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United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General

Report of Inspection

Embassy
Tirana, Albania

Report Number ISP-I-10-36A, March 2010

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PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE INSPECTION

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, as issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of State (Department) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

PURPOSE

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the BBG, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and the BBG. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved; whether U.S. interests are being accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; whether instances of fraud, waste, or abuse exist; and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting this inspection, the inspectors: reviewed pertinent records; as appropriate, circulated, reviewed, and compiled the results of survey instruments; conducted on-site interviews; and reviewed the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, organizations, and activities affected by this review.



**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors**

Office of Inspector General

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to the OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient, and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel
Deputy Inspector General

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KEY JUDGMENTS

- Behind the high-profile leadership of a determined Ambassador, Embassy Tirana pursues sweeping democratization and development goals intended to help Albania achieve full membership in the Euro-Atlantic community and contribute to Balkan peace and stability. Although the policy environment is favorable, the achievement of these goals is impeded by the country's pervasive corruption and the absence of any democratic history.
- Nontraditional diplomacy is therefore a fundamental tool in the embassy's efforts. This puts the mission in the position of publicly criticizing Albanian acts that perpetuate or profit from the weakness of existing institutions, while in private lobbying political leaders on actions they should take or not take. Although sometimes accused of meddling, Embassy Tirana's actions are matched by other western embassies and organizations.
- The front office is popular and respected, but its standing is lowered by a perception among American staff that, at times, it is too involved on behalf of locally employed (LE) staff in management and special immigrant visa (SIV) matters.
- Embassy Tirana manages a broad portfolio of assistance programs involving multiple U.S. Government agencies. Although communication among embassy elements involved in this effort is good, a mechanism for considering overall mission assistance policy issues does not exist.
- The political/economic section functions well. Reporting could be enhanced with more focus on Mission Strategic Plan (MSP) goals, specifically on rule of law and law enforcement issues.
- Given the high priority of Albania's efforts to attain membership in the European Union, the embassy should improve communications with the U.S. Mission to the European Union.

- Fraud is endemic to Albanian society, and the consular section confronts it daily in every activity, including in a large number of diversity visa applications. For the embassy to prevent unqualified or malfeasant applicants from entering the United States, it must ensure that there are adequate and trained embassy staff to focus on fraud.
- Embassy Tirana's management section still is recovering from several long term staffing gaps and an overall decline in International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) customer satisfaction levels.
- Embassy Tirana is adequately funded and staffed. The embassy's current rightsizing exercise will determine whether staffing is in line with the mission's long term goals.

The inspection took place in Washington, DC, between September 8 and 25, 2005, and in Tirana, Albania, between October 26 and November 9, 2009.

CONTEXT

Albania is a small Western Balkan country that is working hard but not entirely successfully to overcome 40 years of Stalinist autarchy and the near anarchy that existed just 12 years ago. It is today a parliamentary democracy, ranking a reasonably respectable 81st on the *Economist Intelligence Unit's* democratization index of



167 countries. Also in its favor is the historical religious tolerance on the part of Albania's 3.6 million people, a significant number of whom are Muslim. Less favorable are its undeveloped economy — in 2009 it had a per capita (gross domestic product) income of \$6,200, among the lowest in the region — and its weak civic institutions. The total absence of any democratic tradition discolors the political process and makes probity in high office a trait to be treasured. Corruption is strong; the rule of law weak.

In political orientation, Albania is pro-Western and almost devoutly pro-American. It is a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a signatory to a stabilization and accession agreement with the European Union. Both are represented in Tirana, as is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Along with the embassies of the relevant countries, these organizations give the practice of diplomacy in Albania a distinctly multilateral flavor.

Bilateral U.S.-Albanian relations are excellent and transcend the \$30 million or so of American aid that the country will receive in FY 2010. Their roots go back to President Wilson's support for Balkan self-determination and show up nowadays in street names, photographs of President Bush's 2007 visit, and, more recently, in graffiti with phrases in both Albanian and English like: "President Obama I love you." Official statements bear out personal sympathies. On November 2, 2009, the Minister of Defense told a group of American businessmen: "America is our number one ally." Concomitantly, access to Albanian leaders is easy, and contact with them at all levels is frequent. While there are pitfalls in the working environment, in general the policy context is favorable.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

Embassy Tirana's executive direction is very much in the highly personal style of the Ambassador. A self-styled old school professional, the Ambassador recognizes the importance of management, delegates well, keeps in close touch with the operating sections and agencies, and empowers his officers and takes a personal interest in them. His relationship with the LE staff is of the same comprehensive nature, but at times it is perceived to be overly protective or more promoting of their interests.

The Ambassador is well liked in the embassy, and his office is a friendly place and the locus of many wide ranging, two-way meetings, by which he maintains close contact with section chiefs and agency heads. The weekly country team meeting brings together a large percentage of the entire mission staff in a session that includes not only the usual review of schedules and visitors but also the Ambassador's interpretation of current Albanian events, the opinions of other participants, and so on. It is a worthwhile event, made notable by being so comprehensive.

Given the warmth of U.S.-Albanian relations and the American factor in Albanian life, access to government officials at all levels is easy. The Ambassador encourages embassy officers to work at whatever level of the Albanian Government they can be effective at, including that of most ministers. Recognizing the importance of training and experience, he is also inclusive: whenever possible, he invites an entry level officer to accompany him to a meeting to serve as note taker and to meet the Albanian official concerned.

The Ambassador is seconded by a still-new deputy chief of mission (DCM) who shares his broad gauged view of management and is adapting to his style, while becoming the mission's day-to-day manager. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) team found that Tirana's front office is thoroughly involved in the embassy's conduct of business, and its leadership role is dominant, as it should be.

The OIG team also found, however, that the Ambassador is perceived by some of the American staff to be too close to embassy operations concerning performance, performance awards, and special immigrant visas. The OIG team found this perception to be valid and counseled the Ambassador to distance himself from these operations and rely on the bodies created to handle them.

The Ambassador's custom of meeting with select groups of LE staff is also a subject of concern, on the part of not only American employees but also some of the LE staff members. The team found these concerns to be based on a lack of information on the part of personnel who neither participate in these meetings nor understand their purpose. In fact, the Ambassador's meetings appear to be no more than forums for the Ambassador to understand Albanian life and its daily problems or to develop public diplomacy (PD) ideas. The OIG team advised the Ambassador to take the mystery away from the groups by making them more transparent and more inclusive.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

As Embassy Tirana pursues its overall MSP goal of helping Albania develop into a fully fledged and honest democracy, it does not have many models to follow. Traditional diplomacy has a place, but in a country “cursed by corruption at all levels of society and in all sectors” (2010 MSP), traditional diplomacy may not provide the answer. Sometimes there is no clear line between the beguiling charm of a decent people who have no democratic tradition in their history and the charmless chicaneries of some of the politicians who rule them. So the embassy uses all the weapons it has, traditional and not.

An active assistance program targeted on rule of law is one of the traditional weapons in the embassy’s arsenal. Though it is not big in relative terms, it involves a number of agencies and reaches into many corners of the judicial and law enforcement world. By raising awareness about a range of issues, such as rule of law, PD plays a major role in program execution. This has resulted in some heartening successes, such as prosecutions that were pursued instead of dropped.

Less traditional is the Ambassador’s high profile PD outreach. It can be debated whether there is too much time and too much exposure devoted to this, but with prominence comes power, and he uses it well. An ambassadorial speech against cover-ups in high places generated much interest, because its implications were so precise. An embassy statement condemning an attack on a prominent journalist also produced widespread public approbation, although not all political factions were happy. Quiet, personal admonitions to government leaders to let a law pass or to stop another from being passed, or public criticism of the Prime Minister’s attacks on the judiciary, are all part of Embassy Tirana’s unusual pursuit of its policy goals. In other times and in other places, it would be called meddling. In Tirana today, it is part of the Ambassador’s job. It is shared by colleagues in other western embassies, who find their role is to do much the same thing.

The embassy also operates through public awareness projects; training programs for police and judges; economic development programs; and participatory PD, which is another area that enjoys the Ambassador’s visible sponsorship.

Opposition to Embassy Tirana’s tightly focused push for democratization and rule of law is usually muted and private. Still, overt partisan attacks on the very institutions that are vital to the democratic process continue. Some of this comes

from the same high officials whose job it is – or is supposed to be – to make those institutions work. Fortunately, throughout this process the embassy seems to maintain good professional objectivity without supporting or becoming identified with any one party or politician. This apparently does not prevent those who feel the heat from trying to circumvent the embassy in search of more sympathetic, less demanding American ears.

POLITICAL/ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Albania's geography and access to the sea are the perfect ingredients to make it a commercial gateway between its landlocked northern neighbors and the consumer markets of Western Europe. Much of Embassy Tirana's focus is aimed at assisting the country to strengthen its weak institutions, improve governance, and address widespread corruption; all of which are key to achieving economic progress and gaining membership to the European Union. For a country that really began developing its institutions just over 10 years ago, after recovering from the devastating collapse of 1997, its leaders are capable of a fairly sophisticated foreign policy. This is evidenced by its accession to NATO membership. Albania is a cooperative ally of the United States and has contributed to U.S. efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to United Nations peacekeeping missions. Its moderate views in fora such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the International Atomic Energy Agency are also helpful. All of this is in contrast with a domestic political scene that can best be described as byzantine.

