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PARLIAMENTS AND EVIDENCE-BASED LAWMAKING IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Draft Programme
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 scrutinize and adopt legislation in a timely, well-planned, and coordinated manner. Enhancing parliament-government coordination and collaboration throughout the full legislative cycle can deliver significant benefits and help advance the public policy agenda.

A parliament's ability to access, scrutinize, 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 recognized 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 not only with national policy objectives but also 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 coordination 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 MPs 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 cooperation 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 organization of parliamentary scrutiny,

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.

research services, legislative planning, and collaboration between parliaments and governments in the 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 68, which focuses on evidence-based lawmaking in the Western Balkans. These insights will serve as a basis for discussing key challenges and prioritizing 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 organizational 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 organized 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, October 17, 2024**. During the informal session, the SIGMA Principles of Public Administration will be presented and discussed, exploring their relevance and applicability for parliamentary processes.

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

Participation

The General Secretaries of the Parliaments of the six Western Balkan administrations will be invited to participate, together with their colleagues involved in the 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 WB administrations (those involved in the coordination of work with parliament and/or working on legislative planning) will be invited. The organizers will consider the possibility of covering the cost of participation of the invited participants from the WB administrations (up to 3-4 from each administration) (TBC).

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

Conference venue and registration

The 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 bring an ID to access the venue. Registration will open from 08:30 (TBC). 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. Male participants are asked to wear a jacket and tie when entering the Chamber's premises.

The informal (optional) session and networking will take place in the afternoon of Thursday, 17 October 2024 in the [Hotel Le Meridien Visconti Rome](#).

SIGMA papers and Monitoring Reports

SIGMA [Paper 68 on Parliaments and Evidence](#) based lawmaking was finalised and published in March 2024. The report can be accessed from the following link in English (full report) and local languages (executive summary and recommendations).

SIGMA 2024 Monitoring Reports will be published in November, 2024. The assessments have been carried out against the updated [Principles of Public Administration](#). Some of the preliminary regional findings will also be presented and discussed.

SIGMA papers can be accessed from <https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/public-governance-papers.htm>

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, HRM 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's 2024 Programme of Work includes **80+ learning initiatives** - developed in collaboration with renowned EU institutions and academies such as INSP, EUI, SNA, CoE, EIPA and others - 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**. Simultaneously, ReSPA is dedicated to fostering **peer practitioners networks between public administrators in the Western Balkans and EU Member States**, promoting a shared European public administration space.

ReSPA trains and enhances the skills & knowledge of more than **1500 public servants** across the region annually.

Key initiatives include **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 Cooperation** and the **Italian National School of Administration (SNA)** provides intensive training for 55 public administrators from the Western Balkans. This program involves tailored sessions led by over 50 experts and exchanges with Italian counterparts across more than 10 Public Institutions.

This year, ReSPA and SIGMA launched the **3rd cycle of the Western Balkans Public Administration Award**, themed “Building better public administration for and with users!” to recognize 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.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

DAY I: Thursday, 17 October 2024 (Informal, OPTIONAL)

Venue: Hotel Le Meridien Visconti Rome, 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 session about the SIGMA Principles of Public Administrations, ongoing and planned projects of EI/DG NEAR, SIGMA and ReSPA**

- Meeting the participants
- Updates on SIGMA and ReSPA programmes and work in the region
- Presentation on the SIGMA Principles of Public Administration, with a particular focus on those that are most relevant for parliaments
- 2024 SIGMA Monitoring Assessments in the Western Balkans
- Q&A

19:00 **Networking drinks/dinner**

Details to be provided/confirmed

DAY II: Friday, 18 October 2024 (MAIN CONFERENCE)

Venue: Parliamentary Groups Hall (TBC),
Italian Chamber of Deputies, Via Campo Marzio 78, 00186, Rome.



09:00 – 09:30 *Arrival and registration of participants*

09:30 – 09:45 **Welcoming remarks from the hosts**

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

09:45 – 10:15 **Introductory speeches: How can parliaments support EU integration and public administration reforms (PAR)?**

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

10:15 – 10:45 **What are key challenges in effective parliamentary scrutiny of lawmaking in the Western Balkans? Main findings of the SIGMA study**

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

10:45 – 11:15 **How does the Italian Chamber of Deputies support evidence-based lawmaking through research and support services?**

- *Mr Giovanni Rizzoni, Head of Cooperation with Other Parliaments and/or Mr Bernardo Polverari, Head of the Research Service*

11:15 - 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 from WB parliaments (General Secretaries)*
- *Heads of parliamentary institutes or research services*
- *Followed by Q&A and discussion.*

Moderated by ReSPA (TBC)

13:00- 14:00 *Lunch Break*

14:00 - 15:15 Panel discussion 2: Legislative planning and co-ordination***How to improve government-parliament co-ordination and legislative planning for more effective lawmaking?***

- *Discussion between the representatives of government and parliament administrations (a mixed group of officials: 3 officials from government and 3 from parliament administrations from WB region)*
- *How are co-ordination and legislative planning organised in the WB administrations?*
- *Q&A and discussion*

Moderated by SIGMA (TBC)

15:15 - 15:30 Coffee Break**15:30- 15:50 Use of evidence and analysis during the preparation of EU laws: The experience of the European Parliament Research Services (EPRS)**

- *Ms Isebell Ioannides, EPRS*

15:50 - 16:45 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 expert)*
- *The use of AI for parliamentary research and documentation: the experience of the Italian Chamber of Deputies*
- *Prospects of using AI in the WB parliaments: how can it help achieve evidence-based lawmaking? (WB parliaments are invited to make comments and observations).*

Moderated by EC DG NEAR(?)/ SIGMA and/or ReSPA (TBC)

16:45 - 17:00 Closing session: key messages, final remarks and future plans

- *Representatives of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, EC, ReSPA and SIGMA*

17:00 Guided tour of the Palazzo Montecitorio

Participants will be invited to have a guided tour of the Palazzo Montecitorio where the main Plenary Hall of the Chamber is located, the historical Building of Bernini and the Art Collection.