

ACER

Albania Center for Economic Research Albania Economic Summary

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Network Members
★ ACER - Tirana

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1. Background

Established in November 1992, Albanian Center for Economic Research is Albania's first independent, non-governmental organization dedicated to the value of democracy and market economy. ACER has undertaken research, policy analysis, and advocacy in support of the small and medium enterprises, non-governmental and private sector development during the democratic transition.

ACER objectives are:

- To promote the development of free market and to develop the relevant associated economic policies;
- To promote institutional reform and the practical implementation of democratic values in legal and economic practice;
- To establish the ground for a better understanding from the public of economic development issues, and
- To develop an interdisciplinary research institute, trustful for accuracy and transparency on public affairs, problem analysis capability, surveys and case studies, researches, and expert-wise opinion on economic development and growth.
- To build bridges between scholars and policy makers and promote public private coalition building.

The objectives of ACER are to advance educational and scientific profile and understanding, in the field of the promotion of free enterprises, limited government and personal responsibility as pertaining to Albania; to publish, to conduct seminars, and to engage in such other and further means as may be necessary and proper to accomplish the foregoing objects and purposes. ACER encourages an open dialogue between scholars and policy makers and promotes public-private coalition building.

Albanian Center for Economic Research was the first non-profit organization to emerge in Albania after the political changes in 1991. Founded and incorporated by a group of university professors, economists and bankers, ACER was registered in the Tirana District Law Court of Tirana in June 1993. ACER has been active in research identification and execution, information publication and dissemination throughout the public opinion exchange, aiming: i) to strengthen parliamentary democracy and private entrepreneurship in Albania and ii) to encourage the wide-scale recognition of classical liberal values in Albanian society.

Initially, the Center's profile was rather broadly defined and included a range of projects in the field economic research, East European studies and book publishing. This thematic diversity was important to maintain a broad spectrum of research orientations in order to strengthen the overall institutional capacity of the Center. The diversification of interests was the first step in the process of an identity search, which later turned out to provide longer-term benefits. By 1996 ACER had assumed a prominent position among the Albanian NGO community. Today ACER's work is focused mainly on economic growth; institutionally and regulatory framework reform, and Albania's complex informal economy. ACER's activity includes:

- research and research management;
- education and training
- national policy development
- legal and regulatory reform
- public outreach and advocacy
- information exchange and dissemination

Being one of the first NGOs in the country, ACER has had a strong impact on the development of NGOs community. Some of the founding members of ACER as well as researchers has established their own organizations, among which the Center for Economic and Social Studies and Research Center for Rural Development have a good reputation in Albania. Sharing its own experience and expertise with other NGOs has been the main contribution of ACER to the development of NGOs sector in Albania.

The first grant has been received by International Center for Economic Growth (ICEG - San Francisco) in December 1992. Brochures focused on the economic issues of developing countries have been published and disseminated in main political and academic circles, business community, local university and media.

Through many contacts inside Albania and abroad, the Center has strengthened its staff professional capabilities and has become known for its accurate data collection, analysis, surveys and expertise. In 1994 supported by ICEG, ACER conducted a survey on *Managerial Capacities of Albanian New Entrepreneurs*.

In 1995-1996 the Center performed the first *Comprehensive Survey of Small Business* in Albania. The analysis of this survey focused on financial topics of small businesses and included the impact of the informal financial sector (money lending); staff professional abilities; the establishing of a supportive environment for small businesses as well as prior topics for the future.

In 1996 ACER was selected as the Albanian counterpart of the *Balkan Network* which was a USAI funded project designed to develop a communication network between three public policy institutes in Albania, Bulgaria and Romania for the exchange of information and experience. The cooperation between the three founding countries was expanded to include 17 public policy institutes in 11 Central and Eastern Countries.

During 1997 the Center has been involved in the *Fiscal Decentralization Initiative in Albania* which was finalized with a National Forum that brought together experts from central and local government, business community, NGOs and donors who discussed on the current legal framework and possibilities and challenges for further fiscal decentralization; strengthen of local government institutions, etc.

During 1998, ACER has been involved in a partnership of four NGOs in the region "*Wide Area Network in the Southern Tier of Eastern Europe*" The main objective of this project was the establishment of a virtual cooperation network among public policy institutes, research institutes in the region, etc.

Among the most successful initiatives undertaken by ACER was the *Anti-corruption Initiative* part of which were two projects funded by the Delegation of European Commission and USAID, SOROS Foundation and World Bank. On the framework of these projects the Center carried out a national survey on enterprises and public officials followed by a wide public education campaign. As part of the anti-corruption efforts, the Center is currently carrying out a survey on households.

