



PACEP II ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS – Year 1

| Field | Details |
|------------------|---|
| Project | Support to Parliament and Civil Society (PACEP II) |
| Country | Albania |
| Reporting Period | 27 June 2024 – 26 June 2025 (Year 1) |
| Funder | Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) |
| Overall Goal | The oversight ecosystem of the Albanian Parliament is strengthened to deliver effective oversight and accountability. |

Executive Summary

During its first year of implementation, PACEP II operated in a politically polarised but reform-active context. Key features of the operating environment included the 11 May 2025 general elections (the first to enable diaspora voting), steady EU-accession momentum with four negotiating clusters opened between October 2024 and May 2025, and high-profile anti-corruption proceedings. Election timelines and leadership changes in Parliament slowed some decision-making and postponed the 2025 parliamentary hearings of independent institutions to September, limiting opportunities to observe the full oversight cycle during this first reporting period.

In this context, the project focused on three main areas: (i) reviewing and developing instruments and procedures for parliamentary oversight; (ii) assessing institutional capacities and initiating skills transfer with the four project-supported independent institutions; and (iii) selecting and onboarding a cohort of emerging civil society organisations (CSOs) for a structured 16-month capacity-building programme.

Key Achievements

Parliamentary oversight (Outcome 1): Solid progress was achieved on developing the necessary instruments for implementing Parliament's oversight manual, including KPIs for monitoring independent institutions, new reporting formats, and the co-creation of an Action Plan for Priority Areas 2 and 3 of the Parliament's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. The flagship activity—the redesign of the Inter-institutional Monitoring Platform—moved from concept to build: a three-module system was agreed, and Module 1 was completed and presented to Parliament. The project also supported the launch or revitalisation of two inter-institutional coordination networks linking Parliament, independent institutions, and line ministries.

Independent institutions (Outcome 2): Comprehensive institutional assessments for all four project-supported institutions identified common needs, including SMART strategies and indicators, modern case-management systems, clearer reporting lines, and stronger parliamentary engagement. Tailored training

sessions for each institution initiated a competency shift towards results-based reporting, clarified data flows, and set priorities for standardising formats and KPIs.

Civil society (Outcome 3): The project successfully launched a national call for CSO participation in a 16-month capacity programme, with eleven emerging CSOs ultimately selected. Two intensive three-day training blocks in May and June combined foundational knowledge of parliamentary and oversight processes with practical application. A Community of Practice was co-designed to sustain peer learning and coordination ahead of the new legislature.

Gender mainstreaming: Embedded across all activities. A local expert team delivered dedicated gender sessions within each capacity-building event and produced, inter alia, draft guidelines and a training manual for MPs and staff, both to be finalised in the next reporting period.

HEADLINE LESSON

Political cycles and staff turnover underscored the need for transition-proof engagement: strong documentation, clear communication channels, and flexible stakeholder management. Working with four independent institutions showed that tailored assistance consistently outperforms uniform approaches. For CSOs, trust-building with Parliament and oversight institutions—through reliable procedures and transparent feedback—is a prerequisite for meaningful impact.

1. Context and Relevant Developments

This report covers the period from 27 June 2024 to 26 June 2025, documenting the first year of implementation of the Support to Parliament and Civil Society (PACEP II) project. Project activities took place in a dynamic and at times challenging political environment, shaped primarily by preparations for the general elections held on 11 May 2025.

EU accession progress: European institutions convened four accession conferences that resulted in the opening of the following negotiating clusters: (i) Cluster 1 – Fundamentals (15 October 2024); (ii) Cluster 6 – External Relations (17 December 2024); (iii) Cluster 2 – Internal Market (14 April 2025); and (iv) Cluster 3 – Competitiveness & Inclusive Growth (22 May 2025)—marking a shift from screening into chapter-by-chapter negotiations. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas visited Tirana in April 2025 to commend Albania's reform efforts and reaffirm EU support for its integration aspirations.