The embassy enjoys a high degree of favor among Albanians and is credited for the strong U.S. support of Albania's April 2009 entry into NATO. The United States also receives tremendous gratitude from the Albanians for the 2008 independence of Kosovo, which was viewed as an extraordinary achievement. As a result, officers of the political/economic section enjoy access to government officials at all levels and meet routinely with ministers. The chief of the political-economic section has frequent interactions with the foreign minister's chief of staff and reports that the foreign minister himself functions as the de facto America's desk. Despite the embassy's active pursuit of democratization programs that can only undercut some vested interests, the government and opposition alike invite the embassy's comments and involvement.

The combined political-economic section is led by an FS-02 officer who enjoys a high level of trust and confidence from the Ambassador and DCM. There are three mid-level officers, one entry-level officer, an administrative assistant (a position occu-

pied by an eligible family member), and three LE staff members. Responsibilities are clearly defined and distributed throughout the section, and signed work requirements for the current rating period are on file. Evaluations for the LE staff are up to date, but their position descriptions are not. The OIG team made an informal recommendation in the management section of this report regarding the need to update position descriptions for LE staff throughout the embassy.

Four of the five officer positions are language designated, and all incumbents had language training prior to their arrival. They also participate in the embassy's language training program in order to maintain their language skills. As part of the Department's hiring surge, two of the three mid-level positions have been ceded to the entry-level division of the career development and assignments division of the Bureau of Human Resources and will be filled with second-tour officers in 2011. The section has an additional position, part of the centrally funded expanded Professional Associates Program that provides opportunities for eligible family members to serve in entry-level officer positions.

The political-economic chief meets daily with the DCM for a quick discussion of priorities and attends daily press briefings. There is a weekly country team meeting, plus a section heads meeting each of the other four days of the week; all are chaired by the Ambassador. In addition, the political-economic chief has a more indepth meeting with the DCM weekly and bi-weekly with the Ambassador and DCM. Staff meetings with all members of the political-economic section are held on an as-needed basis, which is sufficient due to the numerous other opportunities for interaction and coordination. Relations with other sections and agencies are excellent.

The political-economic section collectively spends approximately 20 percent of its time on reporting. Some is done by email, including the daily "Tirana Highlights." Official reporting by cable is quite robust, and the section averages several cables each week; these routinely include analysis and commentary. During the run-up to the parliamentary elections in June of 2009, 16 cables were produced over a 4 week period. More recent cables have profiled newly elected government ministers, thereby providing a good supplement to existing unclassified and classified biographic files. Demarches are tracked, delivered, and reported.

As part of his regular series of section meetings, the Ambassador meets with the entire political-economic section to provide his thoughts on "the big picture" and his views on reporting priorities. In addition, the political-economic chief and the DCM prepared an ambitious reporting plan for the first half of FY 2010, calling for more reporting on economic developments, as well as on Albania's relations with its neigh-

bors. The DCM agreed with the OIG team that, in line with MSP priorities, it would be desirable to do more reporting on law enforcement and rule of law developments. The OIG team made an informal recommendation on this subject.

The political-economic section used approximately 15 percent of the embassy's representation budget during FY 2009, generally by hosting coffees or lunches with small groups of people. LE staff members participate in representation events and host some themselves, but they are reluctant to claim reimbursement for their events, because the amounts of money involved are small. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that these employees submit claims for reimbursement on a quarterly or semiannual basis, so they are not paying out of pocket for these expenses. The section prepared and carried out an aggressive travel plan prior to and during the June elections. Eighty American and LE staff members from throughout the mission traveled to the 12 electoral districts to serve as election monitors.

The LE staff members in the section are highly educated and experienced, with excellent English language skills. Their contacts reach all levels of the government and civil society. They participate in the daily press briefings. In addition, they produce a "Tirana Weekly Report/Tirana Impressions" cable with their insights on political, economic, and cultural happenings in Albania.

Coordination between the political-economic chief and other members of the international community is excellent. The political-economic chief has almost daily contact with the OSCE political officer, and he meets regularly with the political officers of the Swedish Embassy (the current European Union President), the European Commission, and the Embassy of the United Kingdom. Although communication with USNATO is good, the embassy has not established a similar relationship with the U.S. Mission to the European Union (USEU). Recently, the embassy learned via an email from Washington that the Albanian minister of the interior had requested a meeting at USEU with the Ambassador during the minister's trip to Brussels. Weeks later, Embassy Tirana was still ignorant of that meeting's results. The political-economic chief acknowledged that, given the high priority Albania places on its efforts to join the European Union, the section should establish a relationship and regular communications with the Balkans desk at USEU. The OIG team has made an informal recommendation on this issue.

Economic and Commercial Affairs

A newly arrived mid-level officer serves as the primary economic and commercial officer. She is also the designated assistance coordinator (see Foreign Assistance section, below). The officer supervises two LE staff members and reports that

about 40 percent of her time is spent on commercial and investment issues. This impressive figure arises from such endeavors as the participation of large American companies in government tenders, like Bechtel's \$1 billion road project connecting Albania and Kosovo and other projects for military equipment. During the inspection, Albania's ministry of defense opened bids for the latest round in a competitive tender process for medium-lift helicopters. Sikorsky's bid came in lower than that of its competitor, Eurocopter, but this has been challenged, and the embassy's intense advocacy will continue.

In addition, there are numerous inquiries and requests for advocacy from American commercial enterprises that are already active in the region and are interested in entering the Albanian market. Regional support to Tirana is provided by the Foreign Commercial Service in Zagreb. Although the Foreign Commercial Service representative has not been in Tirana for two and a half years, the economic/commercial officer and commercial assistant have met with her in Zagreb, and they are in weekly contact. At the time of the inspection, they were working with the Foreign Commercial Service's advocacy center in Zagreb on five open cases. They also were discussing a regional energy project and regional participation in the International Buyers Program. The economic/commercial officer recently participated in a Department of Commerce/Department of State coordination meeting in Turkey, and then traveled to Zagreb for an aviation conference, followed by a Balkan regional strategy session with the Foreign Commercial Service representative.

The section provides strong support to the American Albanian Chamber of Commerce, a 270-member organization that plays a key role in advocacy for U.S. business and Albanian economic reform. It also participates in numerous trade shows through the International Buyers Program.

The Foreign Agricultural Service representative resides in Rome and visits Tirana annually.

Political/Military Affairs

In March 2008, in Gerdec, outside Tirana, an explosion at a munitions facility killed 26 people, injured hundreds more, and highlighted the real danger posed by these stockpiles of weapons throughout the country. The United States has allotted \$4.5 million to help clean up the disaster site, where it is estimated that 5,000 to 6,000 tons of exploded and unexploded ordnance remain. The Department of State's Bureau of Political/Military Affairs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, has contracted with an American company to oversee the disposal of this explosive ordnance. An explosives ordnance officer from the European Command (EUCOM)

is assigned to the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) at the embassy and serves as an advisor to Albania's ministry of defense. A political-economic officer is an informal representative of the contracting officer for this project and spends much of his time reporting on demilitarization efforts. He also covers military and security issues related to U.S. security goals, including security sector reform and Albanian contributions to international security activities.

The same officer coordinates the political/military working group, which is chaired by the DCM, meets twice per month, and includes ODC, the defense attaché, and representatives of the Export and Related Border Security program (EXBS), the Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Among other things, the group generates talking points on political/military issues for use by the Ambassador and other embassy officials.

Trafficking in Persons

In 2008, Albania improved its standing from a Tier 2 Watch List country to a Tier 2 country in the G/TIP tier placements. The Government of Albania does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but it is making significant efforts to do so.

The embassy has established a trafficking in persons (TIP) working group, which meets on a monthly basis and is co-chaired by one of the political officers and the border management advisor from ICITAP. The embassy was commended by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP) for its active engagement with Albanian government officials, which helped to rectify a serious problem in Albania's victim identification and referral system last year and resulted in more victims receiving rehabilitation services. G/TIP uses Embassy Tirana's cables as a model for high quality reporting on human trafficking.

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

U.S. Government assistance to Albania focuses on Embassy Tirana's MSP goals of helping the Albanian leadership guarantee peace and security, govern justly and democratically, improve health services, and achieve stable economic growth.

In FY 2009, the U.S. Government budgeted approximately \$25 million in foreign assistance to Albania. Of this amount, \$20.1 million were administered by USAID,

the Department of State, and the Department of Justice. The Department of Defense administered \$5 million through its Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs. In addition, USAID administered a \$15.7 million, two-year Millennium Challenge Corporation threshold project designed to strengthen the rule of law and reduce public sector corruption.

Communication among embassy elements at the working level on assistance management is good. Collaboration within the embassy has enhanced the effectiveness and impact of individual projects. Solid coordination within the embassy produces consistently strong public exposure to the U.S. Government assistance effort in Albania. Although the embassy has working groups to coordinate military and law enforcement assistance programs, these groups focus on program management and not broader policy issues. As noted earlier in this report, a recently arrived economic officer was assigned assistance coordination as a very small part of a larger portfolio. However, at the time of the inspection, the details of this function were not clear.

Embassy Tirana does not have a mechanism for considering broader policy issues of the mission's overall assistance effort, such as program effectiveness, adherence to MSP goals, and longer term assistance priorities. Both the Ambassador and DCM meet individually with the senior managers of individual mission program elements, but there is currently no mechanism for providing overall mission oversight. The embassy needs a mission assistance coordinating committee, in which the Ambassador and DCM are directly involved.

