

Final Programme

Regional conference on

Parliaments and evidence-based lawmaking in the Western Balkans

Challenges and opportunities

17-18 October 2024

Italian Chamber of Deputies, Rome, Italy



Introduction

Lawmaking is one of the key functions of parliaments, together with executive oversight and representation. Parliaments have a unique role in ensuring that adopted laws, regardless of who initiated them, are based on evidence and fit for purpose. For governments, laws are vital instruments through which they deliver public policy. Governments, therefore, rely on parliaments to scrutinise and adopt legislation in a timely, well-planned, and co-ordinated manner. Enhancing parliament-government co-ordination and collaboration throughout the full legislative cycle can deliver significant benefits and help advance the public policy agenda.

A parliament's ability to access, scrutinise, question, and use the best available information, data, and evidence in its legislative processes, in other words, to make informed, evidence-based legislative decisions, is central to the quality of its core functions. The ability of parliaments to base their legislative decisions on the best available information, data, and evidence matters for the quality of public policy, the vitality of the rule of law, and public trust in the competence and effectiveness of its democratically elected representatives. Evidence-based lawmaking is especially critical to EU accession and integration processes. All Western Balkan administrations have recognised EU membership as a top national priority and have committed to aligning their national legislation with the EU *acquis*. This involves adopting and amending considerable volumes of often highly technical legislation. Additional rules and procedures are required to ensure that all draft laws comply with national policy objectives and are in line with the standards and requirements of EU law. Regulatory impact assessment (RIA), public consultations, and stakeholder engagement are important tools and sources of evidence to inform lawmaking. Despite the various efforts made in recent years, Western Balkan administrations continue to face major challenges in ensuring the full and effective implementation of these tools to ensure evidence-based lawmaking. A parliament's ability to prepare and conduct evidence-based scrutiny of government-introduced draft laws is also hugely dependent on government legislative planning and co-ordination quality. Western Balkan parliaments often possess insufficient information about the volume, timing, and substance of government-initiated draft laws prior to their submission to the legislature. Hence, administrative services can do little preparatory work and cannot anticipate the informational needs of Members of Parliament and committees.

Access to high-quality information, data, and evidence is fundamental to allow parliaments to hold the executive accountable for legislation implementation, and it is equally decisive for the critical role parliaments have in advancing European integration processes. A parliament's ability and willingness to make fully informed legislative decisions cannot be taken for granted. Rather, good decision-making requires proper legal and regulatory frameworks; supportive parliamentary procedures; administrative and expert support and advice; qualified personnel; and close co-operation among parliament, government, civil society, and, in the European context, national parliaments and EU institutions.

Objective

This regional conference aims to foster expert dialogue and knowledge exchange among senior officials, experts, and representatives from six Western Balkan administrations¹. By bringing together senior officials, experts and key stakeholders, including those from the Chamber of Deputies of Italy, the European Commission (EC), ReSPA and SIGMA, the conference seeks to debate and address critical challenges related to parliamentary scrutiny and evidence-based lawmaking in the Western Balkan region. The conference will provide a platform for focused, thematic discussions. Participants will engage in in-depth conversations about crucial topics such as planning and organisation of parliamentary scrutiny, research services, legislative planning, and collaboration between parliaments and governments in the

¹ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (State level), Kosovo*, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

Western Balkans. Participants will share their expertise and experiences, drawing from their roles in parliamentary processes in the national administrations. By exchanging insights, best practices, and lessons learned, the conference aims to enhance the collective knowledge base. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality and effectiveness of parliamentary scrutiny of lawmaking in the Western Balkans and enhance the role of parliaments in the implementation of public administration reforms and in EU integration processes. Through informed discussions, participants will identify areas for reform and explore innovative approaches to enhance legislative oversight in the Western Balkans.

