

TRIP REPORT:
**GEORGIA, UKRAINE
& MONGOLIA**

JUNE 2011



A delegation from the House Democracy Partnership (HDP) traveled to four countries in the former Soviet bloc from June 3-12, 2011, to advance partnerships with the legislatures of Georgia and Mongolia and to conclude its five-year program in Ukraine. The Commission also visited Kyrgyzstan to explore the possibility of a program in the newly democratic Central Asian nation. The delegation was led by HDP Chairman David Dreier (R-CA) and included HDP Ranking Democratic Member David Price (D-NC), HDP Member Susan Davis (D-CA), and Representative Brad Miller (D-NC). This was the second HDP congressional delegation of the 112th Congress and the partnership's 23rd overall since its inception in 2005.

The delegation began its mission in Georgia (June 4-7), which was selected as an HDP partner in 2005. This was the Partnership's third full Congressional delegation to Georgia and fifth overall stop. The visit allowed HDP Members and their counterparts in the National Parliament of the Republic of Georgia to discuss the impact of constitutional reforms on the parliament, the role of the parliamentary opposition, budget oversight, and constituent outreach.



Georgian MP Nuzgar Abulashvili shares an anecdote with David Dreier and David Price

After a Saturday meeting with Georgian civil society leaders and a dinner with President Mikhail Saakashvili and Speaker David Bakradze, the delegation on Sunday traveled to the eastern town of Signaghi, about 70 miles southeast of Tbilisi, to meet with MP Nuzgar Abulashvili, local officials, and constituents. The delegation learned about how residents communicate with their local MP and how the MP assists them with issues like disaster relief and accessing government services, and shared their experiences of assisting their constituents.

The delegation began the workweek in the National Parliament with a full day of meetings with Georgian MPs. The delegation met with Pavle Kublashvili, chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee, to discuss the major constitutional changes approved last year, which reduce the power of the president and increase the power of the parliament, such as giving parliament the power to nominate the prime minister. The delegation discussed the role of the minority parties with leaders of the opposition factions, and discussed regional and security issues with members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

The Members of Congress finished their program in Georgia by discussing budget oversight with the Committee on Budget and Finance and drew upon their experience in Signaghi in a discussion of constituent relations with "majoritarian" MPs – those who are elected from single-member districts rather than from national party lists. Concurrently, Ms. Davis met with female staff participating in a program for future women leaders, and congressional staff met with their counterparts who work on budget analysis, committees, and constituent relations.

The delegation's June 7 visit to Kiev was the Commission's third to Ukraine, and it concluded the HDP partnership that began in 2006. At a luncheon for MPs, including Oleh Bilorus, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Chairman Dreier spoke of the importance of the relationship with Ukraine and the Verkhovna Rada, and he delivered a letter from the chairs of the Congressional Ukraine Caucus pledging to maintain strong links between the two legislatures. The delegation discussed the Ukrainian political scene with opposition leaders Arseniy Yatseniuk and Yulia Tymoshenko and discussed the new electoral law with Justice Minister Oleksandr Lavrynovych.

Kyrgyzstan is one of seven countries worldwide identified as an HDP candidate country. During the July 8-9 visit, Kyrgyz MPs expressed pride in their nation's development as a parliamentary democracy since the April 2010 revolution, though they expressed concern about their authoritarian neighbors seeking to undermine their democratic system. They praised USAID projects to assist the parliament,



Rep. Susan Davis and Mongolian MP Oyun after discussing the Parliamentary Research Center

and expressed interest in a potential partnership with HDP. The delegation met with a half-dozen MPs, led by Vice Speaker Asylbek Alymbekov, before seeing Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev, who spoke of Kyrgyzstan as a democratic model for Central Asia and Afghanistan. Members met with several MPs from committees receiving assistance from USAID and discussed program details. The delegation concluded by meeting Speaker Akhmatbek Keldibekov.

The delegation's final stop was Mongolia (July 9-11), where HDP has had a program since 2006. The delegation began a full day of meetings in parliament by discussing the status of the Parliamentary Research Center, which was created in 2009 by the parliament following several HDP seminars in Washington where Mongolian MPs had been introduced to the Congressional Research Service. At meetings with Speaker Demberel and with committee chairmen, the delegation discussed the proposed electoral law for the 2012 polls, which is to include a mix of proportional and district representation. At a lunch with Majority Leader Lundeejantsen, the delegation discussed future HDP cooperation with the State Great Hural, particularly for the research service. The delegation and the Budget Committee discussed how HDP might assist parliament in developing a budget office modeled on the Congressional Budget Office.

The delegation concluded its Mongolia program with a Saturday visit to the Bayanzurkh District, comprising suburban and exurban neighborhoods of the sprawling Ulan Bator municipality. The delegation met with the district governor, council president, administrators and residents to discuss the interaction between districts and the parliament.

Before departing Mongolia, the delegation met at the airport with President Elbegdorj, who was returning to the capital from a provincial visit. The president told the delegation that he is committed to democracy despite the challenge of having two autocratic neighbors, and he held up Mongolia as an example to Kyrgyzstan in its democratic development.

For more information about the House Democracy Partnership or its work in Eurasia, contact (202) 226-1641 or visit <http://democracy.house.gov>.