Domestic political developments: High-profile prosecutions dominated public debate. Former Prime Minister Sali Berisha was indicted in September 2024 and later released from house arrest in December 2024 while proceedings continued. Former President Ilir Meta was arrested in October 2024 and formally charged in May 2025. Tirana's Mayor Erion Veliaj was detained in February 2025 in a Special Prosecution Against Corruption (SPAK) probe. The electoral campaign, which began in March 2025, was characterised by confrontational discourse. The elections returned the governing Socialist Party for a fourth term, with roughly 52% of votes and 83 of 140 parliamentary seats. International observers commended the technical conduct but raised concerns about political polarisation, the misuse of administrative resources, and pressure on public employees.

Impact on project implementation: Under normal circumstances, independent institutions submit their annual reports to Parliament in March for discussion in May–June hearings. Due to the electoral process, the 2025 reporting cycle was postponed until after the inauguration of the new legislature in September 2025, which prevented the project from directly observing and contributing to this oversight process in Year 1. Additionally, the Director of the Monitoring Service—the parliamentary department with which the project collaborates most closely—resigned in December 2024, adding to leadership transitions that included a new Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Majority Leader, and Minister of State for Relations with Parliament appointed in September 2024. The project team responded swiftly to these transitions, but they nonetheless affected the pace of decision-making at times.

2. Achievements on the Overall Goal and Outcomes

The overall project goal is that the oversight ecosystem of the Albanian Parliament is strengthened to deliver effective oversight and accountability. As noted above, the deferral of the annual parliamentary reporting cycle until September 2025 means that no full-cycle oversight data is available for this period. Impact-level indicators will be updated in the next reporting period.

OUTCOME 1

Parliamentary procedures and administration are enhanced for increased oversight efficiency

Good progress was achieved in developing the instruments necessary for the full implementation of Parliament's oversight manual, redesigning the Inter-institutional Monitoring Platform, and establishing coordination networks between Parliament, independent institutions, and the executive.

OUTCOME 2

Capacities and effectiveness of oversight institutions are increased to deliver high-quality reporting and actionable recommendations

Comprehensive institutional assessments were completed for all four project-supported institutions. The first set of tailored training sessions was delivered, focused on results-based reporting and SMART KPIs. Reporting guidelines are under development for finalisation later in 2025.

OUTCOME 3

Civil society engagement and participation in legislative and oversight processes is increased for better representation of citizens' concerns

Eleven emerging CSOs were selected through a national call and launched into a 16-month capacity-building programme. Two intensive training blocks were delivered. A Community of Practice was co-designed and will be formally launched in the next reporting period.

2.1 Achievements on Outcome 1

Parliamentary procedures and administration are enhanced for increased oversight efficiency.

At the outcome level, the project achieved good progress on supporting the development of necessary instruments for the full implementation of Parliament's oversight manual. Through technical support and capacity-building activities with the Parliament's Monitoring Service, the project has assisted in the development of: (i) a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) that the Monitoring Service can use to track the performance of independent institutions; (ii) new standardised reporting formats; and (iii) an Action Plan for Priority Areas 2 and 3 of Parliament's Strategic Plan 2025–2030, covering both the oversight cycle and the appointment process for chairs of independent institutions. These instruments are pending approval before they can be formally introduced into the Monitoring Service's routine work practices.

Considerable progress has been made on the redesign of the Inter-institutional Monitoring Platform—a key tool for improving the efficiency and transparency of the oversight process. Building on findings from the inception period and a review of the existing (but non-functional) platform, the redesign envisages a new platform built around three modules: (i) the reporting of independent institutions to Parliament and the fulfilment of parliamentary recommendations; (ii) the follow-up of recommendations from independent institutions to executive agencies; and (iii) the appointment process for chairs of independent institutions. By June 2025, Module 1 had been developed and presented to Parliament staff, while work on Modules 2 and 3 is ongoing. The full draft platform is expected to be completed by the end of 2025, with pilot testing by all actors planned for 2026.

In addition, the project provided momentum for the establishment and revitalisation of two complementary coordination networks. The **Inter-institutional Network for Coordination between Parliament and**

Independent Institutions was launched through a high-level technical roundtable in November 2024, bringing together senior representatives from the Assembly's Monitoring Service, all 26 independent institutions, and the Minister of State for Parliament Relations. The **Inter-institutional Network of Coordinators for Monitoring the Implementation of Recommendations** was revitalised in December 2024, with a focus on developing a methodology for tracking how executive bodies act on recommendations from independent institutions.

