

## CRIMEAN PARLIAMENT OPENS ITS DOORS TO THE PUBLIC

*Since January 2011, 1,100 visitors have learned about the Crimean Parliament through Guided Tours made possible by USAID assistance*

A group of young people are speaking excitedly as they are exiting the Verkhovna Rada (VR) of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC). They are sharing their impressions after a guided tour of the VR premises in which they have just participated.

“While visiting the session hall and press-center, we were exposed to the place where Crimean deputies and Verkhovna Rada’s staff work,” says one participant from the Crimean branch of the *Union of Young Political Scientists of Ukraine*. “Our guide, Elizaveta, prepared an interactive debate game that gave us a chance to feel as though we were members of the Presidium.”



During their orientation Crimean interns are introduced to the VR ARC Excursion, October 2011 (left to the right: PDP II Program Specialist Emir Shevkiev, Anna Lysenko, Irina Klyopva, Nedim Dzhemaletdinov, Ekaterina Sinyaver). Photo by Sergey Burchuladze

On December 1, 2011, the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Volodymyr Konstantynov signed a [Directive Regulating Guided Tours of the VR ARC](#) thus opening the parliament to school and university students, enterprises, institutions, organizations, civic associations, and local authorities. The Directive states that tours will be organized “to make parliament’s activities more open and transparent.”

USAID’s Parliamentary Development Program II (PDP II) has worked with the VR ARC to develop tours similar to [those, which were introduced in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine](#) in the 1990s and which are common for many parliaments around the world.

In April 2010, when USAID PDP II consultants had an impromptu meeting with then newly elected VR



Crimean Student Government Leaders in the VR ARC Session Hall. Photo by Elena Volochkova

ARC Speaker, Volodymyr Konstantynov, he made what seemed then to be an off-handed comment regarding practices of the Scottish Parliament. The consultant had noted the lack of public gallery seats at the VR ARC and described the situation in the Scottish chambers —where there are not only seats available for the public, but also tours and activities available to promote citizen visits to the legislature. Mr. Konstantynov, in reply, said “I would like to see that here in Crimea.”

During a USAID PDP II sponsored UK study tour for VR ARC members and staff in June 2010, to learn about the research and analysis support provided to UK parliaments (Westminster, Wales and Scotland), participants were

particularly impressed by the educational and public outreach efforts of Britain’s representative bodies. Upon returning to Ukraine, they took steps to institute similar programs to increase citizens’ knowledge of the work of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC and the roles that active, engaged citizens can play.

“The Crimean parliament is the public authority with history and experience, and we will continue to build upon our experience of openness and transparency,” noted Speaker Konstantynov while [meeting with students](#) in December 2011. “We welcome your feedback, ideas and criticism.”

It was after the October 2010 Election, when Mr. Konstantynov was re-elected speaker that his team began to implement some of the changes that were identified to improve VR ARC processes and more effectively engage the public. Subsequently the VR ARC Secretariat created a special excursion program for different groups of visitors (official delegations, Crimean students and pupils) with assistance from USAID PDP II.

---

The first excursion to the VR ARC took place on January 13, 2011. After which, the VR received many requests for further tours. During the tour, participants not only learn about the history of the parliament and see the building, but also visit the office of elected members, discuss with members of the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC, and learn about the work of the VR ARC Secretariat.

The Ministry of Education and Science of ARC set a goal of providing more than 600 Crimean schools and university excursions to the VR ARC building for pupils and students during 2012, and bookings were made up to two months in advance.

Since January 2011, about 50 excursions for school and university students have been conducted, in which nearly 1,100 visitors took part. The VR ARC [promotes](#) its tours on their website, and provides information for groups interested in participating. As a rule, interns supported through the USAID PDP II program conduct scheduled tours every Thursday, though tours can be accommodated on other days as needed. Currently, staff members from the Library Center, set up in the VR ARC with USAID PDP II support, is preparing a letter to the Ministry of Tourism of Crimea with a request to include the Verkhovna Rada on sightseeing tours of Simferopol. The Library Center is also preparing informational brochures which will enhance the experience of those visiting the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

August 1, 2012

---