

UKRAINE PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with Ukraine in November 2006, and the program ended in June 2011. During that time, the Commission worked with the Ukrainian parliament in the areas of committee oversight, parliamentary politics, ethics, and the legislative application of information technology.

The Commission encouraged development through Congressional visits to Ukraine, and training seminars in the U.S. for visiting MPs and parliamentary staff.

Background

Ukraine's legislative branch is a unicameral, 450-seat parliament known as the Verkhovna Rada. The parliament elects the executive branch and the Cabinet of Ministers, which led by the Prime Minister. Ukraine follows a semi-presidential system, so in addition to the parliament and prime minister, a president is directly-elected every five years. The Verkhovna Rada is responsible for drafting laws, ratifying foreign treaties, electing judges, appointing some officials, and if necessary, amending the Constitution.

The wave of demonstrations and protests known as *Euromaidan* began in Ukraine on the night of November 21, 2013, with public protests as citizens demanded closer European integration. The protests ultimately led to the revolution of dignity and snap parliamentary elections were held on October 26, 2014. Since *Euromaidan*, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine reengaged with HDP and was formally reinstated as a partner in 2015. The commitment of a new generation of Ukrainian political leaders has been evidenced by their eagerness to advance institutional reform.

Congressional Delegations

In June 2011, Representative David Dreier led a four-Member delegation to Kiev to meet with members of the Verkhovna Rada. The delegation met with members of the Rada's U.S. Interparliamentary Group, led by Oleh Bilorus, chairman of the Rada's foreign affairs committee, to discuss relations between the Congress and the Rada after the end of the HDP program. The delegation also met with Arseniy Yatseniuk, leader of the Front for Change Party; Yulia Tymoshenko, leader of the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko; and Justice Minister Oleksandr Lavrynovych.

In late March 2008, the Commission organized a delegation of seven Members of Congress, led by Representative David Price, to meet with their counterparts in the Verkhova Rada. The delegation focused on meeting newly elected members, and held discussions with them on constituent relations, committee operations, budgeting, and social policy. They also met with Speaker Arseniy Yatseniuk and senior members of the foreign affairs and defense committees. In addition, the delegation sat down

with President Yushchenko and met with local and regional officials in Lviv, the western Ukrainian city that has played an important role in Ukrainian culture.

Three Members of Congress, led by Representative David Price, visited Ukraine on the Commission's behalf in March 2007. They met with Speaker Alexander Moroz and with the foreign affairs and national defense committees to discuss issues of bilateral concern. The delegation met with numerous committee chairmen to discuss committee relations and operations. Capacity-building sessions were held on political ethics, the application of information technology to legislative work, and role of political parties in a legislature.

Staff Delegations

In November 2015, to conclude an assessment exercise to capture impact of HDP's work and make recommendations as to future programming, the largest HDP assessment delegation to date visited Ukraine and Tunisia, the latter an HDP observer country for 2015-2016. The delegation included: Izmira Aitch, Legislative Assistant to Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI); Jeff Billman, Legislative Assistant to HDP Chair Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL); Robert Cogan, Legislative Director to Rep. Diane Black (R-TN); Lawrence Kluttz, Communications Director for HDP Ranking Member Rep. David Price (D-NC); Annika Parks, Legislative Assistant to Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA); David Rosenbaum, Legislative Director for Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV); Daniel Rubin, Communications Director for Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA); and senior NDI staff. During their visit, the delegation met with senior parliamentary and party 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. While Ukraine's participation in HDP had waned in the years preceding Euromaidan, during the assessment visit, the Verkhova Rada was formally reinstated as a HDP partner legislature and agreed to collaboratively host a HDP regional exchange in Kiev in 2016 focused on the 21st century parliament.

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 2008, the Commission organized a week-long seminar for Ukrainian MPs to discuss the importance of an independent legislative research service. House Committee staff and Members of Congress also spoke to participants about various aspects of committee operations, including the role of staff in organizing public hearings, and how committees are used to advance policy and oversight priorities.

Staff Seminars

In December 2015, 6 parliamentary staff members from the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 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.

Ukrainian parliamentary staff joined 28 parliamentary staffers from 10 partnership countries in Washington in December 2008 for a Legislative 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 Ukrainian 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.