

# SUPPORTING ARMENIA'S DEMOCRATIC AND WESTERN FUTURE

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## HEARING BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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## **SUPPORTING ARMENIA'S DEMOCRATIC AND WESTERN FUTURE**

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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND  
COOPERATION IN EUROPE,  
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION,  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
*Tuesday, September 10, 2024.*

The hearing was held from 2:30 p.m. to 3:40 p.m., Room 419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

**Committee Members Present:** Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman; Senator Ben Cardin [D-MD], Co-Chairman; Senator Roger Wicker [R-MS], Ranking Member; Representative Steve Cohen [D-TN], Ranking Member; Representative Marc Veasey [D-TX]; Representative Andy Harris [R-MD]; Representative Emanuel Cleaver II, [D-MO]; Representative Victoria Spartz [R-IN]; Senator Jeanne Shaheen [D-NH]; Senator Richard Blumenthal [D-CT].

**Witnesses:** Dan Baer, Senior Vice President for Policy Research, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Former U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE; Olesya Vartanyan, South Caucasus Security Expert; Tigran Grigoryan, President and Founder, Regional Center for Democracy and Security, Yerevan, Armenia.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF JOE WILSON, CHAIRMAN, U.S. HOUSE, FROM SOUTH CAROLINA**

Chairman WILSON: I am grateful for our colleagues to be here on this important hearing on Armenia, a country that stands at a critical crossroads. The United States has a unique and crucial role to play in supporting the Armenian future, a future rooted in peace, democracy, and a stable region free from the malign influence of those who seek to destabilize it.

I have been so impressed by the people of Armenia with my second and third visits to Yerevan this year. Armenia is facing immense challenges, both internal and external. The recent history of this proud nation is one of struggle and resilience. The Armenian people, whose ancestors have weathered centuries of adversity, have never wavered in their pursuit of freedom and self-determination. Today they face new challenges, challenges that arise from regional tensions, economic instability, and the corrosive effect of Putinesque influence, which has long sought to perpetuate division and conflict in the South Caucasus.

Despite these challenges, during the recent CODEL to the country I was struck by the remarkable resilience of the Armenian peo-

ple. There is a strong and growing societal consensus in Armenia, a desire to turn westward, to fully embrace democratic values, and to build a future of alignment with the free world. This consensus is driven by the clear recognition that Armenian true potential can only be realized through greater integration with the West—through deepening ties with Europe, the United States, and regional allies who share a vision of stability and prosperity.

Armenia has made brave steps to assert its independence and distance itself from the grip of the war criminal Putin's influence. These decisions have not been easy, especially in a region where war criminal Putin's influence is ever present. Moscow has repeatedly demonstrated that it prefers to see Armenia and its neighbors mired in conflict, a strategy designed to maintain its dominance. War criminal Putin's actions, including its meddling in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its efforts to exploit divisions in the region, are aimed at preventing Armenia and the South Caucasus from moving toward lasting peace and prosperity as Putin seeks to recreate the failed Soviet Empire, which oppresses Russians as it benefits oligarchs.

The Armenian people want something different. They want peace. They want democracy. They want to build a future that is free from outside interference, a future that can thrive as a sovereign nation in a stable and secure region. This is where the United States has a crucial role to play. We must be there to support Armenia on its journey toward democracy, to help foster the economic and political conditions that will allow Armenia to stand tall as a full partner in the free world and not a puppet of Soviet dictatorships.

As chairman of the Türkiye Caucus, normalization of ties between Armenia and—is essential to this vision and mutual benefit to both countries. I am the Co-Chair of the Türkiye Caucus and have been for years, and I just so appreciate Türkiye as a member of NATO and a great ally for freedom and democracy in the world. The time has come for Türkiye to respond in kind to Armenia's call for dialogue and normalization.

It is also imperative that Azerbaijan join in the effort to build lasting peace in the region. The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan has taken a toll on both nations, but we believe that peace is not only possible; it is essential. Stability for Azerbaijan is so beneficial, with economic ties to Europe which Putin opposes. I was grateful this weekend to be with President Ilham Aliyev as he spoke to the Forum di Cernobbio, which I attended with Senator Lindsey Graham and Co-Chairman—chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee—Ben Cardin.

For Armenia to have a peaceful and prosperous future, for Azerbaijan to thrive, and for the entire South Caucasus to move forward, both Türkiye and Azerbaijan should take meaningful steps toward reconciliation with Armenia. The United States stands ready to assist in this process, but our support alone is not enough. It will require the concerted efforts of all stakeholders in the region.

The future of Armenia, and indeed the entire region, depends on what happens in the next few months and years. If the region remains locked in a cycle of conflict and division, we will see more

suffering, more instability, and more opportunities for malign actors like Putin to exploit these divisions. However, if we seize this moment—if we push for peace, normalization, and greater democratic governance—we can unlock a future of unprecedented peace and prosperity for the South Caucasus.

There is clear bipartisan support for the United States to step up its support for Armenia's assistance, both economic and political. We will help solidify Armenian democratic gains, strengthen its institutions, and provide a bulwark against external threats. At the same time, we must encourage other partners in the region, especially Türkiye and Azerbaijan, to recognize their long-term interests are best served by a peaceful and prosperous South Caucasus, one where borders are secure, economies are thriving, and democracy is flourishing.

Additionally, I want to emphasize the importance of cultural and people-to-people exchanges. The Armenian diaspora in the United States has been a powerful force in strengthening ties between our two nations. By fostering these relationships and building up shared values, we can create a deeper and more lasting partnership. Armenian Americans have contributed immensely to our country, and their success is a testament to the potential of Armenia itself, as also has been achieved by Turkish Americans for decades.

In closing, it is critical Armenia have the—has made great strides in pulling away from the shadow of Putin's influence and toward a brighter future. The courage of the Armenian people deserves our admiration and our support. It is incumbent upon us as members of Congress and as leaders of the free world to stand with Armenia at this critical moment. The future of Armenia is bright, but only if we work together to ensure peace, democracy, and prosperity take root and flourish. Thank you, and I look forward to our testimony today.

Now I am happy to recognize Senator Ben Cardin as the immediate past Co-Chair.

**STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN CARDIN, CO-CHAIRMAN, U.S.  
SENATE, FROM MARYLAND**

Senator CARDIN: The immediate chair, the current Co-Chair, but it is good. It is all good.

Let me welcome our witnesses here today. This hearing is one that we really were anxious to get on our calendar after our visit to Armenia. Senator Wicker, Congressman Wilson, myself, others were impressed by how Armenia has changed in a relatively short period of time, and how they are struggling with the challenges of their region, and how the United States can play a more important role in not only helping Armenia on a path towards a democratic state with its own relations closer to the West but how it affects the region generally. Therefore, we are very pleased that we have such a distinguished group of witnesses.

There is no question that the Armenian diaspora has a very close relationship with Armenia, and we hear about that frequently. Therefore, there is some natural ties in this country that would have us focus on the issues of Armenia.

It is a country that wants to determine its own future. That is what it wants to do. It is difficult because they have external factors that make that a challenge for them to be able to do that. They thirst for democracy and good governance and after so much domination under the Soviet Union and now Russia, that has been a real challenge as to how they can reach that plateau.

It is important that we acknowledge not only these immediate threats, but also broader geographical currents at play and the role the United States can play in helping to secure an independent, democratic, and prosperous future for the Armenians and the region. First, I want to address the direct security threat posed by Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan recently came in and took over the Nagorno-Karabakh area and did ethnic cleansing, requiring the people to leave or face death or imprisonment. This battle has been going on for a long time. This is nothing new. However, they not only decided to displace a whole ethnic group, putting at risk the cultural facilities, and the cultural history of the region; they decided to go into Azerbaijan [sic; Armenia] and take part of Azerbaijan [sic; Armenia] with no indication that they are going to give up that territory. Now, that territory is very strategic. We had a chance to see it. It is the highlands. One can only believe that there is a reasonable risk that Azerbaijan is not going to stop where they are right now and that they are going to make further incursions for the corridor to reconnect the two parts of their country. That would either divide or eliminate a good part of Azerbaijan's [sic; Armenia's] sovereignty by force.

Azerbaijan [sic; Armenia] has relied upon Russia for its defense, basically, certainly for its border security, and what did Russia do? They told Azerbaijan, come on in, take it over. Russia is still present in Armenia. How do you—are able to have security for your country if the person who enabled—the country that enabled your adversary to take over part of your country is who you depend upon for security? I know they are trying to get some of the Russians' presence out of there, but it is pretty intrusive into their country right now. How does that happen?

Then you look at the neighborhood. They are in a tough neighborhood.

They have Russia. We have already talked about how Russia is not reliable for Armenia. They have Azerbaijan.

We already talked about Azerbaijan's desire to not only cleanse Nagorno-Karabakh but to take over perhaps the whole corridor or southern part of Armenia.

Then they have Iran as a neighbor. Iran's not a reliable partner. They do some commerce with Iran. We saw oil trucks. We saw a lot of activity by Iranian trucks when we were there, but that is not a reliable partner to have. We all know that.

Then there is Turkey, which we are always hoping that Armenia and Turkey would normalize their relations. The border is closed right now. The border is close to Azerbaijan. The border is closed to Turkey. There are limited crossings to Russia and Iran. Therefore, we need to be engaged so that Armenia can defend itself and make its own decisions. That means getting Russia out of Armenia. It also means normalizing the relationship between Azerbaijan and



Armenia, and particularly Armenia and Turkey, which is absolutely essential to do, so that there are other avenues available for commerce. The country is being strangled right now. Would you invest in this country in a manufacturing business if you depended upon international commerce? You do not even know if you have any borders that you can—that you can open up to transport your goods. We have to free Armenia so that it can control its own future, and that means we have to figure out ways to move forward with the peace process with Azerbaijan and for more normal relations with Turkey. Who is stopping that? Russia.

Therefore, we welcome our panelists today on how the United States can play an important role in Armenia so it can determine its own future, it can develop as a democratic state, one that has good governance and respects the rights of its citizens and can be a leading partner in security in the region. I look forward to our witnesses.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Chairman Ben Cardin.

We now proceed to Congressman—or excuse me, U.S. Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi.

#### **STATEMENT OF ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATE, FROM MISSISSIPPI**

Senator WICKER: Thank you. I do agree we should get on with the witnesses if we possibly can. I walked in in the middle of the distinguished chairman's remarks, and then I was able to hear all of Mr. Cardin's opening statement. Let me just say that I subscribe to their comments completely and enthusiastically. Yes, there is a lot to be learned from actually visiting a country on the ground and seeing how narrow that slip of land is between Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh area, as well as Türkiye.

I do want to congratulate our friends in Armenia for looking to the West and looking toward the democratic countries of this world for leadership and friendship. We wish our very best to the entire region, our NATO allies in Türkiye, and our friends in Azerbaijan also. However, having been to Armenia and having gotten a real sense of their desire for Western values for self-determination, to democracy, I can only say that I look forward to increasing our friendship.

If there is a record, Mr. Chairman, I have an opening statement that I will submit. However, I want to thank both of the gentlemen who have—who I have heard for their outstanding opening statements. Thank you, sir.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator. Senator Wicker, your CODEL was just so important to all of us to have the opportunity to meet with the people of Armenia.

As a continuation of the bipartisanship here today, I would like to recognize the Co-Chair, Steve Cohen of Tennessee.

Representative COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

#### **STATEMENT OF STEVE COHEN, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TENNESSEE**

Firstly, when I came in, I heard Mr. Wilson talking about his being a Co-Chair of the Turkey Caucus, and he is. I am the other Co-Chair. [LAUGHTER.] I have been that Co-Chair for the 18 years

I have been in Congress, and all of my friends from Armenia know it, and they have expressed feelings about it for 18 years. My position had been that Turkey was a good ally of the United States, a friend of Israel, and an important NATO member, and while it looked like they had committed a genocide—and that is a serious thing, and I had difficulty with it—I supported Turkey because they were very, very, very insistent that they had different issues about Congress should not be a historian and Congress should not be a judge, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

However, over these 18 years, I have come to not like Turkey so much. I will not call it by any other name than Turkey, because when it was Turkey, it was the land of Atatürk, and they tried to do some things that were good and bringing them into the 21st century, and it was a great—Atatürk's one of the great people of the 21st—the 20th century. We have written as a group to Turkish officials about their situation with Israel, where they have supported Hamas, and Hamas is a terrorist organization. If they think the [PKK] Kurdistan Workers' Party is a terrorist organization, they have not seen anything like Hamas. However, they want everybody to be against the PKK and the [YPG] The People's Defense Units and the yippie-ki-yay, and yippie-ki-yay is what I say to them these days.

