

EXDEL TRIP REPORT:

GEORGIA

JANUARY 2010



A delegation of four former members of Congress traveled to Georgia on behalf of the House Democracy Partnership from Jan. 22 to 28, 2010. The delegation consulted with several Georgian members of parliament and executive branch officials on the importance of legislative oversight of the defense and security sectors. The delegation was led by former Rep. Martin Lancaster (D-N.C.), who was joined by former Reps. Pete Geren (D-Texas), Joel Hefley (R-Colo.) and Heather Wilson (R-N.M.). This was HDP's second delegation of former members of Congress, following a November 2009 delegation to Kenya, and built on three previous congressional delegations to Georgia in 2007 and 2008.

After arriving in Georgia on Jan. 23, the delegation's program began on Jan. 24 with a visit to the provincial capital of Gori, where they met with officials of the European Union Monitoring Mission who are ensuring compliance with the cease-fire agreement that followed the August 2008 war with Russia. The delegation also visited a housing development for 6,000 Georgians who were forced from their homes during the Russian invasion, as well as USAID projects in the area designed to spur economic activity.

The delegation on Jan. 25 was greeted by members of the National Parliament of Georgia, including the parliament's Deputy Speaker Rusudan Kervalishvili. The delegation's longest and most in-depth meeting was with members of the defense and security committee, led by deputy chairman Zaza Gelashvili. At this meeting, Mr. Geren, a former secretary of the Army, noted the importance of promoting dialog between MPs and defense officials to ensure proper parliamentary oversight and input into their decisions. Mr. Lancaster, a former undersecretary of the army who later headed the North Carolina community college system, spoke of the importance of military education. Mr. Hefley, former chairman of the House delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and Ms. Wilson, a former official at the U.S. Mission to NATO, both noted how the effectiveness of Georgia's parliamentary oversight will influence its NATO candidacy. The delegation made similar points in meetings with the Georgian committees on budget and finance, foreign affairs, and European integration, as well as with Defense Minister Bacho Akalaia.

During its three days in Tbilisi, the delegation also met with opposition leader Irakli Alesania; representatives of the majority and opposition parties in parliament; the chairwoman of the committee on rules and procedures; and with the parliamentary secretary of the government. The delegation was also briefed by U.S. officials and USAID-funded democracy advocates. The delegation found Georgian officials receptive to their message, and officials peppered the former members with specific questions about defense oversight in the U.S. Congress.