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PARLIAMENTARY PROGRAM IN AZERBAIJAN

Quarterly Report (January 1 – March 31, 2009)

Contract No. DFD-1-00-04-00129-00

(Eighth Quarterly Report for Task Order 5)

April 2009

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(Eighth Quarterly Report for Task Order 05)

This quarterly report is submitted to the Program CTO Parviz Musayev of the Office of Democracy and Governance of USAID-Caucasus-Azerbaijan Mission under the guidelines as stated in Clause A.6 of the contract.

ACRONYMS

CoP Chief of Party
CRS Congressional Research Service
COTR Contracting Officer's Technical Representative
D&G Democracy and Governance
DAI Development Alternatives, Inc.
DCoP Deputy Chief of Party
EG Economic Growth
EU European Union
ExCom Local Representative of Executive Power
IREX International Research and Exchange Board
IT information technology
IR Intermediate Result
LTTA long-term technical assistance
MM Milli Mejlis (the Parliament of Azerbaijan)
MP Member of Parliament
MPA Member of Parliament's Assistant
NGO nongovernmental organization
OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PMP Performance Monitoring Plan
STTA short-term technical assistance
SO Strategic Objective
TA technical assistance
USAID United States Agency for International Development

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Eighth Quarterly Report

Introduction

The **Parliamentary Program in Azerbaijan** is a two-year technical assistance initiative of the United States Agency for International Development USAID. It is being implemented by Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), from April 2007 to April 2009. The Parliamentary Program's main partner is the Milli Mejlis (MM), the Parliament of Azerbaijan. Program subcontractors include the National Conference of State Legislatures, Indiana University and International Roll Call.

The Program's activities focus on three general technical components, with activities to be carried out as detailed in each of the two annual workplans:

- 1) **Developing and strengthening the capacity of permanent parliamentary staff**, including the establishment of central and regional constituency offices for each MP, enhanced committee capacity and sustainable training Programs.
- 2) **Promoting greater legislative and procedural transparency** through the provision of technical assistance and resources to make official and draft legislation accessible to Government and private citizens and the adoption of sunshine mechanisms, including the publication of voting records of Members of Parliament (MPs).
- 3) **Enhancing the effectiveness of Parliament** by providing technical assistance and training for newly elected and existing MPs on staff utilization, responding to constituency requests and issues, ethics Programming, legislative procedure and process development, and comparative study tours.

The emphasis of the first year of the Program was to evaluate the status of the institution's capacity in the three overall components mentioned above and to provide training for capacity building accordingly. The second year of the Program further continues training of the staff of the Parliament and develops the MPs' ability to become a part of the policy making process, as full fledged legislators. The Program is the first USAID funded technical assistance project concerning the Parliament in Azerbaijan and hence, the Program started at determining the fundamentals of the institutional and administrative capacity in the Parliament and rapidly moved into capacity building with very comprehensive tailor-made training Programs for its staff, assistants to MPs and MPs.

In order to carry out the Program activities, the Program has set-up five specific project staff teams, which correspond to one of more of the major activities within – or crosscutting – the three components. This includes the following: Constituency Building Task Force; Communication and Public Relations Task Force; Human Resources Development Task Force; the Organizational/Institutional Task Force and the Legislative/Legal Coordination Task Force. Each of the Program's Task Forces is run by a long term specialist and the entire Program is supervised by the Chief of Party. The counterparts of the Program include the Parliament's Chief of Staff and an Aide to the Chairman of the Parliament. The Program also will interact regularly with heads of technical and administrative departments within the Parliament.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During this quarter the Program team continued its detailed training sessions for MPAs (MP Assistants) that had begun during year 1, moving into the area of policy development conceptualization training and furthering its training work on improving constituency relations. In addition, the Program increased its level of training for MPAs and staff members regarding the use of IT technology, such as blogging and website building.

Overall, this quarter's activities continued to maintain and consolidate the quality of the working relationship between the Program team and the leadership of the Parliament, a number of MM departments, and with individual MPs and their assistants.

