

Project Overview

Introduction

The project aims at building the capacity of parliament in three selected Arab countries: Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, and at reinforcing their cooperation with the parliament of Italy. Adopting a comprehensive approach to strengthening the parliament in the three selected Arab countries, the project involves the building of knowledge through research on the representative function of parliament and its role in promoting decentralization and supporting the fight against corruption. Project components include further a study tour to various Italian constituencies by MPs from the participating Arab countries, i.e. twelve MPs from each of Lebanon and Iraq and six MPs from Jordan and of the holding of regional workshops for the exchange of experiences and consolidating the relationships among the participating parliaments.

The participating Arab countries represent various levels of parliamentary development, ranging from a country with a long history of parliamentary development (Lebanon), to a country with a more recent experience with parliamentary development (Jordan), to one with a new experience with parliamentary institutions (Iraq). The selection of the three countries is based on the premise that the variety of patterns of parliamentary development will contribute to a fruitful exchange of experiences and cross-fertilization to the benefit of successful project implementation.

Italy will act as a European counterpart, where the rich experience of consolidating democracy and the challenges of institution-building in a Mediterranean culture could be beneficial to the parliamentary experience of the three Arab countries.

The expected outcome of the project is the identification of priorities to promote the representative function of parliament in the participating countries and to strengthen its role in promoting regional development and decentralization as well as transparency and the fight against corruption.

Project Components

Research studies

For each of the participating countries, Italy, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, separate research studies are commissioned to assess various aspects and functions of the Parliament in the respective country. The studies are based on a review and analysis of relevant material, existing legal frameworks, institutional set-ups, mechanisms and practices and are supported by qualitative in-depth interviews with key parliamentarians, on the basis of a questionnaire.

One set of studies addresses the representative function of parliament in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon as well as in Italy. The research is a qualitative assessment report of the nature, the various dimensions and of trends of representation, within the existing political system. More specifically, the research aims at identifying the concerns and requests of citizens MPs choose to process and represent in parliament and to highlight the means they select to promote these in parliament and to integrate them into the legislative process. The research further determines opportunities and challenges or constraints that are faced by Parliament in its representative function and provides recommendations for improving this function.

The second group of studies constitutes assessment reports of the role and practice of Parliament in promoting decentralization. They reflect the status of reforms towards decentralization in the country and involve the analysis of legal and institutional frameworks,

established or suggested decentralized structures, and trends of development towards decentralization, both among different levels and territorial areas of the state and among different interests. The assessment further identifies opportunities and challenges and provides recommendations for improvement.

The third set of research addresses the role of parliament in promoting transparency and in fighting corruption in the participating countries. These studies assess Parliament's practice, the existing and suggested legislation to promote transparency, institutions relevant to fighting corruption, the effectiveness of the parliamentary oversight as well as the extent to which Parliament's own internal operation comply with transparency and integrity. In addition, the studies identify opportunities and challenges and provide recommendations for improving parliament's role in the fight against corruption.

Study Tour

A study tour to Rome and other areas in Italy brings together MPs and experts from the participating countries to meet with Italian MPs and experts. The seven-day study tour from 3-11 February 2008, which consists of workshops at the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies and visits to Italian constituencies and other relevant institutions, will allow the exchange of experiences among MPs and parliamentary experts and officials of the Italian Parliament.

Regional Workshops

Two regional workshops have been planned. During the first workshop, held between 23 and 25 July 2007, preliminary research results were presented to an audience of MPs, researchers, experts, civil society representatives and of other interested sides from Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Italy. The focus of the workshop was to assess and compare the role of parliaments in relation to three chosen topics for the countries of Italy, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon and to provide a framework for discussions and networking among the participants. The workshop also addressed the challenges that have undermined the representative function of parliament and its role in promoting decentralization and fighting corruption. The workshop concluded with the discussion roundtable, "Parliament and civil society: A Parliamentary and Civil Society Perspective". The roundtable provided an outline of challenges and opportunities affecting the relationship between parliament and civil society.

A final workshop at the end of the project is dedicated to presenting the final study results, assessing the overall achievements of the project and to identifying the way forward.