Recommendation 1: Embassy Tirana should establish an embassy assistance coordinating committee to monitor programming and develop assistance policy consistent with the Mission Strategic Plan; the Ambassador and deputy chief of mission should be directly involved in this committee. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Export and Related Border Security

The EXBS advisor, a U.S. Coast Guard officer, reports to the DCM through the political/economic section chief. The advisor participates in country team meetings and is on the political/military and law enforcement working groups. The EXBS advisor in Macedonia shares partial responsibility for Albania and focuses on strengthening the land borders. Annual assistance is approximately \$650,000. The resident EXBS advisor was not in Tirana during the inspection.

Department of Justice International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program

The Department of Justice's ICITAP has operated in Albania for nearly ten years, and it has made significant progress in police reform, border security, antitrafficking, and anticorruption. The ICITAP program manager is considered a section head within the embassy and is supervised by the DCM, with whom he meets on a weekly basis. In addition, the ICITAP program manager meets with the Ambassador every other week. The program manager oversees the work of 27 LE staff members and seven American advisors who are embedded with the Albanian State Police. ICITAP's work focuses on organized crime, including TIP, narcotics, and money laundering; border management; human resources and professionalization of the police; port security; training management; procurement and finance; and information technology. The office works with EXBS and the Department of Justice's Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT) program and contributes to the embassy's annual TIP and human rights reports. The program manager participates in country team meetings and is a member of the political/military, law enforcement, and TIP working groups. The annual budget is approximately \$3.1 million.

Embassy Tirana plays an active role in the international consortium, an informal group of approximately 40 foreign missions and organizations involved in providing assistance to Albania in the areas of law enforcement and the rule of law. The embassy's ICITAP program manager serves on the consortium's steering committee.

Department of Justice Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training

The OPDAT program in Albania has been in existence since 1999. Funding for FY 2009 was \$936,000. There are currently two resident legal advisors in Tirana and two LE staff members. At the time of the inspection, an intermittent legal advisor and two temporary LE employees also were on staff, in connection with OPDAT's participation in the current Millennium Challenge Corporation program.

In September 2007, the Albanian government created a joint investigative unit in the Tirana district prosecution office, to fight economic crime and corruption. This unit brings together prosecutors, police officers, customs officials, tax investigators, and intelligence agents in a team structure to build capacity, enhance skills, and foster communication necessary for good investigations and prosecutions. Since April

2008, the second anticorruption resident legal advisors has been embedded with the joint investigative unit. OPDAT also works on legislative reform and has assisted Albania with legislative drafting in the areas of witness protection, asset forfeiture, and money laundering, among other subjects. Given the Albanian Government's concerted attack on judicial institutions, OPDAT has assumed a key role in advising the Ambassador and DCM on these key MSP issues.

Office of Defense Cooperation

ODC is staffed by an Army lieutenant colonel, a bilateral affairs officer from the New Jersey National Guard, an Army captain working on munitions demilitarization, and six LE staff members. ODC administers an FY 2009 Foreign Military Financing program of \$2.15 million, an International Military Education and Training program of about \$1 million, and an annual schedule of some 20 small civic-action programs funded by EUCOM, which in total are worth between one and two million dollars per year. Some of these programs are implemented by New Jersey National Guard units. In addition, six retired officers work on a private defense infrastructure contract in the Albanian ministry of defense. The contract is part of a modernization program designed to bring Albanian armed forces up to NATO standards. The retired officers are under ODC supervision but are not an official part of the ODC office.

There also is a 20-person NATO military assistance and liaison team to help Albania meet its force goal commitments, but with each of the 20 officers being from a different country and rotating every six months, the team has little continuity or effectiveness. The embassy serves as the NATO contact embassy, and the point of contact is ODC.

In reality, U.S. military assistance takes more forms than those identified above, and it involves additional sums of money. For example, on November 3, 2009, the Ambassador inaugurated an urban warfare training center that was funded by the United States in the amount of \$1.5 million. A first consignment of coastal patrol boats costing \$5.6 million will be delivered in 2010, and larger vessels are to follow. In addition, if Sikorsky wins the current bidding competition for medium-lift helicopters, money from the Department of Defense's Foreign Military Financing program will be available to finance their purchase.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

With a median age of 29, Albania has a very young population that has had little direct exposure to American history, culture, or values. Embassy Tirana has placed a high priority on communicating with Albanian youth and does so through a variety of innovative programs that are closely linked to MSP goals, including one specifically devoted to building public support for U.S. policies.

The public affairs section (PAS) consists of two American officers and nine LE staff members. The public affairs officer (PAO) position became vacant three months before the inspection, and an experienced PD officer was expected to arrive shortly after the inspection to temporarily fill the vacant position. During the interim, the assistant PAO (APAO) was covering both jobs. Although this was the first PD assignment for the APAO, the officer effectively managed the PAS's broad program portfolio and enjoyed the full trust of both the Ambassador and DCM. As noted earlier in this report, the Ambassador pursues a non-stop PD schedule and relies heavily on PAS to support that effort. The APAO and LE media assistants provide the Ambassador and senior staff with a media briefing each morning. The APAO attends all senior staff meetings and is in frequent, direct contact with the Ambassador to coordinate his PD schedule. Communication is good within PAS. The APAO chairs one weekly meeting with the entire staff and meets individually with each LE staff member. One LE staff assistant registers all PAS programs in the mission activity tracking system and maintains a contact management data base that is used by all elements of the embassy.

PAS maintains the embassy Web site, which is kept up to date and contains direct links to embassy Facebook and YouTube pages. Because more than 90 percent of Albanians use mobile phones, PAS also transmits information to a large portion of the mission audience via text messaging.

In FY 2009, PAS had a program budget of \$760,000, broken down as follows: \$550,000 for Democracy Commission grants; \$90,000 for the translation of university textbooks; \$90,000 for civic education and media training; and \$30,000 for speakers. During FY 2009, the embassy received a \$47,500 Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation grant to help restore one of Albania's oldest castles. The APAO has a grant commission and works closely with one LE staff assistant to manage the grants program. The OIG team made a spot check of FY 2009 grant records and found the files to be complete and well organized. All required reports were submitted on time and financial coordination with the embassy financial management office functions well. PAS includes reports on all grants in its mission activity tracking system, and many are reported in a weekly highlights submission to elements within

the Department. The DCM chairs the Democracy Commission grants committee, which includes representatives from all embassy sections.

PAS administers a modest but growing exchange portfolio that, for the first time in 2009, included the participation of 15 Albanian high school students in the youth exchange and studies program. During FY 2009, three American students and three senior scholars traveled to Albania under the Fulbright program, and four Albanian students studied in the United States. One Albanian participated in the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, and six participated in the Junior Faculty Development Program. Fifteen Albanians participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). The DCM chairs the selection committee, which receives nominations from all embassy elements on MSP themes. The Albanian Fulbright Alumni Association is active and is open to participants of all U.S. academic exchanges. Former International Visitor Leadership Program participants formed an alumni association called the Forum for Free Thought, which actively promotes community-based social reform.

PAS also manages a diverse cultural program featuring graphic and performing arts. Shortly before the inspection, the embassy sponsored the premier in Albania of "Porgy and Bess," which had been banned under the Communist regime. The Albanian Prime Minister and U.S. Ambassador opened the first performance, held at the National Opera and featuring both Albanian and American artists.

PAS communicates and collaborates closely with other embassy elements, and it coordinates all public affairs statements and media events for the mission. PAS has collaborated with the Peace Corps to support English teaching throughout Albania, and it has worked closely with USAID on a number of specific projects, such as the development of civic education curricula in Muslim schools. The office also works with the United Nations mission in Albania to organize an annual model UN program involving more than 300 students from schools throughout Albania.

American Corners and Information Resource Center

Embassy Tirana pursues much of its PD programming from the Information Resource Center (IRC) located on the embassy compound and from the three American Corners located in Tirana, Vlore, and Kukes. One LE assistant manages an active IRC program, coordinates the work of and support for the three American Corners, and maintains the embassy Web site. Current memoranda of understanding and program plans are maintained with the Albanian organizations that co-host all three corners. Using the IRC and American Corners as a base, the embassy has developed a series of highly proactive and creative programs to reach young Albanian audiences.

Meet America

Meet America brings an Albanian school or university class to the IRC each week to meet an American and discuss a specific topic of interest. Because English is now taught in most Albanian schools, it is the language most frequently used. The initial discussion usually lasts approximately 1 hour and is followed by a meeting with the Ambassador, who fields follow-on questions. During the inspection, two Marine security guards met with a group of middle school students to discuss “serving your country.” Following a lively exchange with the Marines, one student speaking for the group acknowledged that the experience had changed their view of America and taught them to “have the courage to make the right decision.” A letter from the students to the Marine guards followed, expressing the same sentiments.

Ambassador’s Book Club

Several times a year, the Ambassador brings together exchange program alumni and Albanian students of American studies, to discuss specific American books. The embassy provides copies of the book to the participants several weeks before the gathering, so they can read the book and be prepared to discuss it. One of the most popular of this series in recent months was a discussion of *The Audacity of Hope*, by President Obama. Combining resources with the U.S. embassies in neighboring Macedonia and Kosovo, which both have significant Albanian minorities, Embassy Tirana had the book translated into Albanian and made available to the populations of all three countries.

Embassy Speakers Bureau

The embassy has developed an ambitious speaker program involving American employees, host universities, and nongovernmental organizations throughout Albania. The IRC assistant solicits host organization participation and MSP related topics on the embassy Internet and Facebook pages and promotes the program within the embassy. She maintains an active register of Albanian institution invitations and topics for embassy personnel to review and select. During FY 2009, embassy speakers conducted 30 programs throughout Albania, on such topics as free and fair elections and trafficking in persons.