The conference will disseminate the findings and recommendations from SIGMA Paper No.68, which focuses on evidence-based lawmaking in the Western Balkans. These insights will serve as a basis for discussing key challenges and prioritising future reforms. Attendees will also have the opportunity to discuss some of the preliminary findings from the SIGMA 2024 Monitoring Reports across all six Western Balkan administrations. These reports provide valuable insights for shaping organisational and legislative improvements in parliaments across all administrations of the region.

The event will also enable the participants to explore options and opportunities to enhance the role of parliaments in monitoring public administration reforms and supporting EU integration processes through ongoing and future SIGMA and ReSPA projects.

Organisation and format

The regional conference is jointly organised by the SIGMA Programme and the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), in collaboration with the Italian Chamber of Deputies and with the support of European Commission DG NEAR.

The Conference will take place in the Italian Chamber of Deputies on **Friday, 18 October 2024**.

Participants are invited to **an additional informal session** in the afternoon on **Thursday, 17 October 2024**. During this session, the Principles of Public Administration will be presented and discussed, exploring their relevance and applicability for parliamentary processes. SIGMA and ReSPA colleagues will also provide updates about ongoing and planned projects in partner countries. The informal (optional) session and networking will take place in the afternoon of Thursday, 17 October 2024 in the [Hotel Le Meridien Visconti Rome](#).

The working language of the conference will be **English**. Colleagues are kindly requested to nominate officials who are proficient in English to actively participate in the discussions. Interpretation will be arranged for senior officials from Parliament administrations.

Participation

The Secretaries General of the Parliaments of the six Western Balkan administrations will be invited to participate, together with their colleagues involved in parliamentary research services (such as the heads/officials from the relevant parliamentary institutes and/or research departments). Additionally, senior officials from the centres of government (General Secretariat or PM Offices) of the Western Balkan administrations (those involved in the co-ordination of work with parliament and/or working on legislative planning) will be invited.

The organisers were pleased to cover the cost of participation of four officials from each Western Balkan administration (two from parliament and two from government). Some administrations have nominated additional delegates at their own expense.

Officials and experts from the European Commission (DG NEAR), the Italian Chamber of Deputies, the European Parliament Research Services (EPRS), ReSPA, and SIGMA will participate.

Conference venue and registration

The informal (optional) session and networking will take place in the afternoon of **Thursday, 17 October 2024** in the [Hotel Le Meridien Visconti Rome](#). No registration is needed for this session, which will be in English.

The main conference on **Friday, 18 October 2024 will take place in the Chamber of Deputies** (address: Italian Chamber of Deputies, Via Campo Marzio 78, 00186, Rome). Participants are asked **to arrive on time and present an ID to access the venue**. Registration will open from 08:30. For those who are interested and available, a guided tour of the Palazzo Montecitorio will be offered by the hosts at the end of the Conference at 17:00. Participants are asked to **wear formal attire during the Conference on Friday**. All visitors are asked to wear **security badges at all times** while inside the parliament premises. Additionally, male participants are asked **to wear a jacket and tie**. Simultaneous interpretation for ENG/BCMS/MK/ALB will be provided.

About SIGMA and its work in the region

[SIGMA](#) (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) is a joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union (EU), principally financed by the EU. In partnership with the European Commission (EC) Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), SIGMA works with EU candidate countries and potential candidates as well as EU Neighbourhood countries.

SIGMA provides **advice** on the design and prioritisation of reforms, methodologies and tools to support implementation, recommendations for improving laws and administrative arrangements, and opportunities to **share good practice** from a wide range of countries, including regional events, policy papers and regional comparative studies. The [SIGMA Papers published in 2024](#) address themes including parliaments and evidence-based lawmaking, inter-municipal co-operation, salary systems in public administration and their reforms, and the organisational structure of budget management. Courtesy translations of the executive summary and recommendations of SIGMA [Paper No.68 on Parliaments and Evidence Based Lawmaking in the Western Balkans](#) are available in local languages ([Albanian](#), [Bosnian](#), [Macedonian](#), [Montenegrin](#) and [Serbian](#)).