As happened during the prior quarter with the presidential election campaign, the campaign about the referendum on constitutional amendments held during this quarter substantially affected the Program. Many MPs, as well as people in the leadership and supervisory positions of the MM were called to duty to canvass the regions and constituencies in support of a positive outcome for the referendum. These activities spilled over into the quarter, even past the referendum date, which was followed shortly thereafter by the Novruz holidays and a week long lull in activities. Therefore, these MPs and MM staff were less available, limiting the number of activities the Program could deliver.

Nevertheless, the team was able to still work with the MM leadership and continue its working relationships with the coordinating team at the MM's HR Department and the aide to the Chairman of the Parliament. Training for MM staff continued to take place on communication skills, for instance. Numerous meetings and discussions on concepts and strategies were also held in non-formal settings, so as to help maintain a vision and motivation.

Transparency in the Legislative Process

The program also held its first major round table on transparency and anticorruption in coordination with the USAID/CoE project, AZPAC. The round table conference took place on February 11, 2009, in the great ceremonial conference room of the Milli Mejlis. The aim of the conference was to discuss the legislative process in Azerbaijan and how it might be improved in order to facilitate the efficient passage of high-quality legislation and maximize its resistance to corruption. The event brought together experts, representatives from governmental authorities, the Milli Mejlis, civil society and the media. A number of personalities contributed to the round table, including Mr Ziyafat Asgarov, 1st Deputy Speaker of the Milli Mejlis and Member of the Commission on Combating Corruption, the Honorable Anne Derse, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ms Margaret Killerby, Director of Co-operation of the Council of Europe, Ali Huseynov, Chairman of the Standing Committee on State Building and Law.

The Parliamentary Program's contribution, included coordination with the MM, a presentation by Eldar Gojayev, the Project's legal specialist, as well as substantive comments to the discussion.

The event brought together nearly 80 people, including MPs, Ministry leadership, Council of Europe, USAID and US Embassy representatives, a large number of NGOs representatives and media.

Support establishment of effective constituent relations

During the last quarter, the Project's team focusing on constituency activities carried a 3-day trainings on the Strengthening of Constituency Relations for MPAs. The training was held throughout the entire month of February, 2009. The training was run by Mr. Eric Lepisto, Ph.D. in Social Anthropology; Representatives from Transparency International Organization, an Expert from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and an Expert from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection.

The training was comprised of eight different experiential activities that were held in three settings to ensure the participation of all Parliamentary Assistants. The training oriented the MPAs on strengthening their ability to work with constituencies, and included aspects related to research, relationships, resource management, and needs identification. The running theme of the training addressed the concept and practicalities of professionalization during a period of political, economic and social transition.

MM Legislative Database

In January 2009 the project provided funds for week-long training courses on UNIX based Red Hat Linux software program, specifically tailored for the MM Office IT department four staff members by Baku based SoftLine International Co., a company specialized in designing and providing software operations programs trainings.

This training will be helpful for the MM to obtain knowledge on the principles of the Linux Operating System, and the networks and security issues of the OS, as well as build-up of a web-based system (including the MM's external website), e-mail, DNS and other services. Thus, the courses has significantly increased the MM IT' staff ability to efficiently run electronic resources and databases, including the legislative database. Prior to receiving the Linux Operating System training, the MM was using primarily a Microsoft Windows based OS throughout the system.

MM web-site

This quarter, the Program continued to work with the MM Office of Public Information (Website) Division in improving the division's vision for further improvement of MM website as one of the most efficient ways for information sharing and interaction with constituencies, NGOs and business associations. The Program arranged training for MM Office Public Information Sector and other departments on media communication and made arrangements for conducting of training for MM Office IT Department.

A draft concept of Electronic Parliament (E-Parliament) was developed by MM Office Website Division and submitted to the project at the end of the quarter. The concept's objectives are to develop the electronic services of the MM and its bodies in line with international standards, create a digital legal and other databases allowing members of the MM, the MM Office and citizens to function in the context of an information society, ensure easy access to the services of the E-Parliament by MPs and relevant structures of the MM Office, create basic components of the E-parliament infrastructure, and upgrade the information infrastructure of the MM.

Internet Blog Design Training Course for MPAs

In February 2009, the Program in cooperation with IATP/IREX held training Internet blog design courses for a group of two MPAs from Baku based constituencies. As previously, the training module consisted of eight lessons, 2 hour each and covered all essential aspects of personal blog-design, including creating of the MP website design, embedding various tools and management of blog site (removing and downloading of materials).

