

MACEDONIA PROGRAM PROFILE



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History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with the Assembly of Macedonia in 2006. The partnership focuses on strengthening the independence and effectiveness of the Macedonian parliament by assisting them with committee operations, constituent relations, information technology, rules of procedure, and staff structure.

Since 2006, the Commission has encouraged development on these fronts through Congressional delegations to Macedonia and training programs for both Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff. Additionally, the Commission donated a computer server suite to enhance the Macedonian Parliament's internal information technology capacity.

Accomplishments

- HDP's longstanding work with Macedonian parliamentary committees culminated with the Assembly's first-ever oversight hearing in 2010, when Rep. Earl Pomeroy was asked to testify on U.S. assistance to Macedonia.
- HDP hosted a training seminar for Macedonian constituent office staff with district directors of Members of Congress, helping to establish the importance of constituency offices in Macedonia and to persuade MPs to fund those offices when U.S. government funding ended.
- HDP work with Assembly leadership and senior staff on the importance of independent research and analysis helped lead to the establishment of the Parliamentary Institute, a research service and training institute for Macedonian MPs and staff. The PI has become a model of a non-partisan recruitment processes for other parts of the Macedonian civil service and more broadly in the region. Within its first year, the parliamentary institute has completed well over a hundred research requests from members; has conducted regular trainings for parliamentary members and staff; and has improved citizen and civic engagement with the Assembly -- welcoming hundreds of citizens to parliament each month through open parliament and school visit programs. Parliamentary leadership and staff both cite the influence of CRS, shared through HDP exchanges -- along with sustained engagement on the ground -- with helping grow the PI a model within the region and beyond

Background

After declaring independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia has worked to peacefully reconcile its diverse ethnic groups through parliamentary politics. The Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia is the nation's 120-seat legislative body whose members are elected every four years. The last round of parliamentary elections were held in 2014 and following an agreement that was reached between the government and opposition parties, the next round of parliamentary elections will be held on April 24, 2016.

Congressional Delegations

Chairman David Dreier headed a delegation to Macedonia in April 2012 to renew HDP's relationship with the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia. Members began their visit with bilateral meetings with President Gjorge Ivanov and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, where they discussed Macedonia's progress towards further democratization and majority-minority relations within Macedonia. Following these meetings with the government, the delegation met with the members of the steering committee for the Parliamentary Institute, which the Assembly is developing to serve as a legislative research service. Members of the HDP delegation emphasized the need for any such research service to be independent from political parties and for the hiring process to be conducted in a meritocratic and transparent manner. The delegation also met with the parliamentary group for collaboration with the U.S. Congress and held a workshop on committee oversight with the Assembly's committee chairs.

In addition, HDP and Rules Committee staff met with 65 constituent office managers from across Macedonia for an intensive program on effective constituency outreach. The program focused on how to run a constituent/district office and how best to provide casework services and communicate with constituents. The next day, following a session on effective parliamentary opposition held with Macedonian opposition leaders, the delegation met with the President of the Assembly, Trajko Veljanovski, to discuss the Parliamentary Institute, committee oversight, and his plans for the further development of the Assembly as an institution. Completing its visit to Macedonia, the delegation visited two constituency offices in a municipal building in Gazi Baba, Macedonia, just outside the capital. The delegation met with members of the Assembly representing the region, as well as the local mayor, to discuss the relationship between members of parliament and local officials and constituents.

Representative Earl Pomeroy led a congressional delegation to Macedonia in February 2010. During the two-day visit, the delegation met with the President, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Prime Minister. The U.S. delegation was present for the National Assembly's first-ever committee oversight hearing, which was made possible through the passage of legislation which codified the Assembly's oversight role and power. The hearing was headed by the Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee, whose chairwoman had participated in several partnership training programs, and focused on an international agreement between Macedonia and the United States. In addition to Representative Pomeroy, and the U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia, the Macedonian Minister of Education testified before the committee and responded to the questions of committee members. In addition to the focus on committee hearings, the delegation also held a training session on legislative research.

In March 2008, Representative David Price led a delegation of seven Members of Congress to Macedonia to meet with their counterparts in the Assembly. The delegation met with the Parliamentary Women's Caucus to discuss effective advocacy and legislative initiatives, as well as with parliamentary committee leaders to discuss oversight and committee operations. During the trip, the Members of Congress also met with Assembly Speaker Ljubisha Georgievski to dedicate a \$50,000 network server suite provided by the Commission to enhance the Assembly's information technology capabilities. The delegation also conducted discussions on effective constituency representation, which contributed to the decision by the Assembly to permanently establish constituency offices throughout the country.

In November 2006, Representative David Dreier led a delegation of four Members of Congress to Macedonia to work with counterparts in the Assembly on improving constituent relations and staff support. During the three-day visit, Members and Macedonian MPs discussed topics ranging from the

Assembly's newly revised rules of procedure to the role of majority and minority party coalitions. A concurrent staff program provided the opportunity for staff of the House of Representatives to build peer relationships with their Macedonian counterparts and share their expertise in committee operations and the organization of public hearings.

