

GEORGIA PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with the Georgian parliament in 2006. The program with Georgia has focused on strengthening parliamentary oversight of the defense and security sectors, committee operations, parliamentary research and analysis, and information technology capabilities.

The Commission has encouraged development on these fronts through visits to Tbilisi by current and former Members of Congress, training seminars for Georgian members of parliament in Washington, and training programs for Georgian legislative staff. The Commission also supported a \$70,000 information technology project to significantly upgrade the parliament's internet access and internal information technology capabilities.

Accomplishments

- Improved internet access and internal information technology capabilities.
- Consulted with parliamentary and committee leadership on oversight, particularly in the defense sector, as parliament held an unprecedented series of oversight hearings in the wake of the August 2008 conflict with Russia.
- Helped research, budget and committee staff be more responsive to MP and committee requests for information and analysis.

Background

Georgia has been a democratic republic since the first multiparty, democratic parliamentary elections of October 28, 1990. Following a crisis involving allegations of ballot fraud in the 2003 parliamentary elections, Eduard Shevardnadze resigned as president on November 23, 2003, in the bloodless Rose Revolution. Georgia is a semi-presidential republic, with sole legislative authority invested in the unicameral Parliament of Georgia. Following constitutional amendments passed in 2003, the parliament was reduced to 150 members elected through a proportional representation system. Parliamentary elections will next be held in 2016.

Congressional Delegations

A delegation from the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) traveled to Ukraine and Georgia from June 28 to July 6, to renew the commission's partnership with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Parliament of Georgia. The delegation was led by HDP Chairman Peter Roskam (R-IL) and Ranking Democratic Member David Price (D-NC), along with Reps. Rob Woodall (R-GA), Lois Capps (D-CA), Tom Rice (R-SC), and Dina Titus (D-NV). This was HDP's first outbound legislative strengthening mission in the 114th Congress and 31st overall since 2005.

In March 2010, Representative David Price led a delegation of four Members of Congress, who spent two days in Tbilisi working with the Georgian parliament. The delegation discussed the state of civil-military relations in Georgia, the role of the political opposition, and other regional and bilateral issues with a multi-party group of legislators led by Speaker David Bakradze. The delegation also met with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili during its visit.

In December 2008, Representative Allyson Schwartz led a congressional delegation of five Members of Congress to Georgia to continue the partnership program with the Georgian Parliament. The Commission's program centered on improving oversight of the defense sector, budget analysis, and constituent relations. The delegation met with the relevant defense oversight committees, as well as parliamentary Speaker Bakradze and President Saakashvili. Administrative and research staff from the U.S. House of Representatives met with counterparts and hosted training sessions on committee operations and constituent relations.

Representative David Price led a delegation of three Members of Congress to Georgia in April 2007. The delegation focused on the role of committees and political parties within a parliament. The delegation also met with President Saakashvili, Speaker Bakradze, and U.S. Ambassador to Georgia John Tefft. The delegation also visited a local constituency office in Mtskheta to discuss improving constituent relations. Concurrently, staff from the Congressional Research Service and the Congressional Budget Office conducted training seminars with Georgian counterparts to work on improving their capacity for research and budget analysis.

A delegation of former Members of Congress visited Georgia on behalf of the Commission in January 2010. The group of four former Members, led by retired Representative Martin Lancaster, continued the Commission's efforts to promote greater defense and security sector oversight by the parliament. The delegation met with MPs from the defense and security committee, as well as the committees responsible for budget and finance, foreign affairs, and European integration. Former representatives Pete Geren, Joel Hefley and Heather Wilson joined Mr. Lancaster.

Staff Delegations

The most recent Commission visit to Georgia was in September 2015, when a delegation of current staff from the offices of HDP Chairman Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL) met in Tbilisi with committee chairs, members of parliament, the secretary general of the parliament, the director of research and parliamentary staff to gauge the extent to which the legislature has evolved since joining the HDP and how satisfied they were with the level and quality of engagement they had with the partnership. The delegation was pleased to learn of the democratic growth that had occurred and how HDP supported those democratic reforms as well as ways in which Georgia was interested in partnering with HDP to continue strengthening their democracy. Legislative staff from Georgia and the United States were eager to continue fostering the peer-to-peer relationships formed during the visit.

Retired researcher, Sherry Shapiro from the Congressional Research Service met in Tbilisi with staff of the Georgian parliament in September 2015 to build on the legislative research and analysis lessons learned during the Legislative Staff Institute in October 2014. The training consisted of an advanced course on techniques of public policy analysis and craft skills needed to work effectively with the Parliament. Additionally, it included a seminar on legal analysis, specifically related to reviewing draft legislation and establishing standards for drafting consistently structured legislation. The Commission consultants met with the secretary general of the parliament and the director of research to gauge the

extent to which MPs were making use of the research unit, how satisfied they were with the services they received from the unit, and ways to further partner with HDP to continue professionalizing the research unit staff.