SIGMA supports its partners to monitor public administration reform through a **set of standard indicators** based on the [Principles of Public Administration](#), a comprehensive framework of standards expressing values and behaviours that citizens and businesses can expect from a modern public administration. They are designed to guide the EU enlargement and neighbourhood administrations in their reform efforts to meet the EU requirements on one of the “fundamentals” of the accession process. SIGMA is currently carrying out the 2024 monitoring exercise in all of the Western Balkan administrations and will publish the final [monitoring reports](#) at the end of the year.

The [Principles of Public Administration Data Portal](#) displays data collected, analysed and validated by SIGMA since 2017 in close collaboration with national administrations and the European Commission. The data set is downloadable and all charts can be shared.

ReSPA Programme of Work 2024

The Regional School of Public Administration ([ReSPA](#)) aids governments of the Western Balkans in achieving European administrative standards by enhancing excellence in Policy Development, European

Integration, Human Resource Management and Development, and Digital Transformation. As a regionally owned platform, ReSPA facilitates annual ministerial policy dialogues on Public Administration Reform (PAR). Its significant contribution was highlighted at the EU-Western Balkans Summit last December, where leaders, through the Brussels Declaration, recognized ReSPA as a reliable ally in empowering public administrators to underpin growth-enhancing reforms and EU integration by leveraging on a regional approach.

ReSPA trains and enhances the skills and knowledge of more than 1500 public servants across the region annually. ReSPA's 2024 Programme of Work includes 80+ learning initiatives - developed in collaboration with renowned EU institutions and academies such as Institut national du service public, European University Institute, Scuola Nazionale dell'Amministrazione, College of Europe, European Institute of Public Administration and SIGMA - to leverage the expertise of public officials; 15+ On-demand projects tailored to specific PAR-related needs of each ReSPA Member and 20+ Mobility and Long-term mobility schemes incorporating executive learning and job-shadowing components. ReSPA continues to enhance regional expertise in quality management through the Regional Quality Management Centre by implementing the European Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in four institutions and awarding three institutions with CAF Certificates.

Key initiatives include the Regional Academy on Evidence-Informed Policy Making, the Regional Academy on Interoperability, the Seasonal School on Digital Transformation and the Summer School on EU Accession Negotiation. Additionally, the ambitious Capacity Building and Mobility Programme crafted with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation and the Italian National School of Administration (SNA) provides intensive training for 55 public administrators from the Western Balkans.

This year, ReSPA and SIGMA launched the 3rd cycle of the Western Balkans Public Administration Award, on the theme of "Building better public administration for and with users!" to recognise and promote exemplary solutions and champions in the region's public administration.

Finally, ReSPA is developing the Western Balkans Knowledge Management Platform to empower public administrators who are the driving force behind all reform efforts.

AGENDA

DAY I: Thursday, 17 October 2024 (OPTIONAL)

Venue: *Hotel Le Meridien Visconti Rome*, Conference room Cavour, Via Federico Cesi, 37, Roma Italy

08:30 – 14:30 *Arrival of participants at different times during the day*

14:30 - 15:00 **Welcome coffee**

15:00 – 18:00 **An informal (optional) session with all delegates and experts about the updated Principles of Public Administration, ongoing and planned projects and initiatives in the area of lawmaking and legislative scrutiny-DG NEAR, SIGMA and ReSPA.**

The session will be in English.

- Welcoming remarks
- ReSPA programme in the area of public administration reform and flagship initiatives, *Mr Gentian Xhaxhiu, ReSPA*
- Short presentation about the relevant SIGMA Principles (with a focus on parliament and lawmaking) and brief update on the 2024 Monitoring Assessments of the Western Balkan administration. *Mr Gregor Virant, Mr Bagrat Tunyan, Mr Péter Vági, SIGMA*
- Q&A and discussion

18:00 **Networking reception**

Winter Garden Restaurant, Hotel le Meridien Visconti Rome, Via Federico Cesi, 37, Roma Italy

DAY II: Friday, 18 October 2024

Venue: Parliamentary Groups Hall

Italian Chamber of Deputies, via Campo Marzio 78, 00186, Rome.



