

The Law and Awareness Campaigns of Enforcement

By Xhavit Shala

The Albanian parliament¹ has recently passed several important laws in the fight against crime and illicit trafficking. These bills demonstrate clearly not only the political will of the Albanian parliament to fight crime but also the efforts of the Albanian executive branch to bring about the realization of successful government policies in the field of national security.²

But alongside the work to draft new laws to further strengthen the fight against crime, it is important that efforts be taken to make the public aware of these laws and achieve correct enforcement. This is important even in countries with a consolidated democracy. These efforts are especially important in a country such as ours with an experience of a harsh totalitarian past, with many people having interpreted democracy to mean anarchy and a series of serious violations of public order. The biggest challenge that we must overcome is to the goal to establish the rule of law and create an open society where the law shall rule and were all are beholden to it.

The recent passing of several important laws has not been coupled with an awareness campaign to inform the public of the provisions of these laws and enforcement effects. This is a deficiency in our system that has demonstrated itself in other legislatures as well. The situation becomes even more serious if we take into consideration the strong party propaganda waged after the passing of the law by different parties for the sake of narrow small groups interests. There is a need to increase public awareness efforts to counter the efforts of organized crime and mafia with political links that try to incite camouflaged forms of collective disobedience to approved laws.

With the exception of the work undertaken by some non governmental organization, it is obvious that no organized efforts are made to have an ongoing program in place to work on the legal awareness campaigns. The work to inform the public must include efforts by individuals, social groups, civil society mechanisms and the State with its various structures and institutions.

The work to inform the public of the content of the law and to mobilize support for respecting the law must include, as the experience of other countries also shows, awareness campaigns wisely conceived and implemented that are easily understood by the public. It is especially important to properly inform and train the staff of central and local administrations that will do most of the work to enforce and implement the law in the field

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² The article was first published as an editorial in the daily "Shqip" , October, 14, 2006

Early on this year it was announced that the fight against cannabis cultivation would be strengthened and that a greater sense of responsibility would be expected from the police, local government structures and the public at large to fight it. The executive branch announced that the anti cannabis campaign would be one of the most difficult challenges in the enforcement of the policies against crime. However, when it came to the actual implementation of the prevention campaign work was started very late. The police technical staff in the field started the awareness campaign against cannabis cultivation very late when there was no sufficient time for the campaign to be effective. As a result, the cultivation spread even to the north of the country. Following the changes in the anti cannabis bill, little work was done with the local government officials to make them aware of the changes in the law and what this entails for their work.

The efforts in this field should engage the civil society and the media. The pressure by the public, civil society and the media would increase if greater work was done to make these segments aware of the real negative impact the cultivation of narcotic plants was having on the integration efforts of the country.

Another bill recently approved is the speed boat moratorium to help fight trafficking in human beings. In this case as well, greater work should have been done to explain to the public the reasons behind the introduction of this bill, demonstrating a political will that expressed the public divorce of Albanian politics from coexistence with illicit trafficking. The public should have also been informed that the moratorium aimed at penalizing the traffickers of human beings and narcotics and not the small boat fishermen who won their daily bread by fishing.

In closing, it is necessary to accompany the introduction of new laws with an organized awareness campaign that functions as a consistent operation. Public awareness campaigns are means by which the public from an uninterested group becomes an important factor of support in the law enforcement effort.

