas. SDC, with NDI's support, will continue to invite members of parliament to their districts to promote constituent service. Members of the media will also be encouraged to take part.

Albanians will go to the polls again by March 1996. NDI and SDC will undertake another significant election monitoring program, including a parallel vote tabulation. Interim referenda, such as the second vote on the proposed constitution, and by-elections will also be monitored by SDC, with NDI support.

VII. CONCLUSION

The course Albania has taken in its transition to democracy is promising, yet not without pitfalls. A country with strong authoritarian traditions and little experience in democracy must overcome considerable obstacles -- the anxieties of ordinary citizens, a high degree of centralization, lack of knowledge of the processes of government -- before the process of reform can go forward. Impediments sometimes involve structural issues, such as organizing the administration of elections; more often, however, they are psychological.

NDI-supported activities over the past two years have consistently promoted values associated with democratic freedoms and responsibilities. The many roundtable discussions organized by SDC underline freedom of speech and freedom of association; involving members of the media in activities promotes freedom of the press, and so on. Voter education campaigns emphasize, among other issues, the responsibility of citizens to go to the polls. These lessons have been at the heart of SDC's civic education campaign.

Encouraging citizens to participate in the processes of government is not always enough, however. Given Albania's authoritarian traditions, any campaign to involve the people in making important political decisions risks foundering on the indifference of the political elites. Until elected officials understand -- and agree to -- basic principles of accountability, an enlightened and active citizenry will experience difficulties in gaining access to the structures of power. Thus, NDI has expended considerable effort working with members of parliament on issues such as constituent service.

The twin prong approach to supporting democracy in Albania provides several advantages. The grassroots approach of civic education, particularly when coupled with a local NGO like SDC, exposes a large number of people to the ideas and practices of democracy. It also develops a core group of indigenous experts, whose natural commitment can be cultivated and enhanced through the use of Western techniques.

The institutional approach of working with parliament is more intimate, more persuasive. Whereas ordinary citizens already have a strong desire to change a system that has disenfranchised them for decades, the political elite must often be convinced that change is in its own interest. The subtext of much of NDI's parliamentary work involves reassuring deputies that opening up the processes of government is not tantamount to inviting mob rule.

Transitions, of course, do not occur overnight. Transformations certainly do not. Albania's shift from an extreme, communist totalitarianism to a pluralistic, democratic state will require much more work. More importantly, it will require time. With each month that passes, Albanians become more accustomed to their new freedoms. Organizations like the SDC play a critical role by introducing people to democratic ideas and practices, and then helping citizens put those principles to work.