

**Statement of Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin
Co-Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

“Armenia after the Election”

April 17, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this very important hearing. Having followed Armenia for years, having had close relations with the Armenian community in Maryland, and having enjoyed its support, I am deeply dismayed by the developments of the last two months. I am especially saddened by the death of eight people in Yerevan on March 1 -- I extend my sympathies to the victims' families and friends.

It seems indisputable that the post-election violence, as well as the embittered tenor of the campaign, reflect deep divisions in Armenian society. As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, opposition parties accuse the authorities of rigging elections and using their control of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to retain power. The authorities, for their part, claim that opposition parties too unpopular to win at the ballot box are prepared to use street rallies to come to power by unlawful means.

It sometimes seems to me that the gap between these perspectives and their adherents is unbridgeable. Nevertheless, that is clearly the first priority of Armenia's new President, Serzh Sarkissian, who said in his inauguration address that reconciliation is essential.

That is certainly the case. I wish Armenia every success in overcoming this difficult moment. We in the United States have an important stake in that success and I hope our witnesses will give us guidance on how best to promote the reforms that are necessary for the country to realize its great promise.

Before concluding my opening statement, I would like to take note of something that happened during the campaign that was deeply disturbing to me personally. I have received reports that on February 14, H2, a pro-government TV station, broadcast a “documentary” that accused former President Ter-Petrossian – whose wife is Jewish – of being a Zionist agent in a crude attempt to discredit the protesters by intimating that they were involved in some sort of Jewish-Israeli plot against Armenia.

Apparently, someone in a position of influence decided that blaming the Jews for political controversies in Armenia would be helpful – despite the fact that there are only a few hundred Jews in the entire country.

Let me say to the representatives of Armenia's government present here today that I never thought I would see this sort of anti-Semitic hate in Armenia. I intend to be in further contact with the Armenian Embassy, and with the State Department, to inquire more deeply into who in Yerevan might have been responsible for this reprehensible action.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.