Coordination with Other USAID Projects and Donors

The Program team continued to substantially maintain and cultivate contacts and activities in coordination with other USAID projects.

This quarter, the Program held two events connected with other USAID projects. The first involved a round table seminar with the TIRSP project on providing support for legislation on procurement legislation. The second was a comprehensive and high profile round table with the AZPAC project, a USAID/CoE joint program on anticorruption, held in cooperation with the Parliament in the great ceremonial conference room of the Parliament.

In addition, the Program efficiently responded to a number of requests for information, legislation or strategic support from other USAID partners, the USAID mission, including EG, and the US Embassy.

USAID Mission Coordinator Visits Constituency Offices in Regions and Meets MPAs

On March 2-3, 2009, Mr. Scott Taylor, USAID mission coordinator, together with the representative of MM HR Department for MPAs, Mr. Elshad Ismayilov and Aybeniz Mammadova, DCOP Parliamentary Program, visited 5 constituency offices in Sheki, Gakh and Zakatala regions. The aim was to observe working conditions created for MPAs and to discuss their working environment.

Parliamentary Digest

On March 3, 2009, the Parliamentary Program issued its first publication of the Parliamentary Digest to the international community in Azerbaijan. The Parliamentary Digest provides excerpts about the Milli Mejlis activities and news from articles found in local and international newspapers, the Internet, TV news programs and other news related sources. The Parliamentary Digest is distributed in electronic form to international donors and the technical assistance community, as well as foreign diplomatic representatives in Azerbaijan and to Azerbaijani organizations.

II. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

The activities indicated in the summary are references to the activities indicated in the second year's workplan submitted to the USAID/Azerbaijan mission.

COMPONENT 1: DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY CAPACITY

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

Activity 3. Held a series of comprehensive trainings for MPAs to strengthen constituency relations (January-March 2009)

Activity 3. *USAID-Azerbaijan Mission Coordinator's trip to constituency offices. (March 2-3, 2009)*

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

Activity 3: Support establishment of effective constituent relations

Series of Comprehensive Trainings for MPAs on "Strengthening Constituency Relations " (January-March 2009)

In the last quarter, the Program held 3-day trainings on the Strengthening Constituency Relations during the whole month of February, 2009. The training was run by Mr. Eric Lepisto, Ph.D. in Social Anthropology; Representatives from Transparency International Organization, Expert from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and Expert from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection.

The training was comprised of eight different experiential activities that were held in three settings to ensure the participation of all Parliamentary Assistants. The training oriented the MPAs on strengthening their ability to work with constituencies, and included aspects related to research, relationships, resource management, and needs identification. The running theme of the training addressed the concept and practicalities of professionalization during a period of political, economic and social transition.

Session 1: Resource Management. The topic of resource management was chosen as an elementary theme, but it was developed so that participants focused on their role in managing relationships as a central aspect of their position as parliamentary aides. As

conceptual elements of this session Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Social Capital concepts were introduced to the participants.

Session 2: Professional Interaction. The second session was based on major experiential activity designed to highlight different types of personalities, the idea of stereotypes and problems of interaction. Special emphasis in this session was placed on listening skills and fact-finding. This session had the goal of introducing some basic skills and to emphasize the need to listen to constituents with the aim of learning facts, defining the responsibilities and managing the relationships.

Session 3: Representation and Accountability. The issue of the Social Change, Accountability Triangle (designed by World Bank for its 2004 World Development Report, Making Service work for poor) and Triangulation (a research technique to discover at least three sides of an issue before declaring it to be a social fact) were introduced to MPAs. The discussion around these issues was important not only to emphasize the role of legislators (and their assistants) in responding to social developments but also to reiterate the need for research and to follow actual trends. Special attention was drawn to the importance of long-term data collection, clean statistics, supporting evidence, and MPA monitoring and discussion to understand the actual trends across the country.