CONSULAR OPERATIONS

The consular section at Embassy Tirana provides the full range of consular services, but consular work in Albania is by no means routine. Corruption is endemic to the country, and attempts at visa fraud are frequent. American citizen services are complicated by the country's poor infrastructure and uninformed or corrupt authorities. Naturalized Albanian-American citizens are returning to Albania in increasing numbers, affecting the immigrant visa workload as they petition for relatives to immigrate, and affecting the American citizen services workload when they turn to the embassy with requests for special consular services. Albania is also campaigning to promote tourism as an "undiscovered" tourist destination, potentially raising the number of American visitors.

Staff

Embassy Tirana has an experienced consular staff. Officers include an FS-02 chief in her third year in Albania and two second-tour and one first-tour consular cone officers. Seven of the LE staff members have multiple years of experience working in the consular section. However, the section will soon lose one officer position, and the two key LE staff positions of cashier and antifraud investigator are vacant. As a result, the section's leadership is adjusting duties and assignments to maintain the efficiency of its operation, and it recently added an eligible family member to the section's staff. The embassy needs to fill these existing LE staff vacancies expeditiously; they are key positions.

The current LE staff vacancies were created when two other vacancies were filled internally. These were well-deserved promotions for the new selectees, but their advancement did not ameliorate the urgent need to bring the overall LE consular staffing up to its full level. As a result of the internal promotions, some employees in the section are temporarily fulfilling two and even three functions, and this is unacceptable over the long run. The individuals who are shouldering the extra responsibilities are being challenged by the workload, and there is a risk of operational delays or failure to adhere fully to internal controls requirements, in the interest of getting the work done and meeting the needs of the public. Cashiering, correspondence, and antifraud activities need the attention of adequate and trained staff to ensure integrity and full accountability of the operations. During the inspection, the embassy announced both the cashier position vacancy and the fraud assistant vacancy.

Recommendation 2: Embassy Tirana should hire and train locally employed staff to fill vacant positions in the consular section. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Antifraud Activities

Albania has a history of corruption that permeates all levels of society, and applicant fraud is a serious problem for the consular section. The antifraud LE staff member is active in investigating fraudulent documentation presented for immigrant visa and diversity visa applications as well as nonimmigrant visas, and this requires nearly 60 percent of his time out of the office on travel to remote corners of Albania for investigations. Nearly every document for diversity visas, especially high school records presented as proof to meet the educational requirement, is scrutinized and checked. Fraudulent diplomas, altered work records, fabricated travel histories, fake police clearances, and fictitious marriages are common.

The workload is heavy and out of proportion to the size of the country and the mission. During the 2009 diversity visa year, there were 2,543 diversity visa applicants, compared to 1,834 immigrant visa applicants in all other categories combined. The immigrant visa/diversity visa caseload at Embassy Tirana outpaces all but three other posts in the region, and nearly equals the caseload in the rest of the Balkans combined.

The consular section has requested a second eligible family member to work on antifraud matters, and the embassy expects that the section's antifraud effort will be augmented when the Department fills a newly established assistant regional security officer for investigations position. The incumbent will work with the consular section on investigating fraud activities. The OIG team recognizes and supports these additional resources for the antifraud effort, which are particularly needed because of the loss of one of the consular officer positions. Although the embassy has requested restoration of this position, it is not clear when or whether the request will be granted. However, once the new antifraud LE staff member, antifraud eligible family member, and assistant regional security officer for investigations are in place and trained, the section should have adequate resources to combat the continuing problem of applicant fraud for the immediate future.

Consular Facilities

The consular section moved into fully renovated space in November 2007. This has provided much needed additional space for staff, but it has some deficiencies. Work space includes offices for officers and two levels of open plan workspace for LE staff. There are five interview windows, including a privacy booth. Even though the privacy booth is used most of the time for regular interviews, the staff must occasionally take turns at the windows to complete their work. Careful scheduling of appointments appears to make for a workable arrangement, but the limited space could cause problems if the workload increases. A sign posted at the staff entrance lists the personnel who may enter the area, and this appears to be respected by mission employees.

The public entrance and waiting area for the consular section are less than desirable. A visa applicant or American citizen seeking services must enter an alley behind the embassy along the perimeter wall and walk along a gravel path to the consular entrance. There is no sign to indicate where this entrance is located. Once security has screened each visitor at the entrance through the embassy perimeter wall, he or she must wait in an outdoor area with about 40 chairs, until called to pass through the hardline door to the tiny interior waiting area, which holds 11 seats. The embassy has made some attempt to improve the outside waiting area by providing a roof and plastic sheeting side curtains to protect the waiting public from the elements. However, it presents a poor impression and is a makeshift solution. The embassy's facilities manager has formulated a proposal to improve this space but is unsure that funding will be available.

The area in question also does not meet the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. Currently, the section must make special arrangements whenever applicants with disabilities appear for interviews. These arrangements include putting in place a temporary platform for applicants who need help reaching the windows or the fingerprinting machine. On one occasion, the section had to seek special permission to bring individuals with disabilities into the consular workspace for processing because of the applicants' special needs.

Recommendation 3: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, should develop, fund, and implement a project to improve the consular waiting areas for better service to the public including design elements that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA and OBO)

Another problem with the current set up in the consular waiting area is the public address system. The only means of calling applicants in the outside waiting area to pass through the hardline door to the interior waiting room is the cashier's public address (PA) system. Doing so interrupts the cashier and diverts his attention as he either makes the announcement himself or must allow another individual into the cashier booth to use the public address system. Both are unacceptable risks to the integrity of the cashiering operation. The embassy is aware of the need to correct this situation and has ordered the necessary equipment to provide the outside waiting area with a public address system that can be activated from the interview windows. Once the equipment arrives, it needs to be installed as soon as possible, both for internal control reasons and in order to improve the efficiency of consular operations. The consular section then should cease using the cashier's public address system for calling applicants to the interview windows. This is the subject of an informal recommendation.

As noted above, the entrance to the alley that leads to the consular entrance is not clearly marked, and visa applicants and Americans seeking services sometimes seek directions from the guards at the employee entrance or from neighboring local businesses. Appropriate signage would help. This is the subject of an informal recommendation.

Visa Referrals

Mission officers understand and abide by the requirements for visa referrals. Soon after the Department announced the worldwide policy on visa referrals, the consular chief held a "referral school" to provide refresher training to officers already at the embassy and to educate new arrivals on the requirements for A and B referrals. All eligible officers have completed the course. The DCM is particularly attentive to this process and reviews referrals carefully and consistently, making adjustments or seeking clarification as needed.

Visa Workload

In FY 2009, Embassy Tirana processed 9,149 nonimmigrant visa applications, with an adjusted refusal rate of 36.6 percent. This refusal rate is down somewhat from earlier years, when more than half of all applicants did not qualify for nonimmigrant visas. Of the 4,377 immigrant visa applications, more than half were diversity visas. This does not tell the whole story, however. Diversity visas often require multiple reviews by an officer, usually related to relationship or education and credential verification, and often involve several 221(g) refusals per case (for lack of

documentation or information or pending necessary administrative procedures) before leading to visa issuance. Diversity visas accounted for 2,889 total adjudications, including issuances and refusals. Ultimately, some 675 diversity visa applicants were either refused or failed to show, or about 23 percent.

The fraud activity indicated by the high percentage of refusals is a major workload factor. The section has one full-time antifraud employee, and all officers are involved in antifraud work. In addition, as indicated above, the section recently hired an eligible family member who will assist these efforts, and the expected assignment next year of a new assistant regional security officer for investigations, who will engage in antifraud efforts, will help as well.

American Citizen Services

The number of American citizens residing in and visiting Albania continues to rise. Nearly 1,000 are registered with the embassy. Many are dual nationals. The embassy has done emergency planning; the F-77 report that provides a detailed breakdown of potential evacuees from Albania was updated and published in October. The consular section is working on an update to the warden system, including recruiting new wardens and assigning zones of responsibility. The consular section uses email to contact citizens and distribute warden notices. However, cell phones are more widely used, and the embassy has a contract with a local cellular service provider to deliver important alerts during emergencies. Mission leadership understands and follows the “no double standard” policy when emergencies arise. The warden system needs continued attention and is the subject of an informal recommendation.