Finally, as part of targeted ad-hoc assistance, the project responded to two strategic requests: it developed a **standardised inter-institutional methodology** for implementing and tracking oversight recommendations to executive institutions, at the request of the Minister of State for Parliament Relations; and it supported the **Special Parliamentary Committee on Good Governance, Anti-Corruption and the Rule of Law** in developing an Action Plan Framework and logframe, and facilitated Committee members' participation in high-level meetings in Brussels with the Open Government Partnership and the European Commission.

2.2 Achievements on Outcome 2

Capacities and effectiveness of oversight institutions are increased to deliver high-quality reporting and actionable recommendations.

Implementation against Outcome 2 targets is in progress. The revision of reporting guidelines for independent institutions is expected to be completed later in 2025. However, during Year 1, comprehensive institutional assessments were finalised for all four project-supported institutions. The key findings are summarised below.

Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD)

Despite a strong legal mandate and growing public trust, the CPD's effectiveness is constrained by thin staffing (approximately 34 posts for an expanded remit), manual and fragmented monitoring and reporting processes (Excel- and email-based), weak enforcement and follow-up of decisions, formalistic parliamentary reporting, limited strategic communication, underpowered regional offices, and historically driven budgets that do not fund real operational needs. Recommendations for improvement include: restructuring and specialising directorates; increasing specialist staffing; introducing a modern case-management and recommendation-tracking system integrated with the inter-institutional platform; standardising reports with performance indicators; and strengthening parliamentary follow-up.

Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data (IDP)

While the IDP has a broad mandate, its oversight and reporting impact are constrained by the absence of a SMART medium-term strategy, weak use of measurable indicators, no clear methodology for setting annual priorities, limited digital case-management and follow-up tools, capacity and budget shortfalls, and gaps in formal independence. Recommendations include: adopting a SMART strategy with performance and impact indicators; deploying a modern, public-facing case-management and recommendation-tracking system; strengthening staff and resources; expanding regional presence and civil society engagement; and upgrading annual reporting to include executive summaries, visual data, and a dedicated section on unimplemented decisions.

INSTAT

INSTAT would benefit from improving the quality and usability of its parliamentary reporting, making it more aligned with EU best practice. While Law No. 17/2018 requires INSTAT to submit an annual activity report and Parliament approves the Official Statistics Programme, the process lacks a standardised monitoring framework, clear follow-up to parliamentary recommendations, and accessible visual products for political users. Recommendations include: formalising the oversight structure; producing dual-format outputs (a technical report plus a concise, infographic-rich political summary); creating real-time dashboards; and building staff and parliamentary capacities for policy-oriented analysis.

People's Advocate (Ombudsperson)

The People's Advocate has a strong constitutional mandate and broad roles (investigative, normative, promotional, NPM, and children's rights), but limited impact due to the absence of a current medium-term strategy, largely reactive annual objectives, scarce resources, weak institutional cooperation, low implementation of recommendations, and formalistic parliamentary follow-up. Recommendations include: developing a SMART 3–5-year strategy; introducing a unified investigation methodology; deploying an electronic case-management and recommendation-tracking system; producing clearer, more visual annual reports; and establishing a stronger parliamentary oversight mechanism including regular hearings and systematic tracking.

2.3 Achievements on Outcome 3

Civil society engagement and participation in legislative and oversight processes is increased for better representation of citizens' concerns.

This outcome focuses on strengthening civil society's engagement in legislative and oversight processes. In Year 1, efforts centred on selecting CSOs for the project's capacity-building programme and initiating a Community of Practice. More tangible engagement results with Parliament will be reported in subsequent periods, as the election-related pause in the regular oversight cycle left a narrow window for CSO participation.

3. Outputs and Performance

Crucial to the implementation of project activities and delivering on outputs was the recruitment of five local expert teams, providing expertise in: parliamentary administration support; independent institutions capacity building; civil society engagement and capacity building; gender mainstreaming in oversight and legislative processes; and IT expertise for the inter-institutional monitoring platform redesign. By January 2025, all procurement processes had been finalised and the teams contracted. On 31 January, a joint workshop was held with all expert teams and Parliament staff to present workplans and identify areas for collaboration and synergies.