08:30 – 09:15 Working breakfast meeting of the Secretaries General (SG) of Parliaments of Western Balkans [By invitation, only for SGs, arrival at 08:20. Entrance from the main building accessed from Piazza Monte Citorio]

- *Hosted by Mr Fabrizio Castaldi, Secretary-General, Italian Chamber of Deputies*

08:45 – 09:15 Arrival and registration of other participants.
Entrance from via di campo marzio n. 78. Conference hall will open from 09:00.

09:15 – 09:30 Welcoming remarks from the hosts

- *Mr Fabrizio Castaldi, Secretary-General, Italian Chamber of Deputies*

09:30 – 10:00 Introductory speeches: How can parliaments support EU integration and public administration reforms (PAR)?

- *Mr Vaclav Sterba, Head of PAR Team, DG NEAR, European Commission*
- *Ms Maja Handjiska-Trendafilova, Director of ReSPA*
- *Mr Gregor Virant, Head of the SIGMA Programme*

10:00 – 10:10 Group photo with all participants

10:10 – 10:40 What are key challenges in effective parliamentary scrutiny of lawmaking in the Western Balkans? Main findings of SIGMA Paper on Parliaments

- *Mr Bagrat Tunyan and Mr Klaus Goetz, SIGMA*

10:40 – 11:10 How does the Italian Chamber of Deputies support evidence-based lawmaking through its research and support services?

- *Mr Giovanni Rizzoni, Head of Co-operation with Other Parliaments, Italian Chamber of Deputies*
- *Mr Bernardo Polverari, Head of the Research Service, Italian Chamber of Deputies of Italy*

11:10 - 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 - 12:45 Panel discussion 1: Parliamentary administrations

How to enhance the capacities of the parliamentary administrations in the Western Balkans? Recent initiatives, good practices and main challenges.

- *Short interventions and reflections from each of the Western Balkan parliaments (Secretaries General)*

- Q&A

Moderated by Ms Jelena Mrdak, ReSPA

12:45 - 13:45 **Networking lunch break**

13:45 - 15:00 **Panel discussion 2: Legislative planning and co-ordination**

How to improve government-parliament co-ordination and legislative planning for more effective lawmaking?

- *Short interventions from selected representatives of government and parliament administrations*
- *Q&A and discussion*

Moderated by Mr Péter Vági, SIGMA

15:00- 15:30 **Use of evidence and analysis during the EU lawmaking process: The experience of the European Parliament Research Services (EPRS) in scrutinising legislative initiatives**

- *Ms Isabelle Ioannides, EPRS*

15:30 - 15:45 **Coffee Break**

15:45 - 16:30 **Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technologies in lawmaking. How can AI and data science advance evidence-based lawmaking? Exchanging EU and international experiences**

- *Latest developments in applying AI in parliaments (Mr Fotis Fitsilis, SIGMA)*
- *The use of AI for parliamentary research and documentation: the experience of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (Mr. Annibale Ferrari, Deputy Secretary-General, Italian Chamber of Deputies)*
- *Prospects of using AI in the Western Balkan parliaments: how can it help achieve evidence-based lawmaking? Western Balkan parliamentary delegates will be invited to briefly share their experiences or future plans for applying AI in parliamentary work (optional).*

Moderated by Bagrat Tunyan, SIGMA

16:30 - 16:45 **Closing session: key messages and concluding remarks**

- *Mr Annibale Ferrari, Deputy SG, Italian Chamber of Deputies*
- *Mr Vaclav Sterba, EC DG NEAR*
- *Ms Maja Handjiska-Trendafilova, ReSPA*
- *Mr Gregor Virant, SIGMA*

17:00 **Guided tour of the Palazzo Montecitorio**

Participants will be invited for a guided tour of the Palazzo Montecitorio, the main Plenary Hall of the Chamber, the historical Building of Bernini, the art collection.