The American citizen services section also has its share of fraud activity. All reported lost or stolen passports applications are carefully scrutinized. The number of passports issued in FY2009 was 222, up from 175 the previous year. The section did not report any difficulty with quality control or delays in passports returned to the embassy for distribution.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

| Agency | U.S. Direct-Hire Staff | U.S. Local-Hire Staff | Foreign National Staff | Total Staff | Total Funding FY 2009 |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| State – D&CP | 21 | 1 | 14 | 36 | \$1,616,900 |
| State – ICASS | 5 | 6 | 142 | 153 | 4,217,900 |
| State – Public Diplomacy | 2 | | 9 | 11 | 552,500 |
| State – Diplomatic Security | 2 | 1 | 103 | 106 | 1,816,492 |
| State – Marine Security | 6 | | 3 | 9 | 108,091 |
| State – Overseas Buildings Operations | | | 1 | 1 | 809,852 |
| Defense Attaché Office | 3 | | 2 | 5 | 177,660 |
| Office of Defense Cooperation | 2 | | 6 | 8 | 203,000 |
| Partnership for Peace | | | 1 | 1 | 110,181 |
| USAID | 6 | 2 | 16 | 24 | 1,400,000 |
| Peace Corps | 3 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 1,779,000 |
| Department of Justice – ICITAP | 1 | | 5 | 6 | 613,500 |
| Department of Justice – OPDAT | 2 | | 4 | 6 | 560,680 |
| State - EXBS | 1 | | 1 | 2 | Not available |
| Representation | | | | | 27,400 |
| Totals | 54 | 11 | 309 | 374 | \$13,993,156 |

Overview

Embassy Tirana is adequately funded and staffed. Its first rightsizing review, scheduled to take place in FY 2010 will better determine whether mission staffing is in line with mission goals. The lack of office space, the overarching issue of the 2003 inspection report, is no longer a problem, following construction of the new office annex in 2006. Projects are planned and funded to expand controlled access area space to alleviate overcrowding in affected offices. Embassy Tirana's ICASS scores declined in 2009, in part because of significant and protracted staffing gaps in management offices. Currently, all U.S. direct-hire positions in the management offices are filled. The manner in which performance improvement plans for several LE staff were introduced, and the events that followed, had a negative impact on mission morale (see Human Resources section, below), and Embassy Tirana has taken significant measures to address it. It is working to establish an LE staff health plan and, in the interim, it has introduced medical catastrophic illness coverage for employees and their dependents. Also, the embassy is exploring an off-shore pension fund for the LE staff. Regional support, especially that provided by the Regional Support Center (RSC) Frankfurt, is outstanding. The consolidation of Department and the USAID administrative platforms remains a work in progress.

Security

Additional discussion of Embassy Tirana's management and security programs, with recommendations, will be found in the classified annex of this report.

Management Operations

Embassy Tirana recently experienced an extended period of poor management operations, followed by several months without a management officer. Though still recovering from that experience, Embassy Tirana, with a few exceptions, now has effective management support. During much of the time the embassy was without a management officer, the general services officer (who is in her first management assignment) functioned as management officer. An 8 month gap in the financial management officer/human resources officer position, contributed to an overall decline in the quality of ICASS services and a general disregard by the LE staff for adherence to the chain of command (see Human Resources section, below). The 2009 ICASS overall satisfaction score of 3.94 was Embassy Tirana's all-time lowest score. The ICASS survey identified procurement, travel services, and vouchering as poor

performers. The OIG team substantiated the claim that procurement operations are less than optimal. Travel services have improved with the termination of the travel management center contract. Vouchering services also have improved.

The experienced management officer is relatively new at the embassy, but the OIG team found that he has a strong grasp of the situation and is eager to address operational issues and challenges. Shortly after arriving, he conducted a risk assessment exercise to assess overall operations, and he already has gained the confidence of the American staff. He is working to win the same of the LE employees. Residual hard feelings resulting from the manner in which performance improvement plans had been handled have diminished. The financial management officer/human resources officer is in his first financial management position. The LE staff members are trained, though continued training remains a mission goal. Eligible family members occupy key management positions. RSC Frankfurt will continue to play a prominent role in the mission's management operations.

In broad terms, Embassy Tirana has overcome its most significant challenges and has accomplished many of its FY 2009 MSP goals. It is close to obtaining LE staff health insurance and expanding the embassy controlled access area. Community recreational facilities are available at the chancery, and they are being enhanced with the addition of a sports field at the Rilindja Ridge housing compound. A perimeter wall at the Tirana International School was just completed.

Management is moving forward to concentrate on improving operations and has fully embraced the collaborative management initiative. Process maps have been created for some management activities, although accompanying standard operating procedures (SOPs) have not been developed. Both process maps and standard operating procedures add a degree of process continuity and predictability. Because standard operating procedures governing management operations have not been prepared, the OIG team made an informal recommendation to address this issue.

WebPASS, a Web-based tool combining applications to assist service providers, and eServices, which handles service requests via the Internet, have been partially implemented by the embassy. The WebPASS procurement module has proven effective. The rollout of other WebPASS modules should provide similar outcomes.

As noted above, during the long term management officer position vacancy and the gap in the financial management officer/human resources officer position, the LE staff occasionally ignored chain of command principles. Now that human resources procedures are clearly spelled out and all American management officer

positions are filled, the LE staff should be advised to follow prescribed channels to address their grievances. The OIG team made an informal recommendation to address this issue. The active LE staff committee is capable of bringing general LE staff concerns to management.

Consolidation of State and USAID Management Platforms

As noted above, the consolidation of Department and USAID administrative platforms remains a work in progress. USAID is located within the embassy compound. Consolidation of many services, such as housing, warehousing, property management, and human resources has been achieved, but consolidation of others is pending. USAID retains its own travel services, programmatic procurement, and furniture and appliance pools. Although USAID participates in the motor pool, it maintains a small fleet of vehicles and drivers to meet its program needs, which sometimes involve trips lasting several days away from Tirana. An informal recommendation addresses the need for consolidation to continue.

Rightsizing

During the inspection, Embassy Tirana was involved in its first rightsizing exercise. Its rightsizing review was due to the Department by December 2009. At the time of the inspection, Embassy Tirana had identified only facilities management as a function that could be performed remotely. Embassy Rome already provides regional facilities management assistance to the mission. According to the embassy, it may be possible to eliminate the facilities manager as a U.S. direct-hire position, if a competent facility manager could be hired locally. Although this is a preliminary mission assessment, the inspection team recognized the merits of this proposal.

The inspection team identified the motor pool and several other management operations as appropriate candidates for rightsizing.

Human Resources

The human resources office is managed by a second-tour officer with 36 years of human resources experience in private industry. The officer is credited with bringing tranquility and experience to the section after an 8-month gap prior to his arrival. This officer also serves as the financial management officer.

The human resources officer has made significant progress in stabilizing the office, but realizes there is still much to do. For example, the mission does not have orientation programs for either American or LE staff, and both are needed. Many position descriptions are out of date, but the office is taking steps to review them. The OIG team made informal recommendations on both issues.

The office is currently staffed with four employees. One eligible family member was added to cover the 8-month gap. Now that the human resources officer is in place, that position will be eliminated.

Compensation issues are a concern among the LE staff who received a 1 percent pay increase as the result of the last wage survey. However, the embassy has improved other employee benefits over the years by adding to the number of steps in the compensation plan in 2007 and by increasing the authorized annual leave in 2005. Third party health coverage for the LE staff is one of the current benefit improvements being pursued by the embassy. The embassy also will pursue an off shore retirement plan for the LE staff, although it first must be determined if the Albanian government will allow the embassy to opt out of the Albanian plan. Under the current plan, the employees contribute nine percent and the embassy contributes 20 percent, but after retirement the employees receive little from their contributions.

Of all the elements of the LE staff inspection questionnaire, the awards programs scored the lowest—by a wide margin. This is particularly interesting, considering the number of awards given to the LE staff in the past year. Over 100 group and individual awards went to more than 500 recipients. The human resources officer provided one training session to a small group of employees in which he explained the awards process and the criteria for receiving awards. This training should be broadened to include all American and LE staff. Additionally, the timing of the last awards committee meeting and the following awards ceremony (one of two awards ceremonies held each year) occurred at a time when payment to the awardees was delayed because the mission was operating under a continuing resolution. The embassy should alter the timing of its awards committee meetings and awards ceremonies to prevent a ceremony from coinciding with the beginning of the fiscal year, when discretionary funds typically are not available due to continuing resolution restrictions. The OIG team made informal recommendations to address both of these issues.

RSC Frankfurt staff members made a recent trip to Tirana to review the human resources operation. According to the trip report, Embassy Tirana asked the regional human resources officer not to discuss in detail the use of performance improvement plans, an issue that has been controversial among the LE and American staffs.

In fact, a “moratorium” has been placed on the use of performance improvement plans, because they were seen as a first step toward dismissal. Other counseling and documenting tools are being used in their place.

When used correctly, performance improvement plans are a beneficial tool. The tool should be reinstated, and all employees should be trained in the proper use of performance improvement plans. The OIG team made an informal recommendation to address this issue.

Special Immigrant Visas

When Embassy Tirana was reopened in 1991, a significant number of LE staff members began their employment with the mission. After 15 years passed, those employees who were still employed at the embassy became eligible to apply for a special immigrant visa (SIV). In addition to the minimum requirement of 15 years of employment, SIV applicants must have sustained a high level of performance in exceptional circumstances. In recent years, a number of employees in Tirana have applied for and been found eligible for these visas. The difficult early years when the mission was just being established, and a later period of turmoil in the country, provided a basis for some applicants to meet the “exceptional circumstances” criteria. Others established a record of outstanding service, as demonstrated by awards and good service records. In all cases, a committee of mission officers reviewed and carefully considered the applications.

Unfortunately, within the LE staff community there is a perception of SIV entitlement, if one has simply remained with the mission for the minimum 15 years. This partly derives from the fact that most of the applicants who have applied for an SIV in the last 2 years have been successful. In some cases, an applicant did not initially make a successful application, but a special appeal resulted in reconsideration of the case and a committee recommendation for approval. This further cemented the impression of entitlement. Rather than an entitlement, 9 FAM 42.32(d)(2) Note 2.1 specifies that the SIV is a program to reward employees for more than 15 years of faithful service in exceptional, and frequently life-threatening, circumstances. In most cases at most embassies, SIV eligibility is an infrequently granted benefit of LE employment. Often it is reserved for employees in service for more than the 15 year minimum. In order to clarify the Department’s requirements for SIV eligibility, as well as to reaffirm Embassy Tirana’s policy and procedures, the embassy should review and reissue the embassy’s notice on SIVs so that the process is fair and recommendations for SIV status follow the Department’s guidance.

