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ALBANIA

SUCCESS STORY

Rooting Out Government Corruption

New agency ensures transparency and accountability



Photo: CAO

A popular poster in Tirana urges Albanians not to trade their rights for money.

Albania loses about \$1.2 billion a year because of graft and unpaid taxes. Its regulatory system is not transparent, and its rules are often inconsistent, leading to unreliable interpretation.

But in 2004, the Albanian government sacked a high-level Transportation Department official after an audit of his assets revealed he owned the country's largest asphalt company. And in the months leading up to the July 3, 2005, parliamentary elections, journalists began to ask for the records and assets of public officials. In May, two months after the official deadline for asset declaration submissions, fines were issued to 84 public officials who were late with their submissions.

Formerly a closed society, Albania has begun to expose conflicts of interest and work to improve transparency and accountability among its public officials. Fatmira Laskaj, a former judge who now heads the High Inspectorate on the Declaration and Audit of Assets (HIDAA), analyzes and hands over suspicious cases to the Prosecutor General Office. As a result of Fatmira's work, some officials have been dismissed, others prosecuted.

"It is difficult to change the attitude of officials to declare their assets," said Fatmira, but attitudes are changing

Created by legislation recommended by a USAID-supported coalition of organizations, HIDAA is the first agency of its kind in Albania. It audits all public officials on two-year intervals, and its mandate was recently enlarged to include the implementation of a new conflict of interest law. USAID has provided HIDAA with computers, scanners and other equipment, and it helped design declaration forms and put in place a state-of-the-art information management system that includes an official Web site. USAID also trains inspectors and provides technical assistance, training and small grants to anticorruption organizations such as the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption and the Citizens Advocacy Office.

Telling Our Story

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