Session 4: Professional Norms. MPAs often find themselves approached as if they are friends, not professionals, a situation that makes it difficult to refuse assistance as much as it limits the possibility to serve all. The problem for the MPA is identifying roles, relationships, responsibilities and paths for resolution/action. Defining norms of professional behavior are therefore an essential exercise. A central issue concerns ethics, which formed the focus for this session's activity. Using a game developed by Garry Sheets called "where to draw the line", a simulation where MPAs had to deal with four ethical situations which they had to score "completely acceptable", "somewhat acceptable" and "not acceptable".

Session 5: The Challenge. Experiential seminars often finish with a final team-based challenge that calls upon participants to put their skills to the test.

Session 6: Transparency International Presentation on their activities in Azerbaijan and building relationship with MPAs to serve better for constituents. TI representative spoke mainly about corruption and the corruption hotline in addition to other issues.

Session 7: Legislative aspects of use of National Parks and Reservations. An expert from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources made a presentation on the Legislative aspects of National parks and Reservations since MPAs requested this topic due to receiving number of constituency complaints from the neighboring regions to National Parks.

Session 8: Social security: retirement pensions, targeted social assistance and disability pensions. This topic was presented by the expert from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. MPAs usually deal with complaints on social security issues. Discussion around this topic were very challenging and MPAs requested for the next set of trainings to have different experts from the Ministry specialized particularly on the mentioned areas of social benefits. MPAs as well requested to have a representative of MM Social Policy Department and expert from the Permanent Social Policy Commission at MM together with the experts from the Ministry to discuss amends to the laws on the social benefits.

The impact of the training on the participants was very significant. The methodology with which the trainers conducted the sessions was innovative and designed to

incorporate a softer, experiential approach in order to involve MPAs more closely and directly with their professional development. In spite of experiencing complex theoretical material for the first time, the participants received it well very well due to fact that all of the materials were incorporated into a game format. This innovative format of trainings challenged MPAs at the beginning of the training. They expressed initial resistance to be part of any simulations and role-playing. However, after the first experiential exercises, the participants were able to feel the cohesiveness and efficiency of this methodology by being able to determine their own level of professional knowledge, interaction and responsibility. Given the challenges that working with adults of mixed ages and backgrounds present, the feedback the Program received from MPAs was extremely positive. They mentioned that it was a unique training were they never became tired or bored; that it insured everybody's involvement; that it triggered new questions; and that it opened new horizons for understanding of true professionalism, and that it challenged their own level of competency as MPAs.

USAID-Azerbaijan Mission Coordinator's Trip to Constituency Offices. (March 2-3, 2009)

Mr. Scott Taylor together with the representative of MM HR Department MPA Mr. Elshad Ismayilov and Aybeniz Mammadova, DCOP Parliamentary Program visited 5 constituency offices in Sheki, Gakh and Zakatala regions. The aim was to observe working conditions created for MPAs. Visitors were introduced to their working environment and had long discussions in each constituency office on how MPAs are dealing with the constituency problems, how they are recoding and tracking their complaints and their success and failures and needs for their professional development.

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

- Substantially improved understanding of the MPAs' role in constituencies and in relation to the institution in a practical sense.
- Increased networking capacity among MPAs and with NGOs.
- Practical aspects of developing Constituency offices and relationships with constituents improved.
- Continued development of the relationship between the Program and the MM allows for a more open approach to training and a stronger and more potent exchange of ideas and concepts.

COMPONENT 2: PROMOTING GREATER PROCEDURAL AND LEGISLATIVE TRANSPARENCY

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

Activity 1. Review of new Milli Mejlis website (January-March 2009)

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

Review of new Milli Mejlis website (January-March 2009)

This quarter, the Program continued to work with the MM Office of Public Information (Website) Division in improving the division's vision for further improvement of MM website as one of the most efficient ways for information sharing and interaction with constituencies, NGOs and business associations. The Program arranged training for MM Office Public Information Sector and other departments on media communication and made arrangements for conducting of training for MM Office IT Department.

A number of activities related to the web site and information took place as follows:

MM Legislative Database

Training on UNIX based Red Hat Linux operation system for MM Office IT Department staff

In January 2009 the project provided funds for week-long training courses on UNIX based Red Hat Linux software program, specifically tailored for MM Office IT department four staff members by Baku based SoftLine International Co., a company specialized in designing and providing software operations programs trainings.