3.1 Output 1.1 — Parliamentary Committees Supported to Strengthen Planning and Analytical Functions

In Year 1, the project delivered two concrete results under Output 1.1.

Action Plan for Parliament's Strategic Plan 2025–2030: To operationalise Parliament's Strategic Plan, the project team convened a two-day workshop on 16–17 April 2025, bringing together the full staff of the Monitoring Service and staff from the Legal Service. The workshop co-developed the Action Plan for Priority Areas 2 and 3—covering the oversight cycle and the appointment process for heads of independent institutions, respectively. Training materials were tailored to Parliament's needs and supplemented by case studies from other countries.

Legacy report template and draft committee reports: To strengthen institutional memory and accountability, project experts designed a standard legacy-report template encompassing core sections (executive summary, context, achievements, implementation of recommendations, lessons learned). They mapped the drafting-to-approval-to-dissemination workflow and trained oversight staff on its use. Draft legacy reports were produced for three parliamentary committees—Legal Affairs, European Affairs, and Finance and Economy—and are ready for committee review, approval, and dissemination.

3.2 Output 1.2 — Parliamentary Administration Supported to Streamline Procedures and Improve Digital Efficiencies

Results under Output 1.2 focused on reviewing procedures and reporting formats, developing terms of reference for coordination networks, and building the capacity of parliamentary staff.

Procedure review: Local experts reviewed parliamentary procedures and practices for oversight, specifically as regards coordination, communication, and the analysis of oversight reports. Proposed updates are pending review and approval as per internal parliamentary procedure.

Network terms of reference and report templates: Local experts developed Terms of Reference for the Network of Inter-institutional Contact Points (covering roles, responsibilities, and engagement protocols) and produced standardised summary report templates for external oversight reports to improve clarity and consistency across institutions.

Capacity-building sessions for parliamentary staff: In addition to the April workshop described under Output 1.1, three further training sessions were held for the entire staff of the Monitoring Service (8 participants), as follows:

- **6–7 May 2025** — Development of key performance indicators for independent institutions reporting to the Assembly: participants worked through the design and application of KPIs for assessing institutional performance against parliamentary recommendations.
- **29 May 2025** — Development of reporting formats for independent institutions: the session focused on standardising the structure and content of annual reports submitted by independent institutions to Parliament.
- **17–18 June 2025** — Development of analytical instruments for Members of Parliament: a two-day workshop equipping oversight staff with analytical tools to support committee scrutiny of institutional reports.

3.3 Output 2.1 — Reporting Procedures and Standards for Oversight Institutions Improved

Individual comprehensive institutional assessment reports were produced for each of the four project-supported institutions in April 2025, highlighting existing gaps in oversight work with Parliament. Findings and recommendations were validated with institutional representatives and civil society organisations in Community of Practice events (see Output 2.2).

During the reporting period, progress was also made across four strands of work relating to the review of oversight plans and reporting formats:

- **Needs assessments** on current reporting and workflow protocols were completed for two institutions—the People's Advocate and the IDP—with findings validated with each institution.
- **Institution-specific workshops** were delivered focusing on SMART KPIs, data-flow mapping, and standardisation tools for monitoring and reporting.
- **Standardisation of periodic reports and factsheets** for the IDP and CPD was initiated, with delivery at approximately 10% completion.
- **New parliamentary oversight reporting templates** incorporating KPIs and data visualisation were designed and finalised through consultations and training sessions, with deployment targeted for September 2025.

Drawing from the assessment exercises and training sessions, guidelines on reporting standards, templates, and practices have been developed and shared with each institution for implementation during Year 2.

3.4 Output 2.2 — Staff of Oversight Institutions Capacitated for Updated Reporting Requirements

Four tailored training sessions were delivered—one for each project-supported institution—totalling **54 unique participants (45 women, 9 men)**. Highlights are as follows.

