The Library, Reference and Research Department in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

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The paper presents the main tasks and intended activities of the Library, Reference and Research Department of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The evaluation of clients’ responses to created information products is considered the main criteria for future activities development.

The Library, Reference and Research Department in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia establishes a trend to provide a forum for trend watching and cooperation between the knowledge services for legislatures, in the global information society, in which legislative processes regulate the relations of a society, citizens and state powers. The Department serves to promote better laws and better lawmaking processes with the provision of information and knowledge services. We hope to achieve these aims by promotion of understanding and experience sharing of working in a politically complex environment. Our professional priorities are to continue sharing experiences on the particularities of requests from parliamentarians.

The main tasks of the Library, Reference and Research Department in the National Assembly are:

- To serve as an instance of exchange of experiences, knowledge, problem solving situations and networking, particularly in serving a political environment;
- To promote best practices in providing information and knowledge to the National Assembly;
- To provide a forum for anticipation on issues relating to legislative processes.

In response to requests from deputies, the Library, Reference and Research Department carries out bibliographical and documentary research on all subjects relevant to MPs. The information work usually consists of the extensive data basis and Internet research and information retrieval, in the purpose of an adequate information support for the legislature work in the National Assembly. Also, the Department prepares back information sets related to the laws discussed in the National Assembly. The back information comprises statistics, relevant foreign legislature, relevant European Union documents and relevant positive national legislature. Also, the Department makes use of interlibrary loans with the National Library of Serbia and the University Library in Belgrade, as well as with other libraries in Serbia.

The Department comprises two sections: the Reference and Research Division and the Library.

The Reference and Research Division provides research, analysis and information to MPs, their staff, and other authorized clients. This section also produces a wide range of publications such as background papers and in brief documents, in both electronic and print format, in order to answer specific questions and to keep clients up-to-date on topical issues and developments. The Reference and Research Division
Division carries out duties which allow MPs, working bodies and the National Assembly Staff Service access to all acts in parliamentary procedure, draft laws and other acts of the Government and ministries, positive national legislation, foreign legal acts and acts of international organizations and the European Union. It prepares informative material on issues to be discussed at the National Assembly sittings. Also, it prepares expert analyses and information at the request of international organizations, national parliaments and institutions in the network of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation.

The Library of the National Assembly is the specialized closed type library which collects, preserves and issues library material to deputies and the staff of the National Assembly. Two qualified librarians take care of the reception and classification of library material, develop the library’s catalogue, provide expert assistance to the users when making and formulating requests for information, deal with the storage and circulation of library material, deal with the protection of old and rare books, provide inter-library borrowing services with the National Library of Serbia and other libraries for the needs of the deputies.

Since 2007 year the library electronic catalogue is developing under the unified cataloguing program in cooperation with the National Library of Serbia. The unified cataloguing is developed under UNIMARC standard for electronic cataloguing and about 100 libraries in Serbia participate in its development.

The Union Serbian library catalogue COBIB.SR was made from local online catalogues of the National Library of Serbia, the Library of Matica Srpska, the University Library "Svetozar Marković" in Belgrade and the Yugoslav Bibliographic Information Institute. At this moment [April 2011], it consists of about 2,100,000 bibliographic records of all library materials. It allows almost any user to make WEB OPAC (Open Access Catalogue) search of bibliographic materials on a local basis as in the union library catalogue, as well as for the all libraries that are connected to the system. If the search was made in the shared library catalogue, information such as the number of the copies and the place where the publications can be found, are available with the list of shelf marks. COBIB.SR interface in English: http://www.vbs.rs/scripts/cobiss?ukaz=GETID&lani=en

The holdings of the Library of the National Assembly were formed out of the holdings of the library of the parliament of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (since October 3, 1929. the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), which in 1918 inherited the library holdings of the parliaments of the Principality and the Kingdom of Serbia dating from 1889. The collection of the National Assembly Library contains: 60000 books from the fields of law, political sciences, sociology, philosophy, literature, and from the field of fiction mostly reference and prize winning books; collections of regulations of republic bodies with registers from 1945 until present time; collections of official gazettes from 1945 till today: stenographic records of the National Assembly of Serbia from 1889 until present time; considerable archival material (e.g. Protocols of the Extraordinary National Assembly from 1880, Official Gazette of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from 1921); professional journals; daily press. It also includes valuable referral collection comprising numerous manuals, encyclopedias, dictionaries, lexicons.

Some of the most valuable publications in the Library collection are:

- Protocols of Serbian National Assembly from 1859 to 1918 until today, as well as valuable collection of stenographic records from the Kingdom of Serbia parliamentary meetings in Niš and Corfu from 1914 to 1918;
- The First Serbian Constitution, known as Sretenjski ustav (The Constitution of Sretenje) from 1835;
- The Constitution of the Principality of Serbia from 1838, well known as Sultanski Hat'jerif (Sultan's Edict).

Considering numerous laws and legal codes, it is important to mention Dušanov zakonik (Dushan's Code), printed in 1898. Besides books, the library includes six valuable periodicals, including Slavenoserbski magazin (Slavonic Serbian Magazine) from 1768, being the oldest and the most valuable publication belonging to the collection of the old and rare publications.
The library also has an electronic database of legal regulations, INDOK, comprising the regulations of the Republic of Serbia, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the City of Belgrade in force from 1991 until present time.

The premises of the Library were planned and intended for a specific purpose at the same time when the construction of the National Assembly building was planned, in 1901 year. In 1936 when the construction of the National Assembly building was over, the final arrangement of the library premises and definition of its purposes were completed. The interior was designed by Nikolay Krasnov (Николай Петрович Краснов), Russian migrant and one of the most prominent architects of the first half of the twentieth century. It was designed in the manner of academic traditionalism. The interior of the Library consists of the oak tree engravings and is one of the most beautiful accomplishments of the National Assembly interior, due to Dragoje Barac, famous Belgrade carpenter. The Library occupies an area of 165 square meters. Today, it is equipped with three personal computers, photo-copy machine, laser printer and scanner. Microsoft Vista Windows operating program is installed on all personal computers with a non-stop internet connection. Also, an internal television channel may be watched on computers or TV sets. The opening hours are from 8, 30 A.M. to 16, 30 P.M. on non-sitting period and from 8, 30 A.M. to the end of the National Assembly sitting during sitting period.

Users of the library are MPs, parliamentary groups, officials, employees of the National Assembly, scientists, as well as other citizens of both our and foreign countries. The external users, such as citizens, domestic and foreign researchers, representatives of media, have to obtain the formal permission from the Secretary General of the National Assembly to access the library collection. The Library also anticipates the needs of clients and alerts them to sources of new and newly acquired information, including books, serials and periodicals and databases. In this line, the Library staff emphasizes the role of the electronic resources, basically the use of available electronic libraries and specialized services as EBSCO and others.