Erdoğan went to Cairo, met with al-Sisi, and said the Muslim countries needed to come together in unity to smother and defeat Israel. That is not what Turkey used to be. It is not what we think of as being the Turkey that we knew when we became Co-Chairs. They are no longer necessarily our friends. They are not that trustworthy. They deal with the Russians. They deal with us. They deal with the Chinese. They deal with somebody. Be careful, Armenia, when you deal with Turkey. What my colleagues have said about Armenia and Azerbaijan being friends with Turkey, be careful.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Chairman WILSON: Co-Chairman, thank you very much. Multiple Co-Chair positions you have.

Congressman Harris, do you have an opening statement?

We really are very fortunate today to have outstanding participation: Senator Jeanne Shaheen, all the way from New Hampshire; and then—and Congressman Marc Veasey of Texas. We have—grateful to have with us Emanuel Clever of Missouri; and then Senator Blumenthal—Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut; and then—and Congressman Dr. Andy Harris of Maryland. Therefore, we are well represented.

At this time, we will proceed with the witnesses, and we are under a—with so many outstanding people here, we are under a five-minute rule. Therefore,—and we will be following the five-minute rule with each of our witnesses, and then with each member of the Commission, with the understanding that the five minutes begins with me, and I will stick with that.

With that, we are really grateful to have Dan Baer. Dr. Baer is the senior vice president for policy research at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former U.S. ambassador to the OSCE. Olesya Vartanyan, the South Caucasus security expert, we are so grateful to have you here. In addition, Tigran Grigoryan,

the president and founder of the Regional Center for Democracy and Security in Yerevan.

We will begin with Dr. Baer.

**TESTIMONY OF DAN BAER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR  
POLICY RESEARCH, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTER-  
NATIONAL PEACE AND FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE  
OSCE**

Mr. BAER: Thank you to the Co-Chairs and to the members of the Commission for inviting me to testify today.

If you had told me when I was serving as U.S. ambassador to the OSCE that in less than a decade Georgian democracy would be backsliding as Tbilisi drifted dangerously closer to Putin's embrace while Armenia would have a democratic awakening and be bravely trying to expand ties with Europe and the West, I would have thought you got your Caucasus countries mixed up.

The human toll of the unfreezing of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the hostilities in 2020 and again last year, has been significant and heartbreaking—not only those killed, but the more than 100,000 who have been displaced from their homes in which they grew up and made their lives, and from the place where their ancestors had made their homes for many centuries. There are no silver linings to war, but the political and security situation in the region is different today, and it would be a mistake not to ask us in a dynamic moment like this whether there are any new opportunities to build a more promising future in the wake of a tragic past.

Despite the disappointment of Georgia's backsliding and Azerbaijan's ongoing authoritarianism, we should not overlook the hopeful signs in Armenia. We should ask ourselves: What can the United States and Europe do to support Armenia's democracy, future prosperity, and long-term security?

First, support peace and normalization with Armenia's neighbors. Although it will be politically painful and Moscow may well try to sabotage it, normalization of relations between Yerevan and Ankara and a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan would benefit all three countries. If President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Pashinyan can demonstrate vision and courage, Armenia-Turkey normalization could proceed—could proceed and may even lubricate a final peace deal with Azerbaijan. In addition to the security dividends, Armenia would be able to diversify its economic partners and reduce its dependence on Russia. Opening the Turkey-Armenia border would be a game-changer in this regard. Regional trade between Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan could support economic growth and jobs in each country and diversify transit routes for trade for others. The United States, working with the [EU] European Union and other partners, should offer political, diplomatic, and economic support to advance normalization and peace talks.

Second, build technical skills, including those essential to trade and good governance. I will highlight just two. One, is the agricultural sector, where investment in modernization and storage can help both reduce dependence on Russia for exports and also make Armenia less vulnerable to price shocks on key imports like flour.

Two, customs and border security professionalization, where training and modernization of processes and equipment will be essential to implementing peace and normalization agreements and can help Armenia take advantage of regional trade while curbing corruption threats.

Third, the United States should explore partnering with the EU and other friends of Armenia to develop long-term, comprehensive security and defense partnerships along the model of the bilateral assistance agreements that several countries have developed with Ukraine in the last two years. These security arrangements could give confidence to Armenians as their leaders take difficult steps to reduce dependence on Moscow and carve an independent future.

There will be some who will caution that a warmer embrace by the West could make Armenia less safe, not more. Just look at Ukraine, they will say. We must reject this dictator's proxy veto of our support for the aspirations of the people of Armenia or any other country. We should be clear the motivation behind the U.S. and partners' policy is to support the free future of the people of Armenia, not to score points against Moscow.

Now is also a time to set realistic expectations. The road ahead will be long. Casting off the burdens of cultivated dependency demands long-term structural reforms and investments. It is the work of a generation and will extend beyond the term of a single leader. Moscow will likely try to retard progress. Armenians must be prepared to endure some cold winters. We must be prepared to sustain our support for the long term.

Many of you on the dais today have been outspoken, consistent, principled supporters of Ukraine over the last two-and-a-half years. Nowhere is the philosophical truth of the indivisibility of freedom and justice more practically demonstrable than in the fight against Russian imperialist tyranny that Ukraine is currently undertaking on behalf of its own people and, indeed, of all of us. Make no mistake, what happens in Ukraine has an impact on the freedom and future of the people of Armenia, the people of Georgia, the people of Azerbaijan, of Moldova, and on the stability and prosperity of Europe, including Turkey, for decades to come. If Putin is allowed to win, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and all Europeans—all those who stand in defense of human dignity—will lose alongside Ukraine. Russia must be defeated. Ukraine must prevail. There is no alternate outcome that is—that is acceptable.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair, and I look forward to questions from the members of the Commission.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you so much, Ambassador.

We are really grateful, again, Ms. Vartanyan, for you to be here. Thank you.

#### **TESTIMONY OF OLESYA VARTANYAN, SOUTH CAUCASUS SECURITY EXPERT**

Ms. VARTANYAN: Good afternoon, Chairman Wilson and Co-Chairman Cardin, and distinguished members of the Commission. Thank you for inviting me to testify at this important hearing.

Today I am here to discuss the current state of peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and what is at stake if they collapse or hopefully succeed. I will also address the critical impor-

tance of supporting the ethnic Armenian refugees who fled an Azerbaijani military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh a year ago.

After three years of sporadic negotiations following the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan now stand at a pivotal moment. We have a unique opportunity to achieve a historic peace agreement. Senior officials from both nations have indicated that they are close to finalizing a draft declaration which could significantly reduce the risk of renewed conflict and lay the foundation for normalizing the relations.

While both governments assert that the agreement is nearly finalized, key disagreements remain. Chief among them is Azerbaijan's demand for amendments to Armenia's constitution. Baku insists that these changes are necessary to permanently eliminate any future territorial claims by Armenia regardless of who holds power. Armenia, which has repeatedly renounced such claims, views this demand as a potential stalling tactic. It fears that Azerbaijan may be using this as leverage to delay or derail the final agreement, though Yerevan remains open to dialogue.

For Armenia, the stakes could hardly be higher. Some members of this Commission visited Armenia's Jermuk border region this summer, where they witnessed Azerbaijani military positions established over the past two years. During my recent travels along this and other border areas, I saw no sign that Azerbaijani forces were preparing to withdraw. On the contrary, they have entrenched themselves, constructing military barracks and expanding roads, all well inside Armenian territory. Even more troubling, both sides now confront each other at dangerously close military positions on the frontline, where miscalculations or isolated incidents could quickly escalate into broader conflict, endangering civilian populations near the frontlines.

Faced with this situation, Armenia has little choice but to stay engaged in the peace talks, hoping to reduce the ever-present threat of a new war. Since Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 war, Armenia has struggled to rebuild its military capacity. Its formal ally, Russia, has shown no intention of assisting, as Moscow remains preoccupied with its illegal war in Ukraine and seeks to maintain strong ties with Azerbaijan. Should Azerbaijan pursue Armenia's total capitulation, its forces could within hours seize critical infrastructure, especially in Armenia's vulnerable southern regions. While Baku insists that Yerevan's concerns are false, both Washington and European capitals have issued strong warnings against the new Azerbaijani offensive.

Beyond the immediate security risk, the humanitarian fallout from the conflict continues to loom large. This is the fate of over a hundred thousand ethnic Armenians who fled Nagorno-Karabakh almost a year ago. Most remain scattered across Armenia. In my many months of interviews with dozens of refugees, I have yet to meet a single person ready to give up hope of returning to Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the refugees are also deeply exhausted by decades of military confrontation and the constant sacrifices their families have endured since the very start of the conflict. It is very important to support these refugees and aid their integration into new communities. Armenia has made a significant commitment to helping them, but it struggles to provide adequate

housing and jobs. These refugees deserve more than a life on subsidies. They need opportunities for meaningful work and full integration into their new communities. The United States has a role to play here providing not only financial support but also expertise in managing large-scale displacements effectively in the longer term.

Again, the peace agreement that Yerevan and Baku now negotiate will not settle—will not settle three decades of conflict, but it should reduce the risk of the worst-case scenarios I have outlined: A full-scale war and another humanitarian catastrophe. It would mark the start of a long journey toward rebuilding trust and offer the potential for expanding trade and economic development. The agreement might also help unlock long-stalled talks between Armenia and Türkiye on normalizing relations, which could bring new opportunities for growth not only to Armenia but to the entire South Caucasus. With U.S. support, Armenia and Azerbaijan should seize this opportunity to embark on a less hostile chapter in their history.

I am happy to take the questions.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much. We appreciate again, Ms. Vartanyan, your service with the International Crisis Group. [Comes on mic.] We appreciate your service with the International Crisis Group in Tbilisi, and I wish you well on your success.

We are so fortunate to also have President Grigoryan and the—who is the founder of the Regional Center for Democracy and Security in Yerevan.

**TESTIMONY OF TIGRAN GRIGORYAN, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER, REGIONAL CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY, YEREVAN, ARMENIA**

Mr. GRIGORYAN: Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

In recent years, Armenia has made significant progress toward democratization, especially following the 2018 democratic revolution, a watershed moment where our citizens demanded transparency, the rule of law, and accountable governance. Yet, Armenia's path to becoming a consolidated democracy remains fraught with serious challenges.

First, the greatest challenges to Armenia's democracy are external. The country faces an immediate and existential threat from neighboring Azerbaijan and a hybrid threat from Russia. In the past four years, Azerbaijan has used its military advantage to occupy Armenian territory, impose a nine-month blockade on the civilians of Nagorno-Karabakh, and conduct a military operation that forcibly displaced over 100,000 Armenians, an act characterized by Freedom House as ethnic cleansing. Despite international condemnation, Azerbaijan continues to threaten Armenia with force.

Armenia's inability to counter this threat effectively fuels domestic political polarization and creates fertile ground for Russia's hybrid warfare efforts. Central to Russia's malign influence campaign in Armenia lies the narrative that democratic regimes cannot provide security for their people. This narrative has gained traction as Armenia seeks to distance itself from Moscow. Complicating matters is Armenia's economic and energy dependence on Russia,

which Moscow could exploit to punish Yerevan. Armenia's success in shifting its foreign policy will largely depend on securing support for its diversification efforts.

The second major challenge is Armenia's institutional weakness. While elections and media freedom have significantly improved since the 2018 revolution, building and maintaining strong independent institutions that can prevent democratic backsliding remains a difficult task. Without an effective system of checks and balances, the future and resilience of Armenia's democracy will be at serious risk.

The third major challenge is the refugee crisis stemming from the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia, a country of 3 million people, has absorbed over 100,000 refugees, a staggering number when compared to the U.S. refugee admissions target of 125,000 for this year. While the Armenian government has addressed the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the long-term integration of Karabakh Armenian refugees is a daunting task requiring substantial international support. If left unresolved, the resulting socioeconomic issues could undermine social cohesion in Armenian society.

In light of these challenges, I recommend the following.

To secure Armenia's democratic future, the U.S. must tackle these challenges head-on. Upgrading Armenia from Group [D] to Group [B] under the Export Administration Regulations would be a strategic move that could deepen military cooperation and open the door for advanced U.S. technology transfers. This could bolster Armenia's defense, reduce reliance on Russia, and empower it to confront security threats while standing firm as a democratic partner in a volatile region. At a minimum, targeted sanctions—targeted sanctions should be imposed on Azerbaijani officials and servicemen involved in wartime atrocities and aggression against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. The absence of accountability only emboldens Baku's lines of attack.

Sustained U.S. support for Armenia's efforts to diversify its economy and energy sector is crucial to counter potential hybrid threats from Russia. Moscow has the leverage to inflict severe economic pain on Armenia and coerce political alignment. Equally vital is strengthening Armenia's ability to resist external disinformation campaigns that threaten both societal cohesion and state stability.

On the institutional front, the U.S. must prioritize promoting democratic norms and practices in Armenia, focusing on institution-building rather than supporting specific political actors because they are perceived as pro-democracy. This is what democratic development should be about.

Lastly, the U.S. must increase the support for integrating Karabakh Armenian refugees. While eleven and one half million has been allocated, more should be done to address this humanitarian crisis.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, Armenia's democratic journey is at a critical juncture. The challenges it faces, from external security threats to institutional weaknesses and the refugee crisis, are formidable. With U.S. support and a commitment to democratic principles, Armenia can overcome these obstacles.

This support is not just about aiding one nation: It is about preserving a democratic partner in a region of autocracies.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, President Grigoryan.

We have been joined by Congresswoman Victoria Spartz, and she has a special understanding. She was born in the Soviet Union, but fortunately, her home community now is part of the free and courageous Ukraine.

With this in mind, we are going to now proceed to questions and begin the five minutes with me. As we begin, Ms. Vartanyan, I was so pleased you referenced the European Union and, indeed, how positive that can be for the people of Armenia, because I was with Chairman Cardin yesterday in Brussels, and every time you see the vibrancy of the European Union—and when we were visiting across Armenia, we saw different references to EU support of different projects, and it should be such a bright future. With that bright future, what are the current economic opportunities for American businesses in Armenia, particularly in sectors like IT, renewable energy, and agriculture? How can America deepen its economic ties with Armenia to foster mutual opportunity?

Ms. VARTANYAN: Well, thank you so much for your question. I should say that Armenia has been trying to develop its economy for quite some time. If you have a look at especially the efforts that have been made in the last five years since the change of the leadership and the—with the current political leadership in Armenia, what has been happening is that they were trying to reform the economic structures inside the country. However, what is really very important is to continue building the bridges and the linkages with the outside world. In that sense, of course, the potential is there when it comes to the European Union, first of all, but the United States remains a very important market in that sense as well.

We have been seeing more visits coming from the United States, especially in recent months, and this should probably continue. This is where the dialogue started, strategic dialogue started between the Armenian administration and the United States. Then this is probably where the conversations and the discussions should continue as well.

I should probably point to one very important thing which is more in the sphere of my expertise, which is Armenia's stability and security. Then I think all the speakers here, have pointed to Armenia's vulnerability when it comes to its economic dependence on Russia. Russia remains one of the main economic partners to Armenia, and then it has quite a lot of business presence. Then when it comes especially to the supply of energy to the country, this is where the United States has been trying to help Armenia and could do much more, and then this is where probably I should mention the ongoing discussion about possible U.S. support to rebuild the nuclear potential for Armenia.

Chairman WILSON: Well, thank you very much, and again, I particularly appreciate foreign direct investment. In my home district, with Michelin Tire Corporation, I have the largest Michelin plant in the world. In my home state of South Carolina, we have the



largest BMW manufacturing facility in the world, and we want everybody in Armenia to have an X5. Therefore, this—[LAUGHTER]—so it should—and it is mutual benefit.

Additionally, indeed, Ambassador, I am so concerned about war criminal Putin trying to recreate the failed Soviet Union, which was beneficial to the nomenklatura. Now he wants it to be beneficial as he oppresses the people of Russia to benefit oligarchs. You identified it correctly. Immediately, the threats are to Moldova with the occupation—illegal occupation of Transnistria. We know the illegal occupation of the different portions—South Ossetia, Abkhazia—of the Republic of Georgia. Then the danger of Armenia, there are 4,000 at least Putin troops that were supposed to be there for the protection of the people of Armenia, but that is not the way it has worked out, and so what can we do to strengthen our mutual defense efforts?

Mr. BAER: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair. We want the right people to have X5s in that part of the world—[LAUGHS]—not the oligarchs, but the honest—the honest businesspeople.

Chairman WILSON: We want everybody to have one.

Mr. BAER: Okay. [LAUGHTER.] You know, your question—your question is quite right. I think Vladimir Putin is making the best argument against Vladimir Putin's security guarantees that anybody could make, a stronger argument than we could, and you see that in public opinion in Armenia today. A few years ago, 90 percent of the population trusted Russia—as a partner, and now it is down to 30 percent, and that reflects an assessment of what has gone on in the region. As you said, Russian so-called peacekeepers have not been peacekeepers in the region. Therefore, I think we need to continue to look for opportunities.

One suggestion that I made is that we might work with partners to set up a series of agreements. There have been these agreements made with Ukraine that last for 10 years that kind of give a long-term perspective to security assistance, and if those could be done by individual partners of Armenia, they could be bundled together to give Yerevan and the people of Armenia confidence that there is going to be a partnership with the West for the long run.

Chairman WILSON: Indeed, I believe there will be.

I am really grateful now to recognize Chairman Ben Cardin.

Senator CARDIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me thank again our witnesses.

Therefore, my impression is that to make progress for Armenia, the next step is to have a successful peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. That seems to be the next major step for Armenia.

Now, I start by saying I am not sure that a peace agreement is very fair. If I understand it, it does not—they are not even talking about taking care in Nagorno-Karabakh from the point of view of access by the community that is been displaced. They are not even talking about the border issues as far as the areas that are currently under control by Azerbaijan and Armenia. Therefore, it is not really a very fair agreement. All that being said, my understanding is that Armenia wants to move forward with the agreement because that is the only way they are going to be able to get

their borders open and be able to get their country economically on the right path.

Now, that requires Azerbaijan to say, well, why cannot we at least open up the Turkish borders? Yet, Turkey will not open up the borders until there is an agreement with Azerbaijan. Then it appears that Russia has to okay Azerbaijan agreeing to an agreement with Armenia because of the new relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia, and Russia does not want this to happen. Therefore, the bottom line is it seems like it is all falling apart because Russia is saying no. How do we overcome that?

Ms. VARTANYAN: Should I go? Yes? Is it okay if I start?

Senator CARDIN: Sure.

Ms. VARTANYAN: Well, thank you so much for your analysis. It is great to hear all these details and especially to feel how much you do care about what is happening there in the region.

When you have a conflict for over 30 years; when you have several wars with so many casualties, with such a large displacement; and especially when you have to negotiate in a situation when your major neighbor, Russia, is invading another neighbor, Ukraine, and you have a question about your own statehood future; you have to start with something. It is probably better to start with something where you can agree with Azerbaijan in order to proceed with your dialogue and then to settle step by step some of the issues, including the ones that you mentioned.

I personally believe it is really very important to address some of the topics that have to do with the war legacy and also the conflict. You mentioned just one topic, it is the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh and what happened there. It is really very difficult for me to see how people from Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenians, will just forget about their home region. However, it is really—it is also very difficult for me to see how this very topic can get on the table at this very moment for them to agree. Therefore, they probably should start with something where they can reach an agreement and then proceed with some more difficult topics.

Senator CARDIN: Yes. I agree with that, and so I am supportive of trying to reach an agreement even though I think it is not going to be fair. By the way, I do not think—it is going to be hard to reach this type of agreement. As you have pointed out, Azerbaijan is insisting on constitutional changes in Armenia, which is ridiculous. It is just a ridiculous requirement that they are asking for. It is not needed, and it is really just something we believe is to delay or eliminate the agreement.

However, let me raise two other issues and welcome either —any of your response. How do you deal with the situation? If we are going to be able to get investors into Armenia, how do we get tech investors if Russia is present in Armenia? We would be concerned about compromising our intellectual property, and how do we deal with a country that has open borders with Iran, another security threat to the United States? Therefore, how do we deal with those two issues? Mr. Ambassador, do you want to try that one?

Mr. BAER: [LAUGHS.] You always save the easy ones for me. [LAUGHTER.]

I mean, I think it goes back to your first question. In the services sector, the tech—the tech investments that you would expect to see

in the near term in Armenia would likely be the outsourcing of some programming. It would not necessarily be the highest level of intellectual property threats, and I think we would be wise to be judicious about who else is present on the ground across that region. But you cannot get investment in the services sector if you do not have security, so the peace—the peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan is important for really developing the services sector, including the IT sector.

The border with Turkey is incredibly crucial to all of the goods and—the goods—the developments of the goods, the hard goods business. The border with Turkey is the place to diversify what are right now two options, neither of which is very attractive, Iran and Russia. Therefore, if I were going to make a suggestion to undo the Gordian knot—and I understand it is difficult—that you laid out, we might consider putting emphasis on reversing the sequence; not going for peace with Armenia and—keep those talks going, peace with Armenia and Azerbaijan first, but rather going for normalization with Turkey first, and—

Senator CARDIN: However, Turkey has said they will not do it until there is a peace agreement.

Mr. BAER: They will not surprise the Azerbaijanis. They are too close to the Azerbaijanis. Therefore, they will—I mean, not too—they are not going to surprise the Azerbaijanis by signing some deal without Azerbaijan knowing. However, I wonder if there could be some practical measures, some confidence-building measures between Armenia and Azerbaijan short of normalization; for instance, talks about how they would manage an open border between the two countries. How would the two sides, their border security forces, how would they relate to each other? How would they deal with customs? If you could start to get people talking about the practicalities, you might get them to be able to imagine it. At some point, yes, with Azerbaijan's full knowledge, Turkey may be willing to take the courageous step to do what is good for the entire region including Azerbaijan, which is open to that border.

Senator CARDIN: Thank you.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Chairman Cardin.

We now proceed to Co-Chairman Steve Cohen of Tennessee.

Representative COHEN: Having probably torn my relationship with Turkey apart, I will pass on these questions at the present time.

Chairman WILSON: You just saw, again, bipartisan intelligence right there. Therefore, we now—[LAUGHTER]—and so then—and so it goes straight to Congressman Marc Veasey of Texas.

#### **STATEMENT OF MARC A. VEASEY, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TEXAS**

Representative VEASEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that.

I was hoping, Dr. Baer, that you could talk a little bit about Israel's relationship with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and do you see them having a role in future negotiations?

Mr. BAER: I do not know how much of a role I would expect Israel to have in the actual negotiations. I know Israel has relations with both countries, and indeed with most countries in the region, and some of those relationships are founded on Israel's export

of high-technology defense equipment. Therefore, I could see that as the political and security situation improves in the region, including between Armenia and Azerbaijan, that might pave the way for more trade relations with Israel, as it would with other countries. However, I do not know that I would expect them to play a pivotal role in the kind of diplomatic/political work that needs to be done to get the normalization or the peace agreement in the near term.

Representative VEASEY: Thank you very much.

Mr. Grigoryan, I wanted to ask you, I know that you wanted to—you highlighted Armenia's economic and energy dependence on Russia. Winter is here, and the last two winters have been relatively mild, you know, in comparison to previous seasons. I wanted to know what steps you think the U.S. can take to assist Armenia in diversifying its energy sources and reducing its reliance on Russian markets. This has to be something that you are following closely.

Mr. GRIGORYAN: Yes. Thank you for your question.

Armenia's dependence—economic dependence and energy dependence on Russia is quite big at this moment. It has been the focus of all the talks between the Armenian government and Western leaders, trying to find a solution to that problem. Therefore, that is why I think all of us emphasize the need for diversification.

However, I think we need to understand that it is a long-term process. It cannot happen overnight, but it is not impossible either. Our center has recently conducted research on that topic that actually shows that with continued investment in Armenia's energy sector, like the atomic station we were talking about, or improving its agriculture, and finding new markets for Armenian products, it is possible in the mid-term and in the long term to reduce this dependency.

It is also important to understand that Russia is quite weak at this moment, and that is an opportunity for countries like Armenia to have a bold foreign policy. It means that the possibility of Russia implementing sanctions against Armenia is not that big at this moment. That is why Armenia has been able to take some bold steps, like removing the Russian border guards from the airport or from the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.

However, the short answer to your question is to support Armenia in finding new markets, subsidizing its agriculture, in removing the tariff barriers to energy resources that are coming to Armenia, that is one of the biggest problems and that is one of the biggest reasons for the prevalence of the Russian energy sources. Therefore, there are solutions. It is not that it is impossible to do. However, these are all mid-term and long-term solutions.

Representative VEASEY: Do you feel that Armenia's ready for a long winter if that should occur?

Mr. GRIGORYAN: I think that is the only way to move forward. If we are—if we are serious about this whole foreign policy diversification, enhancing the country's security, I think there is—this understanding in Yerevan. Of course, there are some doubts about the capacity of implementing this kind of strategy or coming up with this kind of strategy. That is why it is important that the U.S.

and the EU continue being engaged in this process because, without Western support, this process could be very difficult.

Representative VEASEY: Yes, no, thank you very much.

Dr. Baer, on—kind of on the same topic, what strategies can Armenia adopt to reduce its reliance on Russia, particularly in the defense sector? How can the U.S. help in that area?

Mr. BAER: In the defense sector, Armenia has been almost entirely dependent on Russia for the last three decades, and so it is going to take a generation to shift. It is not only a shift in the dependence on Russia for hardware and for training, but, obviously, a new generation of leadership. Prime Minister Pashinyan has shown this understanding of the need for a generational shift, and it is not just in the defense sector; it is across government services in many ways.

Therefore, I think of two things. One, going back to what I said before, these bilateral security arrangements or security agreements where we provide assistance to the security sector—the security and defense sector over the long run, not just the United States but also other partners and friends of Armenia. However, also, some of the training programs that we can do to build a culture that is appropriate to a free and democratic people and the future that they have decided that they want.

representative VEASEY: Yes. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Veasey. We now proceed to Congressman Dr. Andy Harris of Maryland.

#### **STATEMENT OF ANDY HARRIS, U.S. HOUSE, FROM MARYLAND**

Representative HARRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

A couple of questions just following up—on the visit earlier in the summer. Are the guards removed from the airport, the Russian troops? They had—so that has taken place.

What about the other Russian forces in the country? There was a suggestion that the Ukraine conflict was going to cause Russia to draw down some of its forces. Where does the drawdown stand? Or is there going to—is there a drawdown? Because the Russian troops were not only at the airport; they were at other bases in the country is my understanding.

Ms. VARTANYAN: Should I go first?

Well, if you—I think it is actually better to look—to take a big—kind of a broader snapshot of what has been happening in the region since Russia invaded Ukraine. In that sense, of course, the situation that happened last year in Nagorno-Karabakh is probably one of those indications where we see the Russian declining ability to have an impact on the ground. In that sense, I am not sure that we should be only discussing kind of, you know, their presence or continued presence in these places. They might have something on the paper, but that does not necessarily mean that Russia is either willing or even able to activate its presence on the ground, yes? I think it is really very important to point. Again, the situation, what happened in Nagorno-Karabakh last year with the Russian peacekeepers on the ground absolutely not acting to do anything and Moscow not even taking any kind of—you know, paying any

kind of attention, including to the fact that some of the Russian peacekeepers got killed during that very crisis.

Therefore, the Russian peacekeepers are still—the Russian military is still present along the Armenian-Turkish border, and then also they are present at the Armenian-Iranian border. The Russian military presence, at the—request of Armenia left not only the airport but also left a number of—a number of their military bases, like small ones along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. I could see it myself when I was traveling there in July that the Russians were no longer there and they had to pack and leave Armenia. However, I mean, again, in light of the war in Ukraine, it is not only the actual having presence, basically physical presence on the ground; it is also the declining Russian ability or sometimes even willingness to activate some of the tools and the resources that it has on the ground.

Representative HARRIS: Thank you. When we visited, there was a suggestion that, of course, Azerbaijan is assisting in avoiding the sanctions on Russia and bypassing sanctions on Russia, especially with regards to energy flow from the Caspian Sea—I am sorry, from Russia through Azerbaijan. However, there are—there are also some reports that Armenia—that may be taking place in Armenia as well, helping Russia avoid sanctions. Is the Armenian government adamant that that should not be happening; that, in fact, these sanctions, these—a lot of these—U.S. and Western sanctions on Russia should be abided by all the players in the South Caucasus?

Ms. VARTANYAN: Should I try to respond to it? Maybe I will allow some of my colleagues also to follow up.

Well, you know, I have been working on the whole region of the South Caucasus, and usually, to be honest, I mean, in my conversations with the Western officials and diplomats, it is not Armenia but Georgia that comes up in the conversations. Armenia, in contrast to many other countries that are bordering Russia, has been staying very transparent and willing to cooperate and also to respond to all the questions that have been coming either from the United States or from the European Union. I think we have already lost count of the delegations that have been visiting and, again, kind of checking and reporting back to their capitals that there have been no problems so far.

Mr. GRIGORYAN: I can confirm that this is actually the case. For the Armenian government, this is an absolute red line and they are doing everything to meet all the requirements that have been set by the Western partners.

However, when it comes to Azerbaijan, it is not just about the sanctions; it is about also creating alternative infrastructure for Russia to trade with the outside world. The so-called North-South Transportation Corridor that allows Russia to basically direct all these products that were sold to Europe to the Indian market and to other markets is very important. If you look at the recent trip by the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, to Baku, that was the most important issue they discussed. Gazprom and the Azerbaijani state oil company, SOCAR, signed a new \$1 billion agreement on developing that route. A lot of other agreements were signed. Therefore, this is much more serious than evading sanctions.

Representative HARRIS: Thank you very much.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Dr. Harris.

We now proceed to Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri.

**STATEMENT OF EMANUEL CLEAVER, U.S. HOUSE, FROM MISSOURI**

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this hearing.

Ms. Vartanyan, I am going to direct this question to you although I am interested in any of you responding. However, you had earlier suggested that the Azerbaijan military appears to be expanding their military operations or their positions along the front-line and building barracks, expanding roads. In the United States, unfortunately, we get pretty much only news from—the American public—only on the United States, so we are not aware of things that are going on in places around the world. Therefore, you know, I think this may be an opportunity for us to at least, you know, expose to the American public some of the things that are going on.

Therefore, I am interested if you would expand on the current military situation on the ground, and would it—would it be provocative if there was some kind of peacekeeping force or whatever else you might have—like to suggest?

Ms. VARTANYAN: Thank you so much for this question. In response to the Azerbaijani attack in 2022, the European Union was very fast to deploy the European Union civilian mission to Armenia. It now monitors all—whole long border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The European Union's observers, they are patrolling 24/7, and they are reporting to their capitals regularly about every single smallest development on the ground. I know that some members of the Commission saw the mission.

I should say that Canada, which is not a member of the European Union, joined the EU—the EU mission in Armenia, and there were some more conversations about some other countries that could join. I know that there were some discussions about the United States potentially participating. I should say that, of course, the United States, in that sense, will not be a leading country. It will be one of many. However, in a way, it will also provide the United States an opportunity to get very regular updates about everything that is happening on the ground, along with other Western partners. Then this will be basically the eyes and ears of the United States on the ground.

Therefore, that could be probably something to consider, and then discuss with the State Department and some other agencies that are responsible for such decisions. As far as I know, there were some preliminary discussions going on, on that very issue. Of course, it will very much depend on the United States and the European Union whether they will want to proceed with every decision.

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you.

Does anyone else like to respond to that?

Mr. GRIGORYAN: Yes. I think in this context, the most important thing, as have—as I mentioned in my testimony, is to support Armenia to defend itself. There have been certain steps by countries like India, and France, who have sold weaponry to Armenia. How-

ever, I think more should be done. Because we have discussed the peace treaty, the peace talks. I think it is important. I agree with that. However, under the current circumstances, when the imbalance of power is such—there is such a huge imbalance of power, Armenia not being able to defend itself is the biggest problem. Because Azerbaijan will exploit future opportunities to escalate the situation.

The peace treaty basically, at this point, does not resolve any of the outstanding issues. It is just a political document about recognizing each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. There will be still a lot of unresolved issues after the signing of the treaty, like the unblocking of communications, and the limitation of the border. Therefore, we might still have a very volatile situation, even if this peace treaty is signed. I am not sure it is going to be signed in the near future.

Mr. BAER: I can just add that I think the monitoring mission, the observers, are really important. Right now, they are really important because they are reporting on the ground on a daily basis and providing information to the international community. The hope is that right now what appears to be an ongoing aggressive posture by Azerbaijan is part of a negotiating tactic, and not a sign that they plan to make another move. The hope. If they do make another move, obviously, the observers are there. After there is a peace deal, the observers will remain important in giving confidence to both sides that the peace deal is being implemented, because there will be outstanding issues. I think after a peace deal, the observers can help build confidence on both sides that the peace will stick.

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Cleaver.

Now proceed immediately to Congresswoman Victoria Spartz of Indiana.

#### **STATEMENT OF VICTORIA SPARTZ, U.S. HOUSE, FROM INDIANA**

Representative SPARTZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have, like, a brief question for the ambassador. What do you think, if you look at South Caucasus right now, the lay of the land? It is interesting, just if you have some thoughts, on whether Azerbaijan intends to join BRICS. What is—what are your thoughts really where the powers are moving and what is really happening? Would like to hear your perspective.

Mr. BAER: Sure. Let me start with Azerbaijan. I think Ilham Aliyev has masterfully been able to use petrochemicals and his control over energy in the region to bargain with the West. Obviously, the war in Ukraine has created more interest from Europe, in particular, in Azerbaijan's petrochemicals, while he's been cozying up to Putin and making a kind of fraternity of authoritarians with Putin. Therefore, Azerbaijan is—and, obviously, after a military victory he feels quite emboldened.

I think the goal of U.S. diplomacy should make—should be to engage with him, because we do not have any choice, but to engage with him and try to encourage him not to let the emboldened go



to his head and make decisions that are may in the short run gratifying, but in the long run, undermine not only the stability of other countries in the region but also Azerbaijan's own prospects for a prosperous and secure future.

In Georgia, it is a devastatingly sad story right now. The backsliding of Georgian democracy over the last few years in particular has been heartbreaking for many of us who saw Georgia as a bright light as recently as a few years ago. Georgia has been accused of being a conduit for sanctions evasion and exporting to Russia goods that should not be exported to Russia. The current government has copied/pasted, effectively, Russia's anti-NGO law, forcing NGOs to register.

I know that Senator Shaheen was in a meeting recently where she reported that she was told that if the United States would stop funding pro-democracy NGOs, that would solve problems in Tbilisi. Of course, the United States should continue to support those on the ground, which is the vast majority of Georgians who want a free, democratic Georgian government and who want a free, democratic Georgian future.

I hope that we will stay engaged with Tbilisi. They have an election coming up, as I am sure you know, in October, before ours, and that election will be really pivotal. If the opposition wins, the prospects for unwinding some of the backsliding that has happened in recent years are on the table, as well as making progress with Georgia's talks with the EU which are now stalled because of the backsliding. Therefore, watch this space. The next 50 days will be really pivotal in Georgia. I was in Tbilisi last week.

Interesting side note, I had the chance to meet with the president who, a couple of years ago, had—when I had asked about backsliding—she had told me and my colleagues, you know, do not worry, just wait and see how this turns out. This year, she came into our meeting, and she said, our Georgian Dream— which, of course, is the ruling party—our Georgian Dream has become a Georgian nightmare. Therefore, her tone has changed, and she was sounding the alarm as well, as well as many in civil society.

You know—obviously, you know the situation in Ukraine as well as anyone and have been an outspoken champion of Ukraine. Obviously, Armenia finds itself sandwiched between huge regional dynamics—and in some ways strangled—by huge regional dynamics that are not of its own making. However, geography is something that none of us can escape. Therefore, I think the reason why this hearing is so important, and continued congressional visits like the ones that your colleagues have made, is so important is to let people on the ground in Armenia know that America sees them, we want the same democratic future that they want for themselves, and that we will be there to support them in the long run.

Representative SPARTZ: Thank you. Does anyone else want to add briefly something? No? Okay.

Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Congresswoman.

As we conclude, I think it is very clear for the people of Armenia and also for the people of Georgia that we have bicameral support—U.S. House, U.S. Senate—for freedom and democracy. We have bipartisan Republicans and Democrats also very supportive of freedom and democracy for the people of Armenia.

I am so happy you mentioned the Republic of Georgia because the nation of Georgia—we are just impressed by the people of Georgia and know that their past experience has been to work closely with the EU, with the United States. That would be in their interest, and not to adopt foreign registration acts that could be clearly identified as a precursor of dictatorship, as has been sadly revealed in the Russian Federation and Venezuela.

Keeping this in mind again, we are so hopeful for the people of Armenia. I have to restate, bicameral, House and Senate, bipartisan, Republicans and Democrats. We want the best for the people of Armenia. With that, we are adjourned. [Sounds gavel.]

[Whereupon, at 3:40 p.m., the hearing ended.]





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