Training for the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) — 21 May 2025

Fourteen staff members attended (12 women, 2 men), including the Commissioner. Participants engaged actively, with high levels of discussion and experience-sharing on institutional challenges. The Commissioner stressed the need to use data not only for reporting but also for evidence-based decision-making. Key findings:

strong interest in institutionalising KPIs; fragmented internal data flows requiring structuring; and the need to strengthen cross-sectoral data-sharing and a system for monitoring recommendations.

Training for the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data (IDP) — 22 May 2025

Attended by thirteen staff members, the session was highly interactive. Participants highlighted the need to improve internal policy documents, particularly through SMART objectives and KPIs. Human-resource and budget constraints were also underlined. Key findings: similar needs to CPD, plus a priority to draft an institutional policy document grounded in SMART objectives and finalise internal workflow documents.

Training for INSTAT — 11 June 2025

The training responded to parliamentary resolutions from 2021, 2023, and 2024, and focused on data flow, standardisation, outcome reporting, and gender mainstreaming. Fifteen staff members attended. Key findings: improved staff understanding of the link between data management and oversight outcomes; commitment to adopt standard templates and enhance metadata practices; and identification of immediate actions to improve gender-data collection and integrate gender-sensitive KPIs.

Training for the People's Advocate (Ombudsperson) — 12 June 2025

The training focused on internal policy documents incorporating SMART objectives and realistic KPIs, as well as data-flow processes and good practices for Assembly collaboration. Twelve staff members attended. Key findings: strong interest in KPI institutionalisation; fragmented data flows requiring formalisation; and opportunities to improve cross-sectoral data-sharing and the monitoring of recommendations.

Communities of Practice

Two Community of Practice (CoP) events were held in June 2025, involving CSO representatives and institutional staff in facilitated discussions on strengthening the enforcement and public visibility of each institution's recommendations.

- **IDP CoP — 16 June 2025:** Discussions focused on increasing the applicability and enforcement of IDP decisions, and on strengthening public information about IDP's activities. Key recommendations included increased sanctions for non-compliance, public naming of non-compliant institutions, and development of a citizen-focused communications plan.
- **CPD CoP — 17 June 2025:** Recommendations included developing a general public communications plan, running traditional-media campaigns, producing short animated social-media videos, and creating an online platform to track implementation of CPD decisions.

3.5 Output 3.1 — CSOs Capacitated to Meaningfully Contribute to Legislative and Oversight Processes

Following the selection of the eleven CSOs that would participate in the project's capacity-building programme, local experts conducted a comprehensive assessment of existing civil society engagement practices in Albanian parliamentary oversight. The assessment combined desk research, document review, and interviews with Parliament staff, and administered a structured questionnaire to the selected CSOs. Key findings included:

- Limited technical knowledge of parliamentary oversight mechanisms among most CSOs.
- Insufficient financial resources and restricted access to timely parliamentary information.
- Limited familiarity with existing participation mechanisms such as public consultations, hearings, and the electronic legislative register.
- Largely sporadic and unstructured prior engagement with Parliament.
- Despite these challenges, a strong willingness to engage more meaningfully and a clear potential for growth if supported with practical, context-based training.

Informed by these findings, a three-staged training curriculum was designed: (a) a theoretical block covering parliamentary functions and oversight processes; (b) learning through case studies and simulations; and (c)

support for hands-on engagement with oversight processes, including participation in hearings and consultations and the production of analyses and position papers.

First Training Block — 23–25 May 2025

The training focused on foundational knowledge of parliamentary functions, oversight procedures, advocacy tools, and gender-equality considerations. A dedicated session by Parliament's Civil Society Coordinator provided first-hand guidance on cooperation practices, procedural entry points, and expectations for CSO involvement. By the end of the block, participants had a clearer understanding of the oversight ecosystem and concrete tools for planning and strengthening engagement with parliamentary committees.

Second Training Block — 17–19 June 2025

This block shifted the focus from theory to practice through participatory workshops, simulations, and case studies. Institutional perspectives were provided by the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, Parliament's Civil Society Coordinator, and the Parliament's Monitoring Service Advisor, alongside an international expert from GPG. Gender-equality modules delivered by the local gender expert team linked parliamentary functions directly to gender advocacy.

