

# GEORGIA PROGRAM PROFILE



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## 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, budget analysis, constituent relations 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 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. Georgia held parliamentary elections on October 1, 2012.

## Congressional Delegations

Representative David Dreier led a four-Member delegation to Georgia in June 2011 to meet with members of parliament. A full day of meetings in the parliament focused on constituent relations, budget analysis and new amendments to the Georgian constitution. The delegation enjoyed a dinner meeting with President Mikhail Saakashvili and Speaker David Bakradze. Members also traveled to the eastern Georgian city of Signaghi to meet with the local MP, constituents and local officials.

In March 2010, Representative David Price led a delegation of four Members of Congress for an overnight stop in Tbilisi. 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.

### **MP Seminars**

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 June 2010, two staff members of the Georgian Parliament traveled to Warsaw, Poland to attend the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 nine Legislative Staff Institutes organized by the Commission since 2007. In October 2012, two staff members from the Georgian Parliament 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 January 2012, two staff members participated in a training seminar on legislative research and analysis. They were joined by colleagues from 12 other HDP partner countries. The parliamentary staff institute included presentations and discussions with Members of Congress and top officials from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Current and former CRS staff provided the participants an overview of basic legislative research and analysis techniques including identifying sources of information, basic policy analysis, developing alternatives for the legislature, and conducting impact analysis.

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.