According to feedback the project got from Sh.Hasanov, the Head of the MM IT Department, after the training course, the training helped MM IT staff to learn about the UNIX based Red Hat Linux operating system which provides enhanced opportunities for ensuring server security, including MM website server. Now MM IT staff are able to operate a state-of-art software operating system, thus efficiently develop internal software solutions within MM for many areas, including efficient running of legislative database and website. Therefore the courses greatly contributed to improved transparency of information and in the legislative process, both internally and externally.

MM web-site

A draft concept of Electronic Parliament (E-Parliament) was developed by MM Office Website Division and submitted to the project at the end of the quarter. The concept's objectives are to develop the electronic services of the MM and its bodies in line with international standards, to create digital legal and other databases allowing members of the MM, the MM Office and citizens to access information more freely. The plan is also to ensure easy access to the services of the E-Parliament by MPs and relevant structures of the MM, create basic components of the E-parliament infrastructure, and upgrade the information infrastructure of the MM.

The draft E-Parliament concept will be discussed with MM Website Division during STTA Svetoslav Yankov's planned visit to Baku. Mr. Yankov will work with the project's

staff and counterparts from MM to identify further key areas for improvement in website management and legislative database issues and will evaluate and address MM's overall IT and Internet services flow processes from a transparency perspective.

While the E-Parliament concept is winding down its way through improvement and eventually approval, the MM Office Website Division continued its work on improving the current website.

The following additional elements were also added by MM Office Website Division into MM website design:

- General information section in the Standing Commissions sub-menu, which provides description of functions for each of commissions and contact details, including e-mail and phone numbers.
- Statistics section in the Ongoing Activity sub-menu. The section provides information about number of bills and resolutions adopted by MM during previous session (Fall or Spring)

Internet Blog Design Training Course for MPAs

In February 2009, the Program in cooperation with IATP/IREX held Internet blog design courses for a group of two MPAs from Baku based constituencies. As previously, the training module consisted of eight lessons, 2 hours each and covered all essential aspects of personal blog-design, including creating the MP website design, embedding various tools and management of the blog site (removing and downloading of materials). The basic template of MP's blog-site consists of the following content elements:

Basic information— address, biodata, contact details, including constituency map
Constituency and other Information (dynamic and changing) – current activity in the constituency and the Parliament, including constituency campaigns, speeches at the Standing Commissions and Plenary Sessions meetings; voting records, media reports. Depending on the success of the courses, the Program may consider increasing trainings to MM Standing Commissions secretaries, in order to train on downloading of information related to the Commissions activities into MM

As a result of the Program's training, following internet blog sites were created:

For MP Astan Shaverdiyev: <http://www.120cebrayil.blogmilli.com/>

For MP Havva Mammadova: <http://www.122xankendi.blogmilli.com/>

Despite observing relative success in creating of Internet blog sites for MP's through series of intensive training, further review of MPA's involvement in blogs activities revealed weaknesses in regular updating of blogs. While in some cases it might be related to an absence of computers at MP's offices, which is still an issue because of alleged lack of funding from Milli Mejlis, in other cases, where the offices are equipped with computers it might be related with low self-motivation from MPAs, since it is a relatively new social and technical phenomena. Even in most European countries MP's still rarely use blogs.

In order to encourage MPAs to work on MP's blogs more actively and provide regular update for the materials, the Parliamentary Project's communications specialist will meet in April 2009 with Fakhriya Nasirli, Head of MM Office HR Department's section on work with MPA's (and MPAs who have already created blogs) and discuss how MPAs can blog more efficiently. It may also include monitoring MP's blog activities by MM HR Department's officers.

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

- This quarter helped outline the needs of the IT and web site departments and develop a clearer vision for the heads of the departments.
- The training supported capacity building for improved transparency for improved legislative process and access to information
- The Program exchanged views on the state of development of the departments' IT capabilities and provided suggestions for future capacity building.
- Training on media relations for MM Office website division had provided very good opportunity for MM staff to acquire best experience in the use of communication tools for public information sharing.

