ARMENIