

TRIP REPORT:
**KOSOVO &
MACEDONIA**
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A congressional delegation from the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) traveled to the Balkans from February 13-23, 2010, to inaugurate a partnership with the Assembly of Kosovo, advance its existing partnership with the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, and engage with legislators and other officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The delegation was led by Rep. Earl Pomeroy (D-ND) and was HDP's fifth outbound congressional delegation of the 111th Congress and 18th overall since 2005.

The delegation began its visit to the region in Bosnia and Herzegovina (February 14-16), meeting with the Tri-Presidency of State, the Prime Minister, and the leadership of the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples, as well as members of civil society. The delegation emphasized the need for meaningful constitutional reform in order for sustainable democratic development to be achieved.



Rep. Pomeroy leads a training session on committee hearings with Kosovo MPs.

The delegation's trip to Kosovo (February 16-17) marked the formal inauguration of HDP's partnership with the Assembly of Kosovo, which was selected as the commission's 13th partner legislature in 2009. The delegation's visit coincided with the second anniversary of Kosovo Independence Day (February 17) and allowed for HDP participation in official celebrations commemorating the event.

The delegation began its program in the Assembly with meetings with the Speaker and the Presidency of the Assembly (a nine-member leadership team representing the major parties). The centerpiece of the two-day program was an afternoon of intensive training sessions on the committee hearing process and constituent services. These training seminars drew senior MP and staff participation and included spirited discussions and Q&A sessions. The delegation also met with the Prime Minister and members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, which allowed for discussions on bilateral foreign policy issues.

On February 17, following its participation in the official Independence Day ceremony in the Assembly with the Speaker, the President and the Prime Minister, the delegation traveled to Gračanica, the largest Serb enclave south of the Ibar River, to underscore HDP's position that a commitment to minority rights and participation is a key component of democratic development. The delegation met with the mayor and the city council and held candid and substantive discussions on the status of democratic reforms since independence.

The delegation traveled next to Macedonia (February 17-18), meeting with the President, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Prime Minister. The focal points of its program in the Assembly were participation in a milestone oversight hearing and a training session on legislative research. The oversight hearing, the first of its kind since the recent passage of a law codifying the Assembly's oversight role and powers, was held by the Foreign Affairs Committee, whose chairwoman has

participated in several HDP training programs. The hearing focused on an international agreement between Macedonia and the United States on bilateral assistance. In addition to Rep. Pomeroy and the U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia, the Minister of Education testified before the committee and responded to the questions of the committee members. In addition, HDP's legislative research training session helped to lay the groundwork for a planned Parliamentary Institute, which will provide independent research and analysis for members and staff of the Assembly.



Rep. Pomeroy testifies as a witness in the Macedonia Assembly's first-ever oversight hearing

The delegation continued its mission in Serbia (February 18-21). In Belgrade, the delegation met with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly, and members of the Serbia-U.S. Caucus, as well as representatives from civil society. The delegation encouraged Serbia's pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration and discussed the political and economic reforms that such a path will entail. The importance of strengthening the U.S.-Serbia relationship and engaging in legislature-to-legislature exchanges were also discussed at length.

The delegation also visited Kraljevo, a city in Serbia's heartland that was bombed during the NATO campaign in 1999, and the location of Rep. Pomeroy's study abroad program in 1973. While nationalist and anti-American sentiment has run strong in the area, the delegation was very warmly received by the mayor and members of the city council, garnering a significant amount of very positive national and local media coverage.



Rep. Pomeroy meets with local officials in Kraljevo, where he studied abroad in 1973.

On February 21, the delegation returned to Kosovo for a full day with U.S. troops stationed at Camp Bondsteel. In addition to receiving briefings on the KFOR mission and touring the facilities, the delegation spent several hours on patrol with Liaison Monitoring Teams, traveling to the largest ethnic-Albanian and ethnic-Serbian cities in the U.S.-led sector, including a visit to housing for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The delegation concluded its mission in Ramstein, Germany, including a visit to the Landstuhl military hospital.

Overall, the delegation successfully advanced HDP's mission of supporting the development of democratic institutions and strengthening cooperation between the U.S. Congress and its peer legislatures in the Balkans. The Kosovo Assembly appears very committed to strengthening its young legislative institutions and protecting the rights of minorities, while Kosovar Serbs south of the Ibar River are demonstrating a greater interest in participating in Kosovo's democratic process. The Macedonia Assembly continues to be an active and engaged partner and is showing strong signs of incorporating HDP training into its legislative processes.

For more information about the House Democracy Partnership, please contact the HDP office at (202) 226-1641 or visit <http://democracy.house.gov>.