



**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. Jackie Speier

Thank you, Chairman Veasey. I want to thank you and for holding this crucial hearing on Armenia’s peaceful democratic revolution.

Over the last year and a half, I have watched with excitement and admiration as Armenia’s people have transformed their government from a staid autocracy to burgeoning democracy—all without a shot fired. Seared in my mind are the signature images of Armenia’s velvet revolution—hundreds of thousands of women and men in the streets protesting. Children blocking the roads with their toy cars. And that defiance turning into joyful dancing and singing as Armenia’s people and future carried the day.

Two weeks ago, I had the privilege to visit Armenia as a member of the first dedicated Congressional trip to the country since the revolution. I could not be more excited, encouraged, or enthusiastic about the progress I saw.

Armenia’s democracy is brand new. 102 of its 132 parliamentarians have never held public office. And its bureaucrats inexperienced. But, I have good news. They are up to the challenge. I was blown away by the bright young people who will define Armenia’s next chapter. They have much work to do: building political parties, reforming institutions, and writing and implementing laws. But they’re up to the challenge.



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Armenia's young people are brilliant, engaged, and capable. And they understand they must act quickly to take advantage of their unique opportunity to define their country's future. They know—from the youngest member of parliament to the Prime minister—that Armenia must reform the justice sector, build a modern, efficient bureaucracy, reform the constitution and electoral code, and improve the country's infrastructure and delivery of basic services like trash pickup and street cleaning. All we need to do is follow their lead.

That effort began when my amendment to allocate an additional \$40 million in democracy aid to Armenia received a resounding 268 bipartisan votes on the House floor. And it continues with this hearing. Going forward, we must continue highlighting Armenia's progress, assisting its government, and partnering with its parliamentarians.

We must also ensure that Armenia's leaders understand that taking advantage of their special, limited opportunity to define their country's future will require laying out specific plans. The issue of corruption stands out especially—ad hoc arrests of corrupt figures will not have the same legitimacy or efficacy as a sustained, organized campaign within an understandable framework. That level of clarity, of course, would also aid reform efforts on issues from basic services to the constitution.

Armenia has come so far in such a short period. It's remarkable, inspiring, and a reminder that—even in the shadow of growing global autocracy, even in a neighborhood filled with bad actors, and even when it seems most distant—the flame of democracy burns bright and we can help it grow.

Thank you again for holding this hearing and thank you to our witnesses for sharing your knowledge. I look forward to learning more about how we can help Armenia's democracy grow and prosper.