Recommendation 4: Embassy Tirana should update and reissue, under the Chief of Mission's signature, the policy and application procedures for special immigrant visas. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Financial Management

As noted previously, the human resources officer is also the financial management officer. Resources in Tirana are adequate, and the embassy had a large carry-over of ICASS funds at the end of FY 2009.

The ICASS process at the mission is not functioning according to the ICASS rules and regulations. The ICASS council and budget committee are not separate. The council chairperson has had no formal ICASS training. The financial management officer has requested post-specific training from the ICASS service center. Although the service center agrees that the training is needed, a date for it has not yet been established.

Recommendation 5: Embassy Tirana should coordinate and agree with the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services service center on proposed dates for post-specific training during FY 2010. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

The financial management officer already has initiated one-on-one dialogues with the serviced agencies at post to discuss ICASS issues, and this process will continue.

The cashier is in a very inconvenient location on the third floor of the new office annex. Customers requiring attention at the window block the traffic flow between the hallway corridor and the offices on the third floor. In addition, the air flow in the office is minimal.

Recommendation 6: Embassy Tirana should move the cashier to a more convenient location with good ventilation. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) The mission is operating with nine subcashiers. The OIG team believes this number to be excessive and made an informal recommendation on this issue.

Representation

The embassy received \$27,400 in representation funds in FY 2009. Funds are appropriately distributed to all sections. The embassy made a bulk purchase of wine in early September, but at the time of the inspection had not yet received the shipment. Although bulk wine purchases are permitted, 3 FAH-1 H-3244.3 d. prohibits the use of year end funds for this purpose, as well as for invitations or other representation supplies and materials that are not a bonafide need of that fiscal year. The OIG team made an informal recommendation addressing this issue.

Equal Employment Opportunity

The mission's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program appears to work well for the American employees. The current EEO counselor had received the necessary training and a replacement also had the training and was preparing to receive the follow-up course. American employees appeared to be well informed of EEO programs. There have been no American EEO complaints in the past year.

The issue is quite different with the LE staff. EEO sensitivity ranked low on the LE staff questionnaires. Although there is no indication that any issues exist, EEO awareness was lacking. LE staff members have not received any EEO training, and many said in their questionnaires that they were not aware of what EEO sensitivity really means. In addition, there were no LE staff EEO liaisons. The OIG team made two informal recommendations to address EEO awareness and training for the LE staff.

Real Property

The embassy compound, which was first built in 1927, now includes the chancery, a consular building, a new office annex, and Marine security guard quarters. The construction of the 35,000-gross square foot new office annex in 2006 solved a serious overcrowding issue in the mission's limited access areas. The mission now is focused on converting limited access space in the chancery into a controlled access area. A project to accomplish this already was planned and funded, with an anticipated completion date for early 2010. At the time of the inspection, a project to rehabilitate the post communication center in the chancery was being developed and is further discussed in the classified annex of this report. This project's completion is planned for 2010. The embassy compound is well maintained. The chancery building is listed on the Secretary of State's Register of Culturally Significant Property.

As noted earlier, the exterior consular waiting area, although now covered, does not provide adequate protection from the weather for people waiting for services. The interior waiting area can accommodate approximately 11 seated applicants. The inspection team made a formal recommendation in the consular portion of this report to address the need for a proper exterior waiting room.

Both the Ambassador's residence and the DCM's residence are located on the embassy's 13.8-acre Rilindja Ridge housing compound. The director of USAID and the regional affairs officer also have designated residences on the compound. The other 14 residential units are part of the housing pool. There are 35 residential short-term leases.

General Services Operations

All functions within general services operations, with the exception of procurement, perform effectively. However, motor pool staffing is too large for current requirements, and warehousing operations staff may be also. The general services officer, in her first management position, only recently has been allowed to focus all her attention on general services operations. There are 32 LE staff members and one eligible family member, who supervises the procurement staff. One of the first orders of business, now that the management section is fully staffed, will be to reverse the decline in ICASS scores.

Procurement Office

Despite the addition of an eligible family member supervisor and multiple assistance visits from RSC Frankfurt and regional LE staff specialists, Embassy Tirana's procurement office remains a marginal performer. This assessment is not meant to dismiss the substantial gains this office has made, such as lessening its reliance on time consuming petty cash purchases. It is only meant to signal the continued need for staff assistance visits, training, and perhaps other remedies, if the situation does not improve. Of all the procurement activities, contracting appears to be the most problematic. This may be in part because of the limited number of contracts handled by the office and the resultant lack of contracting experience.

Recommendation 7: Embassy Tirana should request a staff assistance visit by the Bureau of Administration's Office of the Procurement Executive. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with A/OPE)

The three LE staff procurement agents have similar position descriptions, and it appears that none of the three is ready for additional responsibilities. In FY 2009, the office remained reliant on time consuming petty cash purchases that took the procurement agents away from the office. Several LE staff members in facilities maintenance and the motor pool were recently designated to make their own petty cash purchases, which should provide some relief to the procurement staff. The embassy uses blanket purchase agreements, which are a useful and quick acquisition method, but they are not being used to their full advantage, because the embassy is practicing per-call funding rather than bulk funding. Bulk funding of blanket purchase agreements involving purchases for frequently needed commodities could streamline the process and provide additional relief to the procurement staff. The OIG team left an informal recommendation addressing this issue.

As noted above, contracting appears to be the most problematic procurement activity. A review of contract files showed that two contracts that were to be awarded based on “lowest price technically acceptable” were actually awarded on price criteria alone. Moreover, technical evaluation panels were not convened in either award. Descriptions of goods and services on many purchase orders lack a sufficient degree of specificity. Because some files contain more detailed scopes of work or item descriptions, the OIG team suggested that these files be flagged as an attachment on the description box of the purchase orders. In cases where the files lacked detailed scopes of work or item descriptions, the team suggested that the requested service(s) or item(s) be fully described.

Recommendation 8: Embassy Tirana should prioritize, fund, and implement procurement training for the three procurement agents with an emphasis on contracting. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Motor Pool

The motor pool enjoys a favorable ICASS score and provides effective service. However, with a staff of 17 comprised of a supervisor, 3 dispatchers, and 13 drivers, it is overstaffed for mission needs. Operating with two shifts, motor pool hours of operation are from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., Monday through Sunday. A dispatcher and several drivers have weekend duty. Dispatchers have the added duty of arranging taxis for mission personnel. The motor pool provides service to all agencies at the mission, except for the Peace Corps and ICITAP. The Ambassador and the Marine security guard detachment have their own drivers. When responsibility for driving the Ambassador shifted from the motor pool, the embassy retained the three drivers

who had been providing that service. The motor pool supervisor stated that ten or 11 drivers, instead of 13, would be sufficient to meet current demands.

Recommendation 9: Embassy Tirana should reevaluate the scale of its motor pool services and reduce them where appropriate. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 10: Embassy Tirana should adjust the number of its motor pool drivers and dispatchers to its newly scaled operation and reduce them accordingly. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Travel Services

Travel services appear to be effective, but ICASS travel service subscribers are not satisfied with the level of services. Last year, the mission chose not to continue its travel management center contract because of poor service. It further decided not to enter into another travel management center contract. The travel assistant, who had 10 years of travel agent experience, works with three travel agencies and sometimes directly with the airlines. Charges are the same, regardless of the method used to procure tickets. Accordingly, the arrangement and operations are in line with 14 FAM 542. The travel office has online booking system access, which enables the travel assistant to check fares for correctness.

Warehousing and Property Management

Warehousing and property management services are effectively delivered and enjoyed the highest 2009 mission ICASS satisfaction score of 4.50. The section consists of a supply supervisor, a supply clerk, and four warehouse assistants. USAID is a service subscriber. A single inventory system for both USAID and the Department was initiated, when its property barcodes were converted recently to nonexpendable property application barcodes. As noted earlier, USAID has not yet joined the furniture or appliance pools. Almost all the other agencies have joined both. The embassy participates in the Department's just-in-time furniture initiative, which is intended to preclude the need for warehouse space. Considering the mission's small warehouse, this should be beneficial.

The job descriptions of the four warehouse assistants may not accurately reflect their current responsibilities. One of the four is responsible for dispensing gasoline to official and privately owned vehicles from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Monday through Friday. The others perform an array of duties at the chancery that have little to do with property management, such as servicing water dispensers, shredders, and photo copiers. An informal recommendation addresses the need to update the job descriptions of the four warehouse assistants. As noted above, standard operating procedures provide necessary process and responsibility information. Among those called for is a procedure addressing the control of bulk fuels to include the dispensing of gasoline at the chancery's pump. This would prove worthwhile, considering the high price of gasoline on the open market. Current procedures appear to be adequate, although closer supervision by the general services officer would be beneficial.

Facility Management

The facility management office is an effective steward of the real property program at Embassy Tirana. The facility manager's large staff of 33 includes nine custodians and seven gardeners. Work at the office annex and generator room is handled by designated LE staff assistants. As noted above, the U.S. direct-hire position of facility manager may be considered for elimination as part of the rightsizing exercise, if a competent facility manager can be hired locally.

The embassy's safety and occupational health program effectively safeguards employees at work and at home. However, until a recent serious accident involving a security guard, the occupational safety and health committee had not convened. When the occupational safety and health committee met, the DCM became actively engaged, as did the management, regional security, and general services officers, the Foreign Service health practitioner, and the facility manager, who is the post occupational safety and health officer. The facility management office is actively addressing recommendations made in 2008 by the Overseas Buildings Operations' Safety, Health and Environmental Management Division. The OIG inspection team encouraged the embassy to close out the remaining open recommendations.