COMPONENT 3: ENHANCEMENT OF OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF PARLIAMENT

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

Activity 1: Carried out training for MM staff and MPAs on presentation skills (March 2009)

Activity 3: Held a round table on Review of Rules of Procedure of the Milli Mejlis from a Transparency Perspective in close collaboration with AZPAC and the Milli Mejlis

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

Activity 1: Build Staff (Offices/Departments) Capacity to Contribute to Parliamentary Process

Provided training for MM staff and MPAs on presentation skills (March 2009)

On March 11, 2009 the Parliamentary Project arranged a day-long training course on Presentation Skills for 15 staff members and MPAs. The training was conducted by Sevinj Hasanova, a trainer from Azerbaijan Health Communication Association. Following topics were presented and discussed during the training:

- Making their presentation simple and interesting
- Meeting the audiences needs and own purposes
- Being comfortable in front of the public, and
- Confidently answering questions

The participants showed great interest toward the presented issues, acknowledging the importance of knowledge of presentation skills in their daily work, including presentations to Permanent Commissions and Department meetings. They asked the PPA team to prepare a training module on improving communications skills, consisting of a few sessions focused on various aspects of communications, including practical exercises.

Activity 3: Build Capacity of Deputies to Contribute To the Parliamentary Process

Held a round table to review the Rules of Procedure of the Milli Mejlis from a transparency perspective in close collaboration with AZPAC and the Milli Mejlis

With the support of the Parliamentary Program, in co-operation with the Milli Mejlis, Commission on Combating Corruption, the USAID/Council of Europe project, AZPAC (Project of Support to the Anti-corruption Strategy of Azerbaijan), held a round table conference on improving transparency and efficiency in the legislative process. The conference took place on February 11, 2009, in the great ceremonial conference room

of the Milli Mejlis. The aim of the conference was to discuss the legislative process in Azerbaijan and how it might be improved in order to facilitate the efficient passage of high-quality legislation and maximize its resistance to corruption. The event brought together experts, representatives from governmental authorities, the Milli Mejlis, civil society and the media. A number of personalities contributed to the round table, including Mr Ziyafat Asgarov, 1st Deputy Speaker of the Milli Mejlis and Member of the Commission on Combating Corruption, the Honorable Anne Derse, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ms Margaret Killerby, Director of Co-operation of the Council of Europe, Ali Huseynov, Chairman of the Standing Committee on State Building and Law.

The Parliamentary Program's contribution, included coordination with the MM, a presentation by Eldar Gojayev, the Project's legal specialist, as well as substantive comments to the discussion.

The event brought together nearly 80 people, including MPs, Ministry leadership, Council of Europe, USAID and US Embassy representatives, a large number of NGOs representatives and media.

The event was of special importance because, as the World Bank has underlined, in post-communist transition countries corruption of the legislative process (a form of 'state capture') is as serious a problem - and sometimes a more serious problem - than 'administrative corruption' (corruption in the implementation of laws). The format of the event designed as a series of presentations from different experts (from AZPAC and PPA) and representatives of relevant institutions in Azerbaijan. The representative of AZPAC provided a general presentation on how to maximize the integrity and efficiency of the legislative process. Representatives of the Milli Mejlis and of the executive branch gave their perspectives on the legislative process in Azerbaijan, and the Parliamentary Program provided a presentation from their perspective as an implementer of a USAID program working to strengthen Parliament.

We hope that the event will yield or facilitate the formulation and implementation of recommendations for possible reforms of the legislative process in Azerbaijan. A prime assumption of the event is that the focus of any reform of the legislative process should be on positive objectives (e.g. the facilitation of participation and consultation) rather than a preoccupation with 'fighting corruption'. Based on the concluding statements made by several contributors to the round table, there was broad interest, among MPs to ensure that the transparency of the legislative process increases substantially and then is maintained in its integrity in the future.

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

- Training on Presentation Skills for MM departments and MPAs provided a good opportunity for MM staff to improve their presentation skills during Commissions and Departments meetings and therefore become more effective in policy and other discussions.
- The round table on transparency in the legislative process, co-organized with AZPAC, was successful in raising a delicate and controversial issue in a constructive way. It helped generate buy-in from MPs and MM staff and appeared to show motivation to increase transparency in reviewing and drafting legislation.

