



**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 Rep. Frank Pallone

Thank you to the U.S. Helsinki Commission, Chairman Veasey, and Co-Chair Wicker for holding this important hearing.

I would like to start by acknowledging the incredible progress Armenia has made since I first visited in the 1990s. This is especially true of the last year, where we saw a grassroots movement take hold during the “Velvet Revolution” starting in April 2018. Last December, that revolution culminated with the freest, fairest and most open national elections in the country’s history. These elections brought in one of the youngest and most reform-minded legislatures and executives that Armenia has ever had.

I had the pleasure of meeting several of these individuals during my recent visit to Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh earlier this month. I was struck by the sense of opportunity and promise imparted by Prime Minister Pashinyan and his My Step alliance – and by the incredibly hopeful mood that can be found throughout the country.

There is progress being made and a real sense of momentum within this young government. However, one should not ignore the major changes that are still needed to fulfill the goals of the revolution. This includes bolstering civil society, strengthening its democratic and judicial institutions, and rooting out corruption in an even-handed way. These challenges will require immense focus on the part of the government, and it will require significant international investment and aid to ensure reform efforts take a firm hold. That is why I am working with the other co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues to encourage State Department and USAID funding for projects in Armenia.

I have also introduced a resolution that aims to officially recognize the democratic reforms that are currently taking place. It reaffirms the critical importance of US-Armenia cooperation as well. My hope is that Congress will immediately take up and pass these measures to show full American support for Armenian democratic reforms. I believe that taking these steps and providing investments will build on the US-Armenia strategic relationship and help to grow the already thriving pro-democracy movement.

We must continue to do more, committing significant resources to Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, and I am hopeful that these efforts will yield success.



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Thank you again for holding this aptly timed hearing.