

Training Parliamentary Leadership in Bulgaria



Parliament Building in Sophia, Bulgaria

It has been twelve years since the socialist planning approach was abandoned in favor of market-oriented economic reforms in Bulgaria. But there are still relatively few members of parliament who have any formal training in economics in this Eastern European nation. To remedy that situation, an international project was introduced this summer whose first objective is to provide direct training for parliamentary members in Bulgaria in the basic principles of market-oriented economics.

The project hopes to overcome numerous inadequacies of the past, including the legacy of former one-party control, cronyism, and nepotism. The objective is to improve the policymaking process by training members of parliament in economics and mentoring them in the use of objective policy analysis in the policymaking process.

Professor John Anderson served as a visiting scholar-teacher in Bulgaria in July 2003. He presented daily lectures to members of parliament and their economic advisors, covering the same essential principles of economics that are taught at UNL in Economics 211. While this sophomore principles-level class initially may seem far too simple for the lawmakers, consider the following reaction from a Bulgarian professor of economics.

When discussing the fundamental principles of market economics, this Bulgarian educator said, “Well, you know that we have only been thinking and teaching this type of economics for the past ten or twelve years. It will take much longer for us to become familiar enough with this type of economics to apply these principles to understand our own situation.”

After a week of training in economics and policy analysis, the project culminated with a two-day seminar at the mountain resort Borovetz, site of a former tsar’s hunting lodge. Seminar participants included parliamentary representatives of all political parties in the country. Bulgarian academics provided background on the Bulgarian economic transition experience, while Anderson assessed Bulgaria’s economic transition experience and drew lessons for future economic policy.

The second aim of the project was to develop an academic advisor practice for Bulgarian politicians in public

finance and economics. A continuing phase of the project involves mobilization of academic resources for the enhancement of public policymaking. Policymakers are encouraged to establish links with academic advisors who can provide applied policy analysis to inform policy debates with which members of parliament are struggling. The goal of this aspect of the project is to raise the level of informed policy debate and produce



Professor John E Anderson

better public policy. The project emphasis on developing academic partnership practices is, at its heart, designed to improve the ethical basis of public policy decisions.

The Partnership Project was jointly sponsored by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NAS-PAA) and its counterpart in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPAcee). The project was implemented in Sofia in conjunction with the University of Sofia, National University Center, and the Institute of Public Administration.