Informal Economy in Albania: Hidden Employment and Tax Evasion funded by Center for International Private Enterprise was another successful project carried out during 1998 - 1999. A national survey focused on the issues of informal economy was the basis for the design of the empirical report, an Action Plan for SME and the respective Policy Recommendations.

Currently the Center is working on the project "*Improving the Municipal Service Delivery*" funded by FDI - CEEC. The project includes surveys on general public and local officials and the design of the respective documents and papers.

The research work of the center has become known through seminars, conferences, workshops attended by politicians, experts from central and local government, business community, non-governmental organizations, academic community, foreign and Albanian experts, donors, etc. as well as through periodical publication of the Center.

Among partner and supporting organizations of ACER we can mention USAID, Atlas Economic Research Foundation, Center for Study of Democracy, EC Delegation, World Bank and its executed projects, Fiscal Decentralization Initiative in Central and Eastern Europe, SOROS Foundation, Freedom House, EU Phare Partnership Programme, Foundation for Market Economy, International Center for Economic Growth, Center for International Private Enterprise, etc.

2. Mission and Scope

The Albanian Center for Economic Research seeks to promote economic reform in Albania by conducting independent research on economic growth and assisting in the creation of an adequate institutional framework for reform; encouraging public debate on several transition issues; drafting laws; advocating the country's Policy and decision - makers. The Center provides analysis of public attitudes toward the social and economic aspects of transition and promotes the strengthening of non-governmental sector to support, Albanian's democratic progress.

3. Main Research Activity

- **Albanian Edition on Issues of Market Economy**, supported by ICEG, (1993-1994)
- **Survey on Managerial Capacities of New Entrepreneurs**, supported by ICEG (1994).
- **Survey on the Development of SME Sector**, supported by International Center for Private Enterprises (CIPE), (1994-1995).
- **Hidden Barriers to Economic Growth in Balkan Peninsula (Balkan Network) project**, supported by US Agency for International Development (USAID), through a grant given to Chesapeake Associations in Washington D.C. (1996-1999), 1997 - 2000 Projects
- **Fiscal Decentralization Initiative in Albania (1998)**, sponsored by a consortium of international donors including Council of Europe, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Economic Development Institute/World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Interior Ministry of Denmark, German Project GTZ, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Canadian Agency for International Development. Using the format of a National Forum held on July 2-3 it aimed to broaden the discussion among representatives of Albanian community, local and central government, professors and well-known experts on the current status of fiscal relationships in Albania; challenges for further fiscal decentralization; the way to follow this process, etc.
- **Anti-Corruption Initiative (1998-1999)**, funded by United States Agency for International Development, SOROS Foundation (Albanian Open Society) and World Bank,. The purpose of this project was to collect information on the nature and extent of corrupt practices among government officials. ACER carried out a survey on two types of respondents: enterprises and public officials. The survey had three phases: preparation, implementation and data processing and analyses. The enterprise survey was extended in seven regions and around 370 enterprises were included. Around 100 public officials were included in the public officials' survey. The primary objectives of the survey were to collect information on the relative importance of different types of corruption; methods used by corrupt officials or private citizens to solicit favors; the underlying reasons for the existence of different types of corruption; public awareness of corruption and its impact on political participation and use of public institutions; and feasibility of different types of policies to combat corruption. The surveys conducted by ACER served as basis for the design of Anti-corruption strategies by the Central Government assisted by World Bank. Main areas included in these strategies were tax system, public procurement, judicial system, education, etc. The survey results and anti-corruption institutional schemes were presented at four open debates in Albanian districts (Korca, Shkodra, Vlora, Elbasani and Gjirokastra) organized in cooperation with local universities. A follow-up National Symposium was held in Tirana with the participation of high central and local officials, academics, business community, NGOs, and donor's community.
- **Albanian Business Association Management Training Program (1998)**, supported by Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) in cooperation with ACER. Representatives of Business Associations and Chambers of Commerce from all over Albania took part in the training course. Experienced American experts and consultants presented the lectures with knowledge on the business ethics, Public Policy Advocacy, finance and budgeting, etc, of the business associations. The program gave the participants a unique opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills, as well as to develop valuable contacts and share experience with colleagues from the sector.
- **Wide Area Network in the Southern and Eastern Europe (1998)**, EC/Phare Program through a grant to Center for Study of Democracy. This project aimed to establish a wide area virtual network linking non-governmental institutions in South Eastern Europe and to promote the synergy and communication between the structures of civil society, independently from government control of telecommunication channels.
- **Informal Economy in Albania: Study of Hidden Employment and Tax Evasion (1999)**, sponsored by the International Center for Private Enterprise (CIPE). ACER undertook a research and advocacy project focusing on two areas of informal economic activity: informal employment and fiscal evasion. To accomplish the project objectives, ACER:
 - Carried out an in-depth study of the legal framework and legislation;

