

Florida TaxWatch

Welcomes Albanian Officials



TaxWatch Sr. Vice President and COO, Keith G. Baker, Ph.D., stands on the steps (center in blue jacket) of the Florida TaxWatch office with Albanian visitors.

On May 12, 2003, Florida TaxWatch was honored to take part in The North Florida International Visitors Council (NFIVC) Anti-Corruption Training Program for Albanian Public and Civil Society Officials. The program is aimed at exposing the participants to various measures and safeguards that have been put in place at the state and local government levels in the U.S. to reduce opportunities for corruption. The training was conducted in English with consecutive interpretation provided in Albanian by the U.S. Department of State certified interpreters. This program is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and administered by World Learning Participant Training Program.

Over the years, the U.S. has developed a transparent system where ordinary citizens are able to hold government officials accountable for their actions. To a larger degree, the principles of transparency have taken root at the federal, state, and local government levels. Through a federal statute, “Freedom of Information Act” of 1966, Americans can ask for copies of records maintained by various government agencies, departments, and the military.

Florida TaxWatch Thanks the North Florida International Visitors Council for
Allowing our Research Institute the Opportunity to Be Involved in this
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The recent trend toward democracy and market-based systems has improved the lives of millions across the globe. In spite of the fact that many countries have increased political participation, achieved macroeconomic stabilization, and restored growth, citizens in the countries are not able to hold government officials accountable because their systems are not transparent. Many government activities are conducted in secrecy which results in corruption on the part of government officials. Albania's local governments are not immune to corruption-related problems that have a firm grip on Albania.

According to a 2002 survey, Albanian citizens believe that corruption was the most important problem confronting society and that it was widespread among most government officials at all levels. The most common forms of corruption, according to a 1999 World Bank enterprise survey, were: paying of bribes to public officials to avoid taxes and regulations; sale of court and arbitrage decisions; contribution by private interests to political parties; sale of parliamentary votes and presidential decrees; and hiring of friends and relatives into officials positions by public officials.

This training program compliments ongoing USAID efforts in Albania to establish mechanisms for more transparent government, both at the national and local levels. At the end of the training participants will be able to do the following:

- Establish independent governmental bodies that will investigate and support local government administrations in Elbasan, Vlore, Tirana, Shkodra, Korca, Gjirokastra, Lushnja, and Pogradec to meet their Constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the state government for their citizens;
- Establish independent governmental bodies to oversee and coordinate the municipal governments' procurement, financial management, information, and regulatory policies;
- Design procedures and mechanisms for citizens to request and receive information on the government's activities;
- Design procedures and mechanisms for citizens to participate in the governance process by making all government meetings open to the public;
- Develop mechanisms for citizens to register their complaints regarding to governmental services received;
- Establish procedures and mechanisms for investigating alleged wrongdoing and prosecuting individuals responsible if corruption is found;
- Establish procedures and mechanisms for streamlining the licensure, certification, and inspection processes; and
- Review all regulations with the purpose of eliminating regulations that are no longer necessary in order to reduce the opportunities for bribery and extortion