Project Proposal

Transparency International Georgia Office in Parliament

The Context:

Problem Analysis

During the past year and a half parliament of Georgia introduced significant number of new legislative initiatives aimed at combating widespread corruption and implementing reforms in different sectors. However, in the parliament's attempts to carry out numerous changes in a short timeframe, it has not adequately soliciting public input and made the Georgian people aware of the concrete benefits provided by the new legal framework.

Information-sharing mechanisms in Georgia are slow and weak, thus people have vague opinion about the work of the parliament in general. Even though parliamentary plenary sessions are broadcast live, it is very difficult for ordinary citizens to understand how parliament works on a more practical level: what they do from session to session, how political decisions are made, what is the parliamentary agenda, what kind of work is done in parliamentary committees or how citizens can be involved in those processes at all.

This alienation from parliament is very noticeable outside of Tbilisi, where citizens feel completely divorced from the activities of their representatives in parliament, and are unable to influence the decisions made in their name. As a result, the few benefits that democratization has brought so far are concentrated almost exclusively in the capital, further widening the already large center-periphery gap.

During the past year TI Georgia implemented a parliamentary project funded by SDC. Its purpose was to enable Georgian parliamentarians to make informed decisions about draft laws by eliciting expert advice and actively involving civil society in the legislative process. There were several major findings of the project that should be considered in future projects with parliament:

- The new leadership in parliament seems to be more self-confident, trying to move more quickly and sometimes ignoring recommendations from outsiders and breaking parliamentary procedures. Despite the worthiness of the government's initiatives, lack of practical experience and comprehensive expertise have influenced the quality of new initiatives. After facing problems caused by new decisions and legislative initiatives, the government starts to realize the importance of external assistance. That said, in September, Nino Burjanadze rolled out a new initiative to revise already adopted laws again, ensuring parliamentary procedures. She said that, no matter what kind of initiatives come to parliament, they will be discussed thoroughly and the process for considering them will not be sped up artificially.

- Of the three components of the previous project – 1) sending drafts electronically to experts and receiving and distributing written comments, 2) parallel hearings for the general public held outside of Tbilisi, while hearings are held inside the parliament in Tbilisi, 3) expert

discussions both inside and outside of Tbilisi – the most effective approach was the third, interviewing and delivering comments of appropriate segments of public (especially outside of Tbilisi) to the Parliament and other related governmental structures.

Organizing focus groups helped the parliament significantly in the analysis of the draft laws from the perspective of those people who are most influenced by the new legislation, and it also increased public ownership of the new laws.

- The project experience has shown that researching issues and ideas before a law is drafted is more effective. Often the main directions of legislation are already defined by the time drafting begins and afterwards there is less chance to influence the process. On the other hand, when issues are chosen before the draft is written, there are more opportunities to study the main areas of concern and address them appropriately.

- The most active and important committees in the parliament are the Legal Issues and Finance and Budget Committees. Almost 80 to 90 percent of the drafts from parliamentary legislative agenda are considered in these committees. Therefore, Transparency International Georgia worked most intensely with these committees.

Parliamentary Related Projects of TI Georgia Funded by Other Donors

Currently TI Georgia is implementing the Majoritarian Project: Informed Citizens and Accountable Government funded by the British Government, i.e. Global Opportunities Fund: Reuniting Europe.

The purpose of the project is to improve the quality of governance and strengthen democracy in Georgia by facilitating a link between the legislative branch of government and citizens in the regions. Since the lack of information and advocacy skills are most apparent in the regions, the project is focused on majoritarian MPs – elected in single mandate districts, and their staff members in nine regions of Georgia.

The project aims to increase majoritarian MPs' responsiveness to their constituencies and facilitate public participation in the legislative process through a number of corresponding mechanisms, such as: monitoring majoritarian MPs' work in parliament and in their respective districts; publicizing monitoring results to draw public and parliament's attention to this issue; launching a nationwide civic education campaign to inform people about the duties of their majoritarian MPs' and the ways in which to communicate with them; assisting majoritarian MPs in organizing open public meetings to report on parliament's agenda and inform citizens about their work in the parliament; disseminating parliamentary voting/attendance records in the regions to allow the public to track majoritarian MPs' adherence to their commitments; informing regions about new laws and reform initiatives; improving legislation regulating majoritarian MPs' work.

Other Parliamentary Related Projects

1. EU-FUNDED ACTIVITIES

A number of activities are currently supported by the European Union under the European Commission's Rapid Reaction Mechanism programme (RRM), with a view to preparation for the TACIS programme.

"Strengthening effectiveness and transparency of the Parliament of Georgia", implemented by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**. Main activities:

- Modernising the computer system and developing a unified Local Area Network (LAN) for the Parliament and training for staff in Information and Communication Technologies
- Training of staff to improve efficiency of legislative activity and to improve Members' understanding of their roles
- Enhancing the outreach of parliament through the internet
- Improving the visitors' entrance to the parliament, making it more accessible, informative and user-friendly
- Developing a prototype of a national parliament regional office in Kutaisi (Georgia's second city)

"Technical assistance to the Georgian Parliament – EU legislative screening", implemented by **B&S Europe**. Main activities:

- Enhancing resources and providing training for screening of EU legislation
- Training in legislative drafting
- organizational audit and reform plan in view of developing a methodology for effective monitoring of EU legislation by parliamentary staff, including research staff, and by MP's in view of effective oversight and law making
- organization of a conference on the legislative process, and specifically on European law approximation within the remit of legislative and oversight work more generally
- development of clear rules and procedures for the screening process at all stages and codification
- training (of trainers) on legal drafting, with special reference to EC legislation

"Latvian-Georgian Parliamentary Co-operation", implemented by the **London Information Network for Conflicts and State Building** (**LINKS**). Main activities:

- Organizing visits between the Latvian and Georgian parliaments in order to develop good parliamentary practice and partnership within the EU, particularly in respect of EU harmonisation of legislation

These three projects above will each last a maximum of six months, i.e. until mid-2005, and will coordinate their activities to ensure complementarity and communication of good practice as well as providing foundations for further work in their respective areas to be funded under the TACIS programme.

"Parliamentary Reform in Georgia – IABP business and parliament scheme", implemented by the **International Association of Business and Parliament (IABP)**, was supported by the RRM from June until December 2004 and is continuing with other donor funding. Main activities:

- Promotion of MP's understanding of the business world within a transparent and non-corrupt climate
- Running short-term fellowships in companies for a number of Members
- Developing a pre-legislative review of the Tax Code

2. EU TACIS: support to the reform of the Georgian Parliament, implemented by **GTZ**. Main activities:

- Professionalism and working conditions of the Parliament
- Oversight of the executive
- EU approximation and legislative screening
- Improved relations between the Parliament and civil society and interest groups
- Fruitful relationships between the Georgian Parliament, parliaments from EU member states and the European Parliament

3. USAID-FUNDED ACTIVITES:
The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is funding a project being implemented by the **National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)** entitled "Georgia: Parliamentary Oversight, Responsiveness and Transparency (PORT)". Main activities:

- Develop political and legislative skills of the Members of Parliament
- Support the democratic reform process
- Strengthen parliamentary committee operations and public outreach
- Develop long-term strategies for institutional reform and development.

4. THE NETHERLANDS GOVERNMENT-FUNDED ACTIVITIES:
A project entitled "Economic Good Governance and Parliamentary Oversight: A programme in support of Georgia's parliamentary democracy", implemented by **East-West Parliamentary Practice Project**

The Project:

The Transparency International Georgia (TIG) Office in Parliament will strengthen democracy in Georgia by acting as a link and facilitator between the legislative branch of government and civil society, ensuring openness of the parliament by improving the skills of the communications staff.

The aims of the TIG Office is: 1. to enable Georgian parliamentarians to make informed decisions about draft laws by providing them with advice of lower level specialists and actively involving civil society in the legislative process; and 2. improving transparency of information given from the parliament, thus better informing the citizens about the work carried out by the parliament. Civil society's role in the legislative process, which is often taken for granted in established democracies, is very weak in Georgia.

The TIG Office will achieve these two aims:

1. by disseminating draft laws in advance and organizing public discussions about them. The Office will be in constant communication with lawmakers, civil society organizations, interest groups and ordinary citizens both inside and outside Tbilisi. This will ensure that interested parties can give input on draft legislation through focus groups and roundtable discussions within the narrow timeframe for deliberation set by the legislative system in Georgia. TIG will then consolidate this feedback and provide the recommendations in a single, accessible dossier while parliament is still considering the draft. This rapid response will enable the media, parliamentarians and the public to lobby for changes that strengthen transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption.

2. by increasing parliament's communication skills and distributing publications describing parliament's work. TI Georgia will build an active and intensive relationship with media and public relations services in parliament to ensure maximum coverage of the comments and recommendations it has elicited.

3. by conducting parliamentary survey on public opinion about their expectations towards the parliament, in order to assist Georgian parliament.

4. by informing public about newly adopted laws through the dissemination of comprehensive brochures explaining new regulations.

The Process:

The TIG office will work in following directions: 1. facilitating the review of the draft laws proposed to the parliament by establishing civil society and the media as key players in the lawmaking process, and 2. increasing professional abilities and responsibilities of PR people in the parliament and improving the quality and transparency of information given from them; 3. providing public opinion on parliamentary work to the parliament, thus improving parliament's work.

1. TI Georgia will identify the most important draft laws from those that are registered at parliament organizational department. Up to fifty new drafts may be presented every two weeks, but only the most important would will be selected. The office will then commission short studies and organize focus group meetings/roundtables on the legislation, especially outside of Tbilisi.

Through the commissioning of short studies and the facilitation of small-group discussions, TIG will solicit civil society, i.e. lower level practitioners' opinions and advice on draft legislation in the respective fields. Input will be solicited from the groups of society that would most impacted by the law, both inside and outside of Tbilisi, where participants will be given the drafts beforehand. Points brought up in discussion will be incorporated into the recommendations.

Since temporary external support on new legislative initiatives is mostly provided by experts from Georgian and international NGOs, as they have better access to the information and to the parliament as a whole. However, ordinary citizens and lower level specialists of the fields affected by these initiatives are usually less represented, and thus TI Georgia wants to focus on this group. This is an important group as it has practical experience in the respective field and is aware of all important details.

TIG will then consolidate this feedback and deliver the recommendations in a single, accessible format while parliament is still considering the draft. These comments will include, but not be limited to: 1) legality and compatibility with other legislation, 2) potential impact on society, and 3) recommendations for improvement.

This rapid response will enable the media, parliamentarians and the public to lobby for changes that strengthen transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption. TIG itself will offer no comment on the draft laws or amendments, but will only act as a facilitator for civil society and expert comment.

In addition, TIG will distribute the dossier – summaries of the focus group/roundtable discussions - in electronic format to civil society organizations, interest groups, academics and engaged citizens via an electronic mailing list and will post the information on the TIG website. This will open a

window of opportunity for civil society to play an active role in the shaping and making of laws, empowering it to become a key player in Georgian politics.

This will further promote the involvement of civil society in the legislative process, as well as help build the capacity of the third sector – especially in the regions – to interact with the public, special interest groups and the media.

The reports and the supporting materials will be compiled in binders for each of the draft laws that are assessed with TIG involvement. This information will be made available to interested groups and individuals, including the media.

2. In order for Georgian citizens to abide by new laws and reforms, they will need to understand how these laws serve them. In that respect, TI Georgia also wants to work with parliament on improvement of information sharing mechanisms.

Activities designed to improve parliament's external communication mechanisms will take two forms: a. trainings for PR people in parliament, and b. parliamentary related publications.

a. Specific trainings will be held for PR persons from Speaker's office, committees, factions and individual MPs' offices. The goal of these trainings is to help the communications staff in these offices to: increase public awareness of their office's activities; ensure transparency and accountability of parliament; inform population about parliamentary activities; increase the skill level of PR services and spokespersons in parliament; connect Georgian citizens with parliament, etc. Trainings will be followed by additional activities to ensure effectiveness of the trainings.

TI Georgia, together with PR organizations, will train spokespersons of Parliamentary Factions, Parliamentary Committees, Speaker's Office and Majoritarian MPs' offices.

PR trainings will have two components: the trainings themselves and follow-up activities of the training results. Trainings will be divided in two parts: PR Communication Trainings and Constituency Outreach Trainings.

Communication Trainings will include training on: effective communication skills; negotiations with media; conflict management; creativity; how to write press release, how to communicate with journalists, how to organize press conferences, etc.

Training company will be selected through an open tender.

Selected PR company will held two days training for eight different groups of 12 to 15 people each.

Constituency Outreach Trainings will include training on: developing a mission statement; communicating main messages with public; direct interaction with citizens; studying citizens concerns, etc.

One international and other local trainers will conduct the training for the same segment of parliamentary staff. Two days training will be held for three different groups of 30 to 35 people each.

Following the trainings TI Georgia will continue communicating with the majoritarian MPs', parliamentary faction and committee, and the speaker's office staff providing them with ongoing

consultations on PR related activities, including, assisting them in writing up press releases, arranging press conferences, maintaining tight communication with media representatives, etc.

b. Additionally, parliament and committee-related work will be reflected in different publications and distributed appropriately. TI Georgia will help the parliament to prepare committee-related information developed during the previous year, prepare analysis of their work in different sectors, and distribute it. Parliamentary staff will be directly involved in preparation procedures.

The following publications will be created during the project:

- **Annual Reports on Parliamentary Committees**: With the assistance of TI Georgia, all thirteen committees will develop reports describing committee work during the last year.. Thus thirteen different reports of this type will be created (I Year).
- **Brochures on newly adopted laws:** With the assistance of TI Georgia, the parliament will develop brochures on newly adopted laws. These brochures will be written in easy-to-understand language and will provide useful information on how the new laws affect citizens' everyday lives (II Year).

3. Conducting public opinion poll is the part of the Public Awareness Raising Project, idea of which came from the speaker of parliament Nino Burjanadze and aims to study public attitude towards the parliament in order to improve parliamentary work. The project aims to study public attitude towards the parliament through conducting a public opinion survey. The parliament intends to use the results of this survey to develop its strategic framework for the future activities. The survey will research public opinion about the following issues: legislative work of the parliament – its content, level and accessibility for public; behavior of MPs; parliamentary PR work; level of public awareness about the parliament; spheres of public interest related to parliament; public expectations and needs, etc. The survey results and analysis will be published and distributed among MPs and organizations working with the parliament. It will also be provided to media and posted on TI Georgia's website.

The work on survey will start with the interviewing MPs – faction and committee chairs, opposition representatives and individual MPs on existing problematic areas and issues they would like to improve.

The Survey will provide not only descriptive (statistical), but also analytical data. The survey results will be interpreted to provide basis for the development of recommendations to improve parliament's future work. Total of 1500 respondents will be interviewed. Each interview will last approximately an hour.

The surveying company will be selected through an open tender.

The Results:

In addition to the preparation and distribution of the various publications on the activities of parliament and committee-related work, TIG expects that the implementation of this project will yield the following additional concrete results:

- Enable lawmakers to consider the wider consequences that proposed laws have on the lives and livelihoods of the most disenfranchised and vulnerable segments of the population and thus improve the quality of legislation;

- Empower traditionally marginalized groups, such as Georgia's rural population and thus tackle the widening political and economic gap between Tbilisi and the regions by raising the profile of regional and rural issues on the political agenda;
- Build popular support for the rule of law and fight corruption by enhancing transparency in the democratic decision-making process;
- Improve the professional abilities of parliament's communications staff and help them to understand their role in an open, democratic society;
- Build the capacity of Parliament to serve the needs of its constituents, improve the quality of parliament's public relations and raising public awareness of parliament's activities;
- Informing citizens of the work carried out by individual committees throughout the year and how they can be involved in the early stages of policy development;
- Improve the quality and the transparency of the information disseminated by parliamentary spokespersons, consolidate the relationship between civil society and parliament.

Currently it is very difficult for parliament to achieve these results without external assistance. Temporary external support is necessary because of parliament's limited experience in soliciting advice and input into the legislative process, the lack of financial resources in the parliamentary structures, and the massive workload already faced by a parliament committed to rapid change.

TI Georgia will carry out its project in close partnership with parliament. Parliament members and staff will be actively involved in organizing and conducting the activities carried out within the scope of this project. They will be involved in focus group discussions, trainings, committees' annual report preparations, brochure development, etc. thus practicing habits of using public outreach and information sharing mechanisms that will assist them in their future work.

During the two-year project TI Georgia office in parliament will build and develop capacity of exchanging information and increasing interaction between the public and parliament. TI's experience will build up on lessons learned during the project implementation. In addition to constant interaction with parliamentarians, periodical reports on project developments and recommendations will be available for all interested parties – parliament's structural divisions, individuals, or civil society representatives. This knowledge then can be transferred to the parliamentary staff on an ongoing basis as well as to the new members of the parliament that will come into power after the 2008 elections.

By bringing together parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, regional non-governmental organizations, interest groups, and the media in the process making laws, TIG will build the capacity of all involved to constructively work with each other for the greater benefit of the country. This will lay a solid and sustainable foundation for stronger civil society participation in the future, especially from the regions, institutionalizing a method of public input into the legislative process.