Information Management and Information Security

Embassy Tirana operates an effective information management (IM) and information systems security program. The information management section has been a consistently strong performer, as confirmed by the high ICASS survey results and the general consensus of mission personnel.

The
OIG team made an informal recommendation to address this situation. Despite having limited formal training, the IM staff is technically strong. To its credit, the section has been able to consistently achieve an A+ grade on the Department's risk score advisor, a tool for monitoring the embassy's network security and performance. The OIG team counseled the IM staff on issues such as staffing, separation of duties, equipment accountability, and best practices. The staff addressed almost all concerns expeditiously and to the satisfaction of the OIG team. Mitigation activities are in progress.

The IM staff is responsible for the operation, maintenance, and security of the Department's Sensitive But Unclassified network (OpenNet), classified local area network, dedicated Internet networks, unclassified and classified pouch, and telephone/radio operations, as well as mailroom operations. The OpenNet network consists of 160 workstations and eight servers; the classified local area network consists of 12 workstations and five servers. The staff consists of an IM officer, two IM specialists, and the following LE staff members: three systems-support employees, one telephone/radio technician, two mail/pouch employees, and one switchboard operator.

Telephone Frame and Server Rooms

The embassy's telephone frame and server rooms are not properly maintained. These rooms have surplus wires and unlabeled cabling, which can result in wasted time when repairs are needed, if the staff is unable to locate promptly the needed cables. The time required for operational maintenance in the telephone frame and server rooms only will increase until proper action is taken. The OIG team made an informal recommendation regarding this issue.

Diplomatic Post Office

Embassy Tirana is listed by the Office of the Diplomatic Pouch and Mail as a category "B" post, which limits mail service. The embassy has never had an Armed Forces post office or other entity with the capability of sending outgoing mail. Procedures for establishing a DPO are detailed in 14 FAM 761.2. Before a request is made, the mission must first conduct a cost analysis and determine whether there is support, as well as adequate ICASS resources, to establish a permanent DPO service. The creation of a DPO will allow the embassy to send outgoing mail. This has been an issue within the mission for some time, so having a DPO that can handle outgoing mail should help to boost embassy morale. The OIG team issued an informal recommendation regarding this issue.

Training of Systems Staff

The LE information systems staff members have not received the technical training they need to provide high quality information technology support. The OIG team reviewed the training records of the LE staff and found the records to be deficient. The LE systems staff members' work development plans include narratives stating that training in the programs they administer should be conducted through "self-help and online searches." However, the deployed systems at this mission are too complex to be learned through trial-and-error; formal training is necessary. It would be prudent to provide the platform administrators with appropriate training through formalized courses provided by the Foreign Service Institute. Without continuous technical training, the IM employees will be unable to keep their knowledge and skills up to date.

Recommendation 11: Embassy Tirana should provide all information systems staff members with appropriate training, commensurate with their respective job functions and designated duties. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Dedicated Internet Networks

Embassy Tirana currently is operating dedicated Internet network computer(s) located in the public affairs IRC, the community liaison office, the information systems center, and the multipurpose room. The OIG team pointed out the requirement that these Internet connections have a waiver granted by the Department's information technology change control board. In response, the IM section's management requested the Department's formal approval for the waiver during the course of the inspection. The OIG team commends Embassy Tirana's approach to this issue.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Embassy Tirana morale appears high, although heavy traffic, reckless driving, pollution, and the quality of health care outside the mission are issues that affect the morale of some Americans. In the 3-to 5-month period before the inspection, the turnover of some embassy staff positions and filling of longstanding staffing gaps helped to push morale scores higher. Hopefully, ICASS scores will follow. The Ambassador and DCM are attuned to morale and demonstrate this on a daily basis. They are both frequently seen chatting with employees in the hallways of the embassy, and the LE staff members feel particularly close to the Ambassador. American employees at Embassy Tirana receive a 20 percent hardship differential.

COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICE

The community liaison office has two part-time coordinators and one LE staff assistant. However, both coordinators are new and need training as soon as possible. One started work during the inspection, and the other had been on the job for two weeks. They are in the process of deciding on office hours and separation of duties. Each one has strong, albeit different, skill sets. Luckily, the LE staff assistant can provide the continuity during this break-in period. The coordinators need to consult with an advisory committee as they begin to put together agendas and programs for the mission. The office also would benefit from holding periodic meetings with the American Embassy Recreation Association (AERA). A community liaison budget should be prepared by the AERA, in close cooperation with the coordinators. The OIG team made informal recommendations to address this issue.

Embassy Tirana has a strong eligible family member hiring platform. There are six full-time and five part-time eligible family members providing support to the mission. A bilateral work agreement is also in place.

AMERICAN EMBASSY RECREATION ASSOCIATION

For several reasons, AERA did not meet its 2008 reporting and financial obligations to the Office of Commissary and Recreation Affairs. The departure of the previous AERA chairperson and the absence for a time of an AERA general manager, along with the absence of the management officer, all contributed to the late submissions. Delinquent reports were completed prior to the inspection.

The AERA charter is dated June 2004. Laundry and dry cleaning service now is provided by AERA but is not addressed by the charter. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that the charter be revised and updated.

Throughout the past year, there have been issues with the cafeteria. OIG questionnaire responses indicated broad LE staff dissatisfaction with the current vendor and a feeling that they had not been consulted when a prior contract was canceled and the award went to the current vendor. On the other hand, AERA board meeting notes indicated dissatisfaction with the previous vendor. It appears that the decision making process may have lacked transparency. As with many missions, it is difficult to satisfy both the American and LE staff simultaneously with regard to the taste and pricing of food, but the fact remains that LE staff members are not satisfied with the current cafeteria vendor.

AERA financial records indicate the community liaison office has more than \$2,500 in bank accounts maintained by AERA.

HEALTH UNIT

The health unit provides effective primary care to an embassy community that includes approximately 30 children. It is well regarded, as is evidenced by its ICASS score. The Foreign Service health practitioner is assisted by a part-time (24 hours a week) eligible family member registered nurse and a full-time LE administrative assistant. Both the regional medical officer and regional medical officer -psychiatrist are based in Embassy Vienna. The regional medical officer visits approximately two or three times a year, and the regional medical officer-psychiatrist twice a year. The well-equipped health unit has ample space and a well-planned physical layout.

Since 1992, the [redacted] has been the Office of Overseas Schools-supported school in Albania. The mission is represented on the school board and enjoys a good relationship with the school. The embassy provides security advice, customs clearance assistance, and transportation for students, in addition to limited commissary use. [redacted] The one overarching issue is acquiring an adequate site to construct a new school.

The Albanian government offered land for a new school, but it was deemed too small. The school is ready to purchase a site, if one is not donated. Although the school now enjoys tax exempt status, that status is not certain in the future.

The FY 2008 grant of \$14,000 – for salaries, educational materials, a computer lab upgrade, and staff development – has been fully expended. There is a balance of \$4,097 remaining from the FY 2008 grant of \$104,333 for the completion of the perimeter wall, and this security upgrade project is complete.

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

Responsibility for management controls has been delegated to the management officer. Because the DCM and the management officer are new, they met several times recently while preparing the most recent risk assessment. Nothing rising to the importance of a reportable issue was uncovered during their recent review and, subsequently, a negative management control statement of assurance was submitted in August. In addition to the standard risk assessments, RSC Frankfurt visited recently and reviewed the management controls in several management areas, finding no major reportable weaknesses.

CONSULAR MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

During the summer of 2009, a consular management assistance team visited Embassy Tirana to review consular operations. The team made several recommendations to improve management controls in the consular section. The OIG team followed up on these issues and found the embassy had made progress.

The embassy recently concluded an agreement with a local bank that will include off-site machine readable visa fee collections. Implementation will begin once the Bureau of Consular Affairs approves the arrangement. The consular section believes this will be a significant time saver for the section, and it will relieve a bottleneck at the cashier window.

The accountable consular officer conducted two unannounced cash counts in the recent past and appropriately documented them. Daily accountability for visa foils occurs as required, and a discrepancy report that indicated the reconciliation and destruction of spoiled visa foils was sent to the Department by cable during the inspection.

All consular officers had registered or completed the new distance learning course (PC-400) for accountable officers. The accountable consular officer designations are up to date, and the officer conducts the weekly periodic comparison of machine readable visa fees with nonimmigrant visa applications, as is required by 7 FAH-1 H-744.2.

During the inspection the consular chief and the financial management officer agreed on an exchange rate for consular fees, in accordance with the guidance in 7 FAH-1 H-724.2, and the embassy announced the new consular exchange rate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Embassy Tirana should establish an embassy assistance coordinating committee to monitor programming and develop assistance policy consistent with the Mission Strategic Plan; the Ambassador and deputy chief of mission should be directly involved in this committee. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 2: Embassy Tirana should hire and train locally employed staff to fill vacant positions in the consular section. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 3: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, should develop, fund, and implement a project to improve the consular waiting areas for better service to the public including design elements that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA and OBO)

Recommendation 4: Embassy Tirana should update and reissue, under the Chief of Mission's signature, the policy and application procedures for special immigrant visas. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 5: Embassy Tirana should coordinate and agree with the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services service center on proposed dates for post-specific training during FY 2010. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 6: Embassy Tirana should move the cashier to a more convenient location with good ventilation. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 7: Embassy Tirana should request a staff assistance visit by the Bureau of Administration's Office of the Procurement Executive. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with A/OPE)

Recommendation 8: Embassy Tirana should prioritize, fund, and implement procurement training for the three procurement agents with an emphasis on contracting. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 9: Embassy Tirana should reevaluate the scale of its motor pool services and reduce them where appropriate. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 10: Embassy Tirana should adjust the number of its motor pool drivers and dispatchers to its newly scaled operation and reduce them accordingly. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

Recommendation 11: Embassy Tirana should provide all information systems staff members with appropriate training, commensurate with their respective job functions and designated duties. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or onsite compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

Political/Economic

In order to assist Albania's efforts to develop into a stable, secure democracy, the embassy's number one goal is the establishment of a culture of lawfulness and strengthening rule of law. The embassy's reporting plan does not include enough reporting on these issues.

Informal Recommendation 1: Embassy Tirana should increase its reporting on law enforcement/rule-of-law activities.

The LE staff members in the political-economic section often host representational events but do not always claim reimbursement for their expenses.

Informal Recommendation 2: Embassy Tirana should ask locally employed staff to submit claims for reimbursement on a quarterly or semiannual basis so that they are not out of pocket for expenses related to representation events.

Embassy Tirana does not have an established relationship with the USEU, which is important given the high priority of Albanian efforts to join the European Union.

Informal Recommendation 3: Embassy Tirana should use email and other methods to establish a relationship and regular communications with the Balkans desk at the U.S. Mission to the European Union.

Consular Operations

The only means the consular section has to call the public to pass through the hard-line for an interview is the cashier's public address system. This is unsatisfactory because it either diverts the cashier from his duties or compromises the integrity of

the cashier booth when a staff member enters it to make the announcement. The embassy has recently ordered equipment to provide a second public address system for the use of those working at the interview windows.

Informal Recommendation 4: Embassy Tirana should install and activate as soon as possible a consular public address system for the outside waiting area that can be used from the interview windows.

The entrance to the alley that leads to the consular entrance is not clearly marked, and visa applicants and Americans seeking services sometimes need directions from the guards at the employee entrance or from neighboring local businesses to find out where to go.

Informal Recommendation 5: Embassy Tirana should mark the consular alley and entrance with appropriate signage.

Embassy Tirana has an outdated warden system. The consular section has had some success in recruiting new wardens, but more needs to be done. The wardens should also be given appropriate instruction and encouraged to use all modern means of communication to inform the American community in Albania.

Informal Recommendation 6: Embassy Tirana should update the warden system.

Resource Management

Standard operating procedures governing many management operations at Embassy Tirana have not been prepared. Standard operating procedures add a degree of process continuity and predictability.

Informal Recommendation 7: Embassy Tirana should prepare standard operating procedures for its key management operations.

Because of prior staffing gaps in the management section, the LE staff occasionally ignored chain of command principles. Human resources procedures are clearly defined in the LE staff handbook and all American officer positions are now filled.

Informal Recommendation 8: Embassy Tirana should advise locally employed staff to follow prescribed human resources channels to address their grievances.

USAID retains its own travel services, programmatic procurement, and furniture and appliance pools. USAID participates in the motor pool but maintains a small fleet of three vehicles and several drivers.

Informal Recommendation 9: Embassy Tirana should continue efforts to consolidate additional administrative services.

Embassy Tirana does not have an orientation program for American or LE staff.

Informal Recommendation 10: Embassy Tirana should develop orientation programs for both the American and LE staffs.

Many LE staff position descriptions are out of date.

Informal Recommendation 11: Embassy Tirana should update all locally employed staff position descriptions.

LE staff members are dissatisfied with Embassy Tirana's awards program.

Informal Recommendation 12: Embassy Tirana should provide a systematic awards policy and education program to all American and locally employed staff.

The current schedule of awards programs has one of the two occurring at the beginning of a fiscal year. This precludes funding the awards during times the mission is operating under a continuing resolution.

Informal Recommendation 13: Embassy Tirana should adjust its award program schedule to allow for funding of the awards as soon as they are announced.

The embassy has placed a moratorium on performance improvement plans. However, they are a useful and necessary tool in trying to improve the performance of underachieving employees.

Informal Recommendation 14: Embassy Tirana should resume the use of performance improvement plans, at the same time providing the necessary educational program to all employees regarding their appropriate use.

Financial Management

The mission has nine subcashiers. Because of the proximity of the subcashiers to the Class B cashier, there is no need for that many subcashiers.

Informal Recommendation 15: Embassy Tirana should perform a systematic assessment of its cashiering operations and reduce the number of subcashiers as appropriate.

Embassy Tirana made a bulk wine purchase in September, 2009. Bulk wine purchases are prohibited by 3 FAH-1 H-3244.3 if they are not a bona fide need in the fiscal year of purchase.

Informal Recommendation 16: Embassy Tirana should refrain from making bulk wine purchases near the end of the fiscal year.

Equal Employment Opportunity

The LE staff has not had Equal Employment Opportunity training.

Informal Recommendation 17: Embassy Tirana should arrange for Equal Employment Opportunity training for the locally employed staff.

There are no LE staff equal employment opportunity liaisons in the mission.

Informal Recommendation 18: Embassy Tirana should recruit several locally employed staff to serve as Equal Employment Opportunity liaisons.

Procurement Office

Only a few blanket purchase agreements are bulk funded.

Informal Recommendation 19: Embassy Tirana should bulk fund those blanket purchase agreements that would provide its procurement staff the most relief.

Warehousing and Property Management

The job descriptions of the four warehouse assistants may not accurately reflect their current responsibilities. One of the four is responsible for dispensing gasoline to official and privately owned vehicles from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Monday through Friday. The others perform an array of duties at the chancery that have little to do with property management, such as servicing water dispensers, shredders, and photo copiers.

Informal Recommendation 20: Embassy Tirana should revise the job descriptions of the four warehouse assistants to describe accurately their current duties.

Information Management and Information Security

The telephone frame and server rooms located throughout the embassy are not properly maintained. The time required for operational maintenance in the telephone frame and server rooms will only increase until proper action is taken.

Informal Recommendation 21: Embassy Tirana should organize the telephone frame and server rooms.

Embassy Tirana is listed by the Office of the Diplomatic Pouch and Mail as a category “B” post which limits the amount of mail traffic. The creation of a diplomatic post office will allow the embassy to send outgoing mail.

Informal Recommendation 22: Embassy Tirana should initiate the preliminary procedures required for establishing a diplomatic post office.

Quality of Life

The community liaison office has two part-time coordinators who are new and need training as soon as possible. The coordinators need to consult with an advisory committee as they begin to put together agendas and programs for the mission.

Informal Recommendation 23: Embassy Tirana should establish a community liaison office advisory committee to help the new coordinators establish programs that mission employees want.

The community liaison office requires a well defined budget provided by the American Employees Recreation Association to better plan and perform its activities.

Informal Recommendation 24: Embassy Tirana should schedule meetings for the community liaison office coordinators and the American Employees Recreation Association staff members to discuss community liaison office programs and establish a workable budget.

The American Employees Recreation Association charter dates from June 2004. The association now provides laundry and dry cleaning service, something not included in the charter.

Informal Recommendation 25: Embassy Tirana should revise the outdated American Employee Recreation Association charter to include all services.

Information processing center facilities are inadequate to meet the space needs of the section's staff. Currently, there are no plans to relocate the center equipment or the staff to an alternate location due to secure space limitations at post.

Informal Recommendation 26: Embassy Tirana should relocate the information processing center personnel to a more suitable location.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

| | Name | Arrival Date |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Ambassador | John L Withers II | 08/07 |
| Deputy Chief of Mission | Deborah A. Jones | 06/09 |

Chiefs of Sections:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Administrative | Michael H. Scanlon | 07/09 |
| Consular | Abigail K. Aronson | 07/07 |
| Political/Economic | Paul Evans Poletes | 07/08 |
| Public Affairs (Acting) | Leigh Rieder | 07/07 |
| Regional Security | Dennis San Miguel | 07/09 |
| Office of Export Controls Cooperation | Cari Bower | 10/08 |

Other Agencies:

| | | |
|--|---|-------|
| Department of Defense | Commander Jerry Cornett | 06/09 |
| U.S. Agency for International Development | Roberta Mahoney (departed during inspection) | 09/08 |
| Department of Justice | Melissa Schraibmann | 10/06 |
| Department of Treasury | Karl Landgraf | 05/06 |
| Peace Corps | Hill Denham | 06/07 |

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| AERA | American Embassy Recreation Association |
| APAO | assistant public affairs officer |
| DCM | deputy chief of mission |
| DPO | diplomatic pouch operation |
| EEO | Equal Employment Opportunity |
| EUCOM | European Command |
| EXBS | Export and Related Border Security Program |
| G/TIP | Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons |
| ICASS | International Cooperative Administrative Support Services |
| ICITAP | International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program |
| IM | information management |
| IRC | information resource center |
| IVLP | International Visitor Leadership Program |
| LE | locally employed |
| MSP | Mission Strategic Plan |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| ODC | Office of Defense Cooperation |
| OIG | Office of Inspector General |
| OPDAT | Overseas Prosecutorial Development and Training |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| PD | public diplomacy |
| PAS | public affairs section |
| PAO | public affairs officer |

| | |
|-------|---|
| RSC | Regional Support Center |
| SIV | special immigrant visa |
| TIP | trafficking in persons |
| USAID | U.S. Agency for International Development |
| USEU | U.S. Mission to the European Union |

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