3.6 Output 3.2 — Collaboration Mechanisms Established to Facilitate CSO Exchanges and Cooperation

Community of Practice: The second training block yielded a tangible outcome: the co-design of a Community of Practice to advance civil society engagement in oversight and legislative processes. On 19 June, a dedicated session mapped members' needs and expectations, refined topics of interest, and outlined a preliminary meeting timetable. A formal launch event and an accompanying information session are planned for the next reporting period, ahead of the new legislature.

4. Cross-Cutting Items

4.1 Gender Mainstreaming

To strengthen the integration of gender perspectives in oversight, the project engaged a dedicated local gender expert team. Every capacity-building activity—all trainings and workshops described in Section 3—included a dedicated session on integrating gender at each step of the oversight cycle, treated as standard practice rather than an add-on.

In addition to in-training work, the gender expert team delivered:

- An **opinion on Parliament's 2025–2027 Communication Strategy**, highlighting the absence of a gender-sensitive framework and measurable indicators, with concrete proposals to integrate gender objectives and M&E mechanisms.
- A **draft training manual** covering the legal framework, tools (sex-disaggregated data, indicators, gender-responsive budgeting), and practical cases to standardise future capacity building.
- **Draft guidelines for mainstreaming gender** in the work of the Parliament of Albania for MPs and staff, with tools for legislative and oversight analysis, international examples, and institutional recommendations.

The training manual and guidelines will be finalised and submitted for review and validation later in 2025.

4.2 Knowledge Management

During this reporting period, the project supported SDC in organising a regional conference on parliamentary oversight, held in Tirana on 19–21 February 2025. The conference brought together parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, oversight institutions, and experts from Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Moldova, Switzerland, Germany, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Presentations covered the evolution and value of parliamentary oversight, with case studies from Switzerland and Germany, panel discussions on MPs' roles

and enabling conditions, and thematic workshops on committee mandates and agenda-setting practices. The conference strengthened a regional community of practice, reinforced shared commitments to accountability, and generated practical lessons informing the project's ongoing technical assistance.

5. Lessons Learned

During Year 1, project implementation faced several cross-cutting challenges. Corresponding lessons will inform project management in subsequent periods.

Lesson 1: Transition-proof stakeholder engagement

Changes in Assembly leadership—including a new Speaker, Deputy Speaker, and Monitoring Service Director within a short period—required recalibrating engagement to reaffirm commitment and re-establish working relationships. This underscored the need for proactive transition planning, robust documentation to preserve institutional memory, clear and maintained communication channels, and a flexible, responsive approach to stakeholder management. Similar transitions are expected at the start of the new legislature and should be planned for accordingly.

Lesson 2: Tailored assistance over uniform approaches

Supporting four distinct independent institutions confirmed that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. Each institution operates under a different legal mandate, organisational culture, and capacity level. Tailored technical assistance, sequenced milestones, and differentiated indicators are necessary to reflect these differences and to achieve meaningful results. This lesson applies equally to the next phase of work with independent institutions, where bespoke reporting tools and targeted follow-up will be essential.

Lesson 3: Trust as a prerequisite for CSO impact

Because the project intentionally onboarded emerging CSOs, initial scepticism about the feasibility of meaningful participation in legislative and oversight processes was evident. Building trust between Parliament, independent institutions, and CSOs will depend on reliable procedures with predictable timelines, transparent criteria for the uptake of inputs, and clear and consistent feedback on how CSO recommendations are used. These conditions need to be established and maintained to unlock meaningful advocacy contributions.

Lesson 4: User-centred design for the inter-institutional platform

The inter-institutional monitoring platform's diverse user base—Parliament, executive bodies, oversight institutions, CSOs, and citizens—surfaced competing needs and priorities during the design consultation process. An iterative, user-centred design with tiered functionalities, clear content-governance standards, and a phased rollout is essential to maintain system coherence and ensure broad adoption.

Lesson 5: Sequencing matters

Balancing the expansion of technical capacities across beneficiaries with the realities of the political cycle remains critical. Prioritising the early strengthening of administrative structures and systems—before attempting more visible or politically exposed interventions—provides the strongest foundations for durable impact over the project's lifetime.