Staff Delegations

Retired researcher Sherry Shapiro from the Congressional Research Service met in Skopje with staff of the Macedonian 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 intelligence research, specifically related to mechanisms to conduct oversight of the intelligence community. The Commission consults 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.

In May 2015, a delegation of congressional staff of HDP members visited Kosovo and Macedonia as part of an assessment exercise to capture impact of HDP's work to date and make recommendations as to future programming. Led by former Rep. Earl Pomeroy (D-ND), the assessment team also included Omri Rahmil, Legislative Assistant to HDP Chair Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL) and Laura Thrift, Senior Policy Advisor to HDP Ranking Member Rep. David Price (D-NC), as well a senior NDI staff. During their visit, the delegation met with senior parliamentary leadership, as well as HDP program alumni, representatives of the diplomatic and donor communities, civil society activists, and other stakeholders with perspective on the legislature's development and the role of HDP in strengthening the parliamentary institution.

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 July 2012, six Macedonian MPs came to Washington to participate in a week-long seminar on committee operations. They were joined by colleagues from Liberia and Kosovo. The program covered various aspects of committee operations including the role of leadership, legislative ethics, oversight, and committee hearings. Members of Congress and staff also discussed the importance of non-partisan institutions such as the Congressional Research Service, the Government Accountability Office, and the Congressional Budget Office. More than a dozen current and former representatives were able to participate and share their experiences with the visiting MPs.

In June 2012, HDP invited four female MPs to participate in its inaugural Women's Seminar. The week-long program brought together women MPs from four partner countries (Macedonia, Indonesia, Kosovo, and Peru) to discuss economic and political issues relevant to women. The seminar began with presentations from think tanks and NGOs on topics including advocacy, economic empowerment, and using research to further policy. Later in the week, the MPs met with female Members of Congress, including the Co-Chairs of the Congressional Women's Caucus and a member of the House Leadership Team, to exchange ideas about particular challenges faced by elected female representatives and strategies for furthering women's advancement into leadership positions.

In September 2009, Macedonian Members of Parliament traveled to Washington for a week-long seminar focused on committee operations. The Congressional Research Service began the program with a presentation on Congress and its committee structure. Current 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. Members of Congress spoke to participants about their personal experiences utilizing committees to advance their legislative and oversight priorities.

The previous year, in July 2008, the Commission arranged a week-long seminar for Macedonian MPs to discuss committee structure, as well as the importance of an independent research service to quality legislating. U.S. House of Representatives committee staff and Members of Congress spoke to participants about committee operations, including staff roles and responsibilities in organizing hearings, and how committees are used to advance policy objectives.

The first Commission seminar for Macedonian legislators was held in April 2006. Ten members of the Assembly visited the district of Representative Candice Miller in suburban Detroit, which is home to the largest Macedonian-American population in the United States. The program included an introduction to state legislatures and local government, focusing on federal-local relations and constituent service. The Macedonian delegation then traveled to Washington for a program which paired them with their counterparts on various House committees. Discussions centered on the work of committees, the role of information technology, and the importance of legislative access to independent, expert information and analysis. The program culminated with a focus on majority-minority and intraparty relations.

Staff Seminars

NDI facilitated an HDP Parliamentary Staff Institute on "Strengthening the Legislative Institution in the Wake of Political Transitions" from April 27 to May 1, in Washington, D.C. In total, 17 parliamentary staff from Kosovo, Macedonia, Nepal, and Ukraine participated in the exchange. In addition to discussion of the normative principles of democratic legislative processes, the delegation engaged on a practical level with specific tools and resources they could use to support legislatures back in their home countries.

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 the Assembly of Macedonia 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.

Staff from the Assembly have participated in several Legislative Staff Institutes organized by the Commission since 2007. In October 2012, two staff members from the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia participated in a staff institute to strengthen legislative budget analysis. Twenty-three staff from twelve partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Budget, Appropriations, Agriculture, and Ways and Means Committees. Participants also met with representatives from the Government Accountability Office, the World Bank Institute and the International Budget Partnership.

In December 2010, Macedonian staff took part in a 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, Macedonian committee staff 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 Assembly 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, CRS, 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.

In June 2010, two staff members of the Assembly 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 Macedonian 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.

The fifth staff institute was held in December 2009 and was organized in conjunction with CRS. The Institute hosted 27 participants from 12 partner countries, including Macedonia, 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.

The Assembly of Macedonia hosted an HDP-organized training program in Mavrovo, Macedonia, in November 2009. Macedonian staff joined 24 other participants from Kosovo, Georgia and Mongolia for an intensive program emphasizing 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 effective committee reports.

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

Macedonian 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 media relations.

A staff institute in October 2008 on congressional oversight and budgeting again included staff from the Assembly. 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.

Macedonian 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.

Material Assistance

During a Congressional delegation visit in March 2008, the Commission donated a \$50,000 computer server suite to enable the Macedonian parliament to move away from its reliance on hard copies of documents and to an internet-accessible legislative information system for its Members. The server has improved internal legislative management, and strengthened the Assembly's capacity to conduct independent research and analysis.