CROSS-CUTTING TASKS

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

- C. Continued to carry out task planning and development and contribute to events with the coordination of other USAID projects and donors. (January-March 2009)
- C. Began publication of Parliamentary Digest (February 2009)

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

C. Donor Coordination

The Program continued to meet with a number of USAID funded projects, specifically those addressing issues close to the work of the Program with the case studies on policy development issues to be carried out in constituencies by using experts from some of the projects in the detailed training of MPAs. The USAID projects included IREX and the TIRSP Program with which the Program is communicating regularly to open up any opportunities for collaborative work. In addition, the Stop AI project has continued to benefit from contacts and relationships in constituencies the Parliamentary Program has developed in its constituency building work. In particular, the Parliamentary Program helped organize and coordinate working meetings between the leadership of the TIRSP Project and the director of the EG section at USAID with heads of legislative departments and senior MPs.

In March, The Parliamentary Program co-hosted with the USAID funded TIRSP project, a day long seminar on procurement legislation for the benefit of legislative departments staff of the MM and selected members of the Ministry of Economic Development.

Continued meetings with other donors and other USAID projects have proved valuable and constructive. As a result, the Program has created relationships with a number of NGOs that have already contributed to the Initial Training and are now contributing to the Detailed Training Program.

The Parliamentary Program continues to enjoy a close working relationship with other USAID projects. This is due in great part to the individual leadership of each project and especially due to the culture of support and cooperation created by the D&G Office at the USAID/Baku Mission.

With the support of the Parliamentary Program, in co-operation with the Milli Mejlis, Commission on Combating Corruption, the USAID/Council of Europe project, AZPAC (Project of Support to the Anti-corruption Strategy of Azerbaijan), held a round table conference on improving transparency and efficiency in the legislative process, on February 11, 2009.

C. Publication of First Parliamentary Digest (March 2009)

On March 3, 2009, the Parliamentary Program issued its first publication of the Parliamentary Digest to the international community in Azerbaijan. The Parliamentary Digest provides information about Milli Mejlis activities and compiles news from articles found in local and international newspapers, the Internet, TV news programs and other news related sources. The Parliamentary Digest is distributed in electronic form to

international donors and the technical assistance community, as well as foreign diplomatic representatives in Azerbaijan and to Azerbaijani organizations. The Parliamentary Digest disclaims all responsibility for the views and content expressed therein, as it does not endorse or provide any editorial support or otherwise any other support for such contents, nor do the contents of this Digest necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

- The Program continues to work closely with other USAID partners to capitalize upon synergies wherever possible. This includes particularly working with USAID funded civil society, media support and economic policy programs.
- The Program's publication and distribution of the Parliamentary Digest, as a source of information to the international donor community, increases the visibility of the Parliamentary Program. We hope this will build relationships and encourage collaboration with other donors and programs.

III. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

This quarter, the Program requested approval for a third country study tour to the French Assemblée, for the HR Department. USAID, while supportive of the basis and purpose for the study tour, requested the location be moved to an Eastern European country instead. Should funds become available, PPA will work to identify a location in collaboration with USAID.

During this quarter, the Parliamentary Program and its home office team began closedown of the project, including administrative, contractual and technical activities, given the project end date occurs in April 2009, during the next quarter.

IV. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND REMEDIAL SOLUTIONS

This quarter, no challenges of extraordinary scale were encountered, though the Parliament's leadership and MPs' activities were focused primarily on the preparation of the constitutional referendum held for the purpose of amending the constitution of Azerbaijan on a number of issues. The referendum took place on March 14, 2009.

During the period leading to the referendum, the Parliamentary Program was not able to advance in activities that had been planned, due to the unavailability of MPs, the leadership and many staff members. Following the referendum held on March 14, the week long holiday of Novruz (Celebration of the coming of spring) further stifled the Program's activities.

While the Program had communicated its workplan to the beneficiary for the quarter at a very early stage, the referendum issue was brought about late in December 2008. The Program could not plan to circumvent the timeliness issue resulting from such a major political event.

The Program made great efforts in maintaining and communicating the need for interaction and planning in the early part of the quarter, continuing its push for better communication and implementation. This quarter's activities were substantially stifled by the referendum.