- conducted a questionnaire-based survey focused on small and medium enterprises, formal and informal one where the hidden employment and tax evasion are more apparent;
 - Designed and implemented an econometric model for the size of informal economy in Albania
 - Drawn out policy recommendations based on the survey findings;
 - Drawn out an Action Plan for SME
- **Albanians, Corruption and Challenges (1997)**, funded by EC/Phare Program, ACER was commissioned to perform research documenting the different forms of corruption during the transition period in Albania; identifying the social and juridical causes; and present concrete recommendations to address the socio-economic phenomenon.
- **Balkan Network (Banking and Financial Reform in Albania (1999))**, funded by Chesapeake Associates/USAID, Washington D.C. This project enabled ACER to advocate for important public policy changes in Albania in the areas of pension reform, financial reform, and informal sector (illegal employment, fiscal evasion, and corruption). These are areas in which ACER has put important groundwork during the last year, and in which there is a significant chance of success. Research was conducted by ACER economists; this was followed by preparation of policy papers reviewed by outside (Western and regional) and circulated to policy-makers in the country.
- **Illegal Logging Independent Study (2000-on going)**, funded by World Bank's executed Forestry Project. This study has two specific objectives namely: (i) to clarify the extent of the illegal logging problem and (ii) to provide recommendations for improving the current DGFP monitoring system. The study will also clarify the inter-sectoral dimension of illegal logging and will provide the foundation for action by the inter-ministerial Task Force. The study contains three specific components (i) the assessment of the illegal logging problem, (ii) the assessment and modification of the current DGFP monitoring and control system, and (iii) the assessment of the inter-sectoral dimension of the illegal logging problem

4. Periodical Publications/talk show

- "*Ekonomia dhe Tranzicioni*" (Economics and Transition), more than 100 pages, a quarterly magazine in Albanian and with English summaries (the first issue published on 1994).
 - ACER's *Studies & Analysis*, non-periodical publication in Albanian and English.
- Since February 1999, 1 hour weekly *radio talk show "Economy in Focus"* in National Broadcast

5. Last year's publications

1. ACER monthly Newsletter, published in Albanian and English in the frame of "Anti-Corruption Initiative" supported by USAID, SOROS foundation (Albanian Open Society) and the World Bank
2. ACER quarterly magazine "Economy and Transition", published in Albanian with a short summary in English, representing issues of transition in all sectors of economy of Albania, as well as the experience of Eastern and Western countries.
3. A special edition of Economics and Transition Magazine, in the frame of Anti Corruption Initiative, dedicated to corruption issues and public education on this phenomenon
4. In the frame of 'Balkan Network' project there have been published three brochures "Story of Banks", "Story of Money" and "A penny Saved", translated from English.
5. ACER Annual Report

Last years book(s) –

1. "Adventures of Jonathan Gullible" - principles of free market
2. "Problems of Economic Growth in Albania: Strategy or Spontaneity?"

6. Major national and international Donors/Sponsors:

Among the most significant national and/or international agencies that provided financial support for the research activity of ACER are:

- Chesapeake Associates/USAID
- World Bank,
- CIPE (Center for International Private Enterprise)
- Fiscal Decentralization Initiative in Central and Eastern Europe
- Soros Foundation,
- EU Phare,
- European Commission,
- Freedom House

7. Staff Record:

Members of the Board of Trustees:

1. **Dr. Sefedin Guri**, chairman,
Economic Adviser, Parliamentary commission of Economy, Finance and Privatization
2. **Dr. Anilda Bozdo**, Member,
Supervisory Department, Bank of Albania
3. **As. Prof.Dr.Ardian Civici**, Member,
Lector, Economic Faculty, Tirana Agricultural University
4. **Shefqet Meko**, Member,
Director of Research Center for Rural Development
5. **As.Prof.Dr. Shyqyri Llaci**, Member,

Head of Business Department, Economic Faculty, Tirana University

Executive director: **Dr. Zef Preci**

Full-Time Professional staff:

1. Ledia MUÇO, Research Director
2. Arben Tabaku, Researcher
3. Ivis Nocka, Researcher
4. Fatmir Mema, Senior Researcher
5. Elida Reci, Senior Researcher
6. Drini Salko, Senior Researcher
7. Gjoke Uldedaj, Senior Researcher
8. Agron Hetoja, External Adviser

Full-Time Administrative staff:

1. Fjoralba Vesho, Assistant to the Director
2. Aisela Maliqati, Secretary
3. Some 12 consultants have been engaged as Part-Time staff during the last 12 months

Languages Literacy:

Albanian, English, French, Italian, and Russian

8. List of Primary Research and Policy Interests:

- Democratic Transition
- Capital Market and Banking Reforms
- Anti-Corruption Strategies
- Fiscal Decentralization
- Informal Economy
- Institutional Reform
- Local Government
- Public advocacy
- Regional Economic Cooperation

9. Public Events

YEAR	TYPE OF PUBLIC EVENT	TITLE OF PUBLIC EVENT	ATTENDEES	SUPPORTED/FUNDED
1996 (Jan)	Public Forum	"Problems on SMEs Development",	27	Center for International Private Enterprises
		Total 1996	27	
1997 (Feb)	Public Forum	"On Deposit Protection in Albania"	36	"Balkan Network" Chesapeake Associates/ USAID
1997 (May)	Seminar	"On Social Insurance System in Albania"	36	"Balkan Network" Chesapeake Associates/ USAID
1997 (Jun)	Seminar	"Current Crises, Reasons and Alternatives to Overpass it"	33	Albanian Civil Society Foundation/ORT Program
1997 (Aug)	Workshop	"On Further Improvement of the Legal Framework of Social Security"	46	"Balkan Network" Chesapeake Associates/ USAID
1997 (Dec)	Public Forum	"Active Viewpoints in Establishing Social Policies"	55	"Balkan Network" Chesapeake Associates/ USAID
		Total 1997	206	
1998 (May)	Training Course	"Albanian Business Association Management Training Program"	34	Center for International Private Enterprises
1998 (Jun)	Training Course	"The Role of Private Financial Institutions in a Market Economy"	25	"Balkan Network" Chesapeake Associates/ USAID
1998 (July)	National Conference	"Fiscal Decentralization in Albania"	102	Fiscal Decentralization Initiative in Central Eastern Europe
1998 (Sept)	Workshop, (Elbasan)	"Discussing on Corruption"	17	EC/ Phare program/USAID
1998 (Sept)	Workshop, (Korça)	" "	23	" "
1998 (Sept)	Workshop, (Vlora)	" "	27	" "
1998 (Oct)	Workshop, (Shkodra)	" "	34	" "
1998 (Oct)	Workshop, (Gjirokastra)	" "	37	" "
1998 (Oct)	National Conference	"Corruption: A Challenge to be Faced"	54	EC/ Phare program/USAID
		Total 1998	353	
1999 (Jan)	Workshop	"Actual Problems of Albanian Business"	20	CIPE
1999 (Feb)	Training Course	"Problems of Banking System in Transition Countries"	27	Chesapeake Associates/USAID
1999 (Feb)	Training Course	"Basic Concepts of Market Economy: a Time Request for Education of New Generation"	35	" "
1999 (Mar)	National Conference	"Issues of Economic Growth in Albania"	86	CIPE/ Chesapeake Associates/USAID
		Total 1999 (first quarter)	167	
		TOTAL	754	

10. Cooperation with other Policy institutes:

a. In country:

Institute for Contemporary Studies;
Institute of Economic and Social Studies;
Institute of Policy and Legal Studies

b. In CEE countries:

3E NET PPI's;
Institute for Market Economies (IME) Bulgaria
Center for Study of Democracy (CSD), Bulgaria;
Center for Policy Studies and Comparative Analysis (CPSCA) Rumania;
Foundation for Market Economy (FME), Hungary, etc.
RIINVEST, Kosova
Center for Entrepreneurship, Montenegro

c. Other:

Center for International Private Enterprises,
Atlas Economic Research Foundation,
International Center for Economic Growth
ELIAMEP
Center for European Policy Studies
Economic Freedom Network

11. Contact Information

Official Name of the Organization: **Albanian Center for Economic Research**

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Established: **June 1993**
Legal Status: **Non- governmental, non-profit organization**

For more information concerning the [Albania Center for Economic Research](http://www.acer.org.al), please visit our web site at www.acer.org.al.

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