

ONE ON ONE

Out of the shadows

A country that has emerged from the shadows is eagerly developing links with our region, recently sending their parliamentary Speaker to Australia.

How do you create an open, equitable democracy in a country where corruption is so endemic that public service positions are bought, not earned, and bribes are an accepted price of doing business?

This was the situation facing the new government of Georgia following the Rose Revolution that swept them to power in 2003.

The country of Georgia, not to be confused with the US state of the same name, was an independent nation for hundreds of years prior to being annexed by the Russian empire in the 19th century, developing its own alphabet, religion and distinct culture.

However after nearly 200 years of Russian and Soviet rule, and years of civil war and political instability following independence in 1991, the country was a shadow of its former glory.

Finally the Georgian people had enough, and rose up to overthrow their government following disputed parliamentary elections in November 2003 – a revolution named for the roses protesters carried when they took over parliament.

But while the opposition National Movement party were quickly installed as the new government on a platform of democratic reform, fighting the corruption stifling the country was not so simple.

The current Chairman of the Georgian parliament, Dr David Bakradze, was part of the government elected after the revolution and remembers how deeply corruption ran in his country at that time.

“It was a pyramid, the minister was on the top and then it was going all the way down,” Dr Bakradze said during a recent visit to Sydney with a Georgian parliamentary delegation.

“Every police officer was obliged to take bribes. Part of this bribe was going to his pocket, and part was going up, to his boss. Then his boss was taking part of the bribe and sending part of the bribe again to his boss. And all this money was collecting on the top, going to the minister himself.

“So it was well organised, well structured corruption in every ministry.”

With the police at the forefront of a corrupt system that went all the way to parliament, the incoming government had to make a statement. And it did just that, sacking 25 per cent of the police force in one day soon after taking office.

“When we hired new recruits to take their places the president himself attended the exams, to show how serious we were about ending corruption in the police force.”

Dr Bakradze said there was a huge backlash against their actions from those with vested interests in the system, including death threats for many MPs.



BUILDING RELATIONS: *Chairman of the Georgian parliament, Dr David Bakradze*

But he said such bold moves have more than paid off, with organised corruption being completely destroyed in the eight years since the Rose Revolution.

“Single cases still happen, but what matters is that there is no organised corruption,” Dr Bakradze said.

“We still have a lot of officials arrested for corruption, and the fight continues, but the main achievement is that the system is destroyed.”

Dr Bakradze said the evidence of Georgia’s progress is plain to see, pointing to an upcoming World Bank publication on fighting corruption which uses Georgia as a case study.

Today, the Georgian parliament is looking to education to further drive democratic change and economic development in the small Black Sea nation.

One key task is to increase English language proficiency in the country, where Russian is still the most commonly spoken second language.

“We believe that to have a competitive young generation one of the basic necessary skills is the ability to speak English. In the 21st century without good knowledge of English a person cannot be competitive in the global market or in global business – that is very clear.”

Central to improving English language skills among the young is a program to bring 10,000 native English speaking teachers to Georgia to work in schools throughout the country.

“The idea is that every Georgian school, even in the most mountainous remote village, has a native speaking English teacher so that the quality of English teaching is improved.

“Among those, we expect about 1,000 teachers from Australia to come. A big group of them is already in place teaching our young people and I think that this program is going on very successfully.”

House Rules

Your key to the House

Keeping up with the business of the House of Representatives is easier if you know the paper trail you need to follow.

MOST people lament the mountains of documents they have to deal with in the course of their work day.

But without paperwork, Australia's House of Representatives would struggle to function and voters would have no idea what was going on.

In order to ensure the work of the House runs smoothly a team of staff are constantly producing and updating various important documents, which are then distributed to MPs and published on the internet for the public.

Each document has a different purpose, which can be confusing if you're not sure what exactly it is you are trying to track down.

For starters, it's worth looking at the Notice Paper which is the definitive guide to the House's agenda because it lists, among other things, all the business that is before it.

A new Notice Paper is published for each sitting day. 'Notices' indicate that a member is set to introduce a matter for consideration, such as a bill, while 'orders' have already been introduced but not fully considered.

The Notice Paper also lists questions in writing and general information about committee membership and committee inquiries.

The Notice Paper is a lengthy document in comparison to its counterpart, the

Daily Program or Daily Blue (named after the colour of paper it is printed on).

Unlike the Notice Paper, the Blue is not a formal document and does not set the order of business. Instead it is a guide to what is most likely to be dealt with on that particular day.

Ministerial statements, matters of public importance and committee reports can be found on the Blue, but will not be listed on the Notice Paper.

But what if you want to find out what happened yesterday as opposed to keeping track of what's going on today? Well that is the role of the Votes and Proceedings, the official record of exactly what has happened in the House of Representatives.

A separate record is compiled for each sitting that has been held and details the work of the House as a whole.

Items such as documents presented, motions and bills considered, messages from the Senate, and MPs present are recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

A more familiar document for many will be the Hansard (officially titled 'Parliamentary Debates') which is basically the transcript of debates in the House and Main Committee.

Although dominated by what has actually been said in the chamber, Hansard does also record the results of divisions and the text of motions and amendments. MPs are allowed to make



COME IN: A range of documents help open the door to your House

small changes to Hansard to correct things like grammatical errors but they cannot change the meaning of what has been said.

Various documents can also be presented to the House, the most obvious one being bills.

And finally, those who love number crunching will enjoy reading the Work of the Session, which is a twice-yearly list containing statistical summaries of the sittings.

All of these documents can be found on the web at: www.aph.gov.au/house/pubs •

◀ *Continued from page 51*

Television networks are also required to broadcast films and television programs in their original English, rather than dubbed into Georgian, and the government provides full scholarships to students accepted into the world's top 50 universities.

It's all part of promoting the new face of Georgia, as a modern, open society ready to take its place among the world's advanced democracies.

"We are still a small country, but we are no longer the small, corrupt, inward looking country we were 10 years ago," Dr Bakradze said.

"We have very good relations with all our neighbours, unfortunately except Russia of course, we have very intensive economic cooperation with all our neighbours, and we have already become the regional example of reform and quick economic development.

"This is how we see our role, to be small, but to be a positive open country that communicates to the world, which is open to the world and which can play a positive role when it comes to standing on the same side when it comes to having the same values.

"We believe we stand on the right side and that's how we present and portray ourselves." •