



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

**Hearing on “Reform in Armenia: Assessing Progress and Opportunities for U.S. Policy”**

**Tuesday, October 22, 2019**

**2:00 p.m.**

**Room 210, Cannon House Office Building**

**Opening Statement of Helsinki Commissioner Rep. Marc Veasey**

Good afternoon and welcome. This U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing on “Reform in Armenia: Assessing Progress and Opportunities for U.S. Policy” will come to order.

Eighteen months ago, the people of Armenia began marching in the streets in a massive protest and civil disobedience movement that would come to be known as Armenia’s Velvet Revolution. Yerevan, Armenia’s capital, had seen waves of mass protest in recent years but no one could have predicted that this manifestation of popular will would achieve the transformative change it has so far.

At the beginning of last year, it was difficult to imagine that the ruling Republican Party of Armenia’s grip on power was so tenuous that it would recede and effectively vanish from politics in a matter of months after being in power for more than two decades. What’s more, the government’s history of violently suppressing protests meant that demonstrators knew theirs was a dangerous and inauspicious undertaking.

Few knew these lessons better than Nikol Pashinyan, the opposition leader at the center of the Velvet Revolution, who was forced into hiding and jailed after helping organize protests against the initial election in 2008 of President Serzh



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

Sargsyan—the very leader he helped depose last year to become Armenia’s current prime minister.

The fact that this revolutionary political change took place without a shot fired is a testament to the strength, unity, and discipline of the protest movement as well as to the responsible decision-making of government officials who declined to resort to violence to cling to power.

The 2018 protest movement coalesced around the demand to stop the term-limited President Sargsyan from becoming prime minister but quickly grew to encompass broader goals: demanding an end to systemic corruption, respect for the rule of law, and economic justice. These are the demands that vaulted opposition legislator and protest leader Nikol Pashinyan to a landslide victory in parliamentary elections in December 2018.

As we near the one-year anniversary of this historic election, the Helsinki Commission is convening this hearing to gauge how the Armenian government is delivering on its revolutionary promise. What has it achieved so far and where should it channel its focus in its second year and beyond? We are interested in how U.S. policy is adjusting to this unique political opening. Are our assistance levels adequate and are they properly tailored to promote the freedom, security, and sovereignty of the Armenian people? And given our mandate as the Helsinki Commission focused on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: how are multilateral institutions like the OSCE responding?

I am pleased that we have with us today some leaders of the Congressional Armenian Caucus who have trained their focus on these questions and introduced



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

appropriations language that would double U.S. assistance to Armenia for the sake of bolstering democratic reforms.

I also understand that USAID has responded to the political transformation in Yerevan by undertaking a strategic reassessment of its programming in the country: my hope is that this hearing will generate substantive recommendations for how to orient USAID's forthcoming programs toward the most critical reform priorities.

In the realm of multilateral assistance, this Commission is particularly interested in Armenia's engagement with the OSCE—the regional security organization this Commission tracks as part of its statutory obligations. Regrettably, however, OSCE assistance to Armenia's reform objectives is hamstrung by the closure of the OSCE's Field Office in Yerevan since 2017 when the Government of Azerbaijan unilaterally blocked the consensus required to extend the office's mandate. Without this office, it is more difficult to maintain regular OSCE engagement with the Armenian government to develop and implement important training, capacity-building, and policy development initiatives.

In response to the OSCE Field Office's closure, the United States initiated an Armenian Cooperation Program that draws together voluntary contributions from OSCE participating states to support OSCE programs in the country. The Armenian Cooperation Program is contributing to the government's security and economic reforms, but this partnership should extend to judicial independence, parliamentary oversight, and free and fair elections. I hope that this hearing can serve as an encouragement to our partners in the OSCE to increase their commitment to Armenia's reform program through contributions to this U.S.-led initiative. I also



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

hope that Azerbaijani authorities will reconsider their decision to block the mission and welcome discussions to reopen it.

Before proceeding further, I would like to thank Helsinki Commission Chairman Alcee Hastings for the opportunity to chair today's hearing on an issue of profound importance not only for the people of Armenia but for the future of democracy and human rights in Eurasia and the OSCE region as a whole.

At this time, I would like to acknowledge my fellow Commissioners and members of the Congressional Armenian Caucus in attendance for any opening remarks they wish to make.

We have assembled an excellent panel to discuss developments in Armenia and provide their recommendations for the path forward.

We are honored to have with us from Yerevan a distinguished parliamentarian from Armenia's National Assembly and member of the ruling My Step alliance, Hamazasp Danielyan. Mr. Danielyan spent much of his career working in civil society and managing democracy promotion programs in Armenia. In the National Assembly, he serves as the coordinator of the parliamentary working group on electoral reform.

Next we will hear from Arsen Kharatyan, founder and editor-in-chief of AliQ Media, an independent Armenian news outlet based in Tbilisi, Georgia. Mr. Kharatyan is a founding member of Prime Minister Pashinyan's Civil Contract party and served as a senior advisor to Pashinyan during the first 100 days of his tenure as prime minister.



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

Our third witness, Daniel Ioannisian, is also visiting from Yerevan where he works as program director for the Union of Informed Citizens, an NGO focused on developing Armenia's independent media sector and tackling issues such as disinformation and media literacy. As a political activist and civil society leader, Mr. Ioannisian has developed expertise in many areas of democratic reform and currently serves as secretary of the parliamentary working group on electoral reform led by Mr. Danielyan.

After Mr. Ioannisian, we will hear testimony from Miriam Lanskoj, senior director for Russia and Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy. Ms. Lanskoj has 14 years of experience studying and supporting democracy promotion in the former Soviet Union.

Lastly, Jonathan Katz, senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund, will testify drawing on his considerable experience managing U.S. assistance programs in the former Soviet Union. From 2014-2017, he served as deputy assistant administrator at the U.S. Agency for International Development, where he managed U.S. development policy, energy security, economic growth, and democracy, and governance programs in Eastern and Central Europe and the Black Sea and Caucasus Regions.

I will refer you to the materials in your audience handouts for the full biographies of our witnesses.

Thank you to all our esteemed witnesses for being with us today. I look forward to hearing your expert assessments and hereby invite Mr. Danielyan to begin his testimony.