MP Seminars

Parliaments worldwide face common challenges arising from a perceived crisis of trust by citizens. Public opinion polling in many regions reveals a continued decline of public confidence in legislative performance. To help address these issues, HDP convened a special MP exchange on this topic in September/October 2015, featuring participation by members of parliament from the legislatures of Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Nepal, and Ukraine. The program provided opportunities for sharing international perspective, strategies, and practical tools for managing citizen expectations, demonstrating effective legislative performance, and rebuilding public confidence. To this end, the program included meetings with members of the U.S. Congress; representatives of civil society, including from “watchdog” organizations; and staff of independent third-party audit agencies. The agenda also includes in-depth exploration of these topics through case studies that illustrate specific legislative responses to declining citizen trust in the legislature.

In February 2015, the National Democratic Institute facilitated a parliamentary exchange program that represented a departure from the previous technical subjects of focus, tackling “leadership in the digital economy.” The program was jointly supported by HDP and the Institute for Representative Government (IRG), a bipartisan organization of former members of Congress dedicated to strengthening the legislative institution. The program included 22 members of parliament in total, representing the legislatures of Colombia, Georgia, Ghana, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Nepal, Peru, Serbia and Tunisia. The program explored how, from the use of social media and mobile platforms by members of parliament to connect with constituents to enhanced capabilities for voter targeting, new technologies are changing how politics functions and parliamentary business is conducted in many countries. The program also probed how the burgeoning use of technology also raises a number of policy issues for parliaments around the world, including how best to support economic development and trade, protect citizens’ privacy interests, and defend against cybercrime. As an emerging field of policy expertise, issues relating to technology also present opportunities for women and young politicians to assert leadership, bringing new skills that may not otherwise exist within traditional party and parliamentary structures. During the exchange program, delegates explored these topics through dialogue with fellow members of parliament, parliamentary staff, policy experts and industry leaders in both Washington, D.C., and Silicon Valley, CA. The Silicon Valley portion of the trip was especially appreciated by delegates, who have been experimenting with several new applications, platforms, and technological initiatives to narrow the gap between parliament and citizens.

In November 2014, the HDP organized a week-long seminar for visiting members of the Georgian parliament in both Washington, D.C. and New York City, New York. The seminar was designed to enhance the leadership and legislative skills of women members of parliament regarding the designing of strategies for achieving the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The delegation explored methods to develop strategies within their countries to build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) based on the development priorities encapsulated in the 2015 SDGs. Most importantly, the seminar brought together a diverse, global delegation with their peers in the U.S. Congress, officials in the executive branch of the U.S. Government, non-governmental stakeholders, and officials at the United Nations to share best practices and proven solutions to achieving development goals in their home countries.

Georgian MPs were invited to Washington in June 2014, for a week-long seminar that focused on strengthening committee operations. The seminar hosted 20 MPs from five partnership countries. Delegates examined the U.S. Congress committee structure and functions including committee relations with the executive branch agencies they oversee; the role of committee chairs; the role and significance of public hearings; professional research, drafting, and amending services to committees; and several other related issues. Additionally, MPs observed a public committee hearing and met with current and former members and staff of the U.S. Congress.

In June 2013, the HDP organized a weeklong program for visiting members of the Georgian parliament designed to enhance the leadership and legislative skills of women members of parliament regarding economic development. The delegation attended briefings and participated in presentations and interactive exchanges given by their counterparts in the U.S. Congress, policy experts and other relevant civil society to explore the U.S. legislative process and examples of how women legislators can advance and effectively communicate to constituents, economic growth and related policy agendas.

Georgian MPs were invited to Washington in September 2009 for a week-long seminar focused on committee operations. The program began with an overview by the Congressional Research Service of the Congress and its committee structure. Committee staff and former members of Congress spoke to participants about various aspects of committee operations, including the role of staff and organizing public hearings. Roughly a dozen Members of Congress spoke to participants in the seminar, offering personal experiences about how they have used committees to advance legislative and oversight priorities.

The Commission organized a seminar in Washington for 10 visiting MPs from the Georgian Parliament led by Deputy Speaker Jemal Inaishvili in April 2006. The delegation spent two days in the South Carolina district of Representative Joe Wilson for a program about local-federal relations and constituent service. The delegation then traveled to Washington for personalized meetings with staff of House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, the Congressional Budget Office, and the Congressional Research Center

Staff Seminars

In December 2015, 4 parliamentary staff members from the Parliament of Georgia joined colleagues from four other countries for the first HDP staff institute tailored for partisan staff. The weeklong exchange focused on providing effective support to parliamentary groups and caucuses with sessions focused on utilizing support structures for caucus operations, the role of the caucus in communicating and advancing party platforms, promoting cohesion and discipline in caucus operations, and drawing on data and technology to enhance caucus operations.

In January 2015, two parliamentary staff members joined colleagues from 14 other countries for the largest HDP staff institute to date. Facilitated by the National Democratic Institute, the weeklong program focused on strengthening committee operations. The program sought to provide participants an overview of committee operations in the U.S. Congress, and covered topics such as internal and external policy analysis resources, the oversight role and oversight tools available to committees, as well as legislative and executive branch relations. Emphasis was placed on organizing, preparing and conducting public hearings. The program also provided the delegates the opportunity to discuss the role and functions of committees in their home legislatures.

Staff of Georgian parliament participated in a Legislative Staff Institute organized by the Commission in October 2014. The staff institute hosted 24 participants from 12 partnership countries for a week-long seminar that focused on legislative research, analysis, and drafting. The program began with an overview of how the U.S. Congress works, led by the office of the Clerk of the House and the Congressional Research Service. The seminar focused largely on the policy analysis process, which was designed to enhance analytical skills, strengthen the connection between information providers and the legislative process, and to ensure that legislatures were presented with a variety of choices to solve societal problems. The seminar provided best practices to (1) define the problem to be addressed, (2) identify alternative solutions for the resolution of the problem, and (3) trace the key impacts and effects of the alternatives, to utilize when providing products and services to the legislature.

In June 2010, two staff members of the Georgian Parliament traveled to Warsaw, Poland to attend the 20th anniversary of the Frost-Solomon Commission, which was the predecessor to the House Democracy Assistance Commission. They were joined by 22 staff members from 11 partnership countries, along with MPs and research staff from former partners of the Frost-Solomon Commission. While they were in Warsaw, current and former staff of the Congressional Research Service worked with the Georgian staff to help them further develop their parliamentary research service through workshops, peer-to-peer discussions, and open forums. Speakers underlined the importance of reliable, impartial, timely, and accurate research to the work of democratic legislatures. They also shared tips on how to engage legislators and help them see the value of research, which was a concern shared by a number of participants.

Staff from Georgian parliament participated in an HDP training program in Mavrovo, Macedonia, in November 2009 focused on committee operations. The program examined how staff can more effectively support committee operations by organizing hearings, soliciting public input on legislation, conducting policy and legal research, and writing comprehensive committee reports.

Staff from the Georgian parliament have also participated in all seven Legislative Staff Institutes organized by the Commission since 2007. Most recently, in December 2010, Georgian staff took part in an staff institute focused on committee operations, where they held meetings with the Congressional Research Service, staff from several House committees, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Commission. In addition, committee staff from the Republic of Macedonia shared their experience in developing procedures to begin using oversight hearings as an element of the work of their parliamentary committees.

In October 2010, staff from the Georgian Parliament participated in a staff institute that focused on strengthening legislative budget analysis capacity. Twenty-one staff from 11 partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with or presentations by officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Committees on Budget, Appropriations, and the Joint Committee on Taxation. Additionally, budget analysts from the Kenya National Assembly shared their experience in establishing and developing a parliamentary budget office.

The fifth staff institute was held in December 2009 and was organized in conjunction with the Congressional Research Service (CRS). The Institute hosted 27 participants from 12 partner countries, who were mostly officials and analysts of their respective parliament's research services. The program focused on the role of a research service in providing independent information and analysis to members of parliament and their staff.

In November 2009, Georgian parliamentary staff participated in a staff institute centered on the third annual World E-Parliament Conference, which specifically addressed the manner in which information and communications technology can help improve legislative representation, transparency, accountability, openness, and effectiveness.

Georgian parliamentary staff joined 28 parliamentary staffers from 10 partnership countries in Washington in December 2008 for a staff institute focused on strengthening committee operations. Participants gained an understanding of committee operations in the U.S. Congress and explored topics such as staff roles and responsibilities, legislative analysis, drafting and research, legislative-executive relations, and committee-press relations.

A staff institute in October 2008 centered on congressional oversight and budgeting again included staff from the Georgian parliament. Participants were given an overview of the budget process in the U.S. and the structure, organization, and services provided by the Congressional Budget Office. The program dealt with transparency, revenue estimation, and key budgetary policy issues such as health, defense, agriculture, infrastructure, and education.

Georgian parliamentary staff were present for the inaugural staff institute in December 2007. The Institute offered a two-track program, one for senior parliamentary administrators and the other on research and analysis services for the legislature. The program included a three-day overview of the U.S. Congress, a one-day visit to the Maryland Legislature to learn about state and local government, and a five-day series of meetings and workshops with current and retired Congressional research and administrative staff.

Self-Initiated Delegations

In March 2009, Speaker David Bakradze led a delegation of Georgian MPs to meet with Commission Members in Washington. The Georgian delegation met with Representatives David Price, David Dreier, Allyson Schwartz, and Lois Capps to discuss legislative strengthening, geopolitical developments, and bilateral relations.

Material Assistance

During the Commission delegation's visit in December 2008, Representative Schwartz dedicated a Commission funded \$70,000 information technology (IT) project to the Georgian parliament designed to significantly upgrade the internet access and information technology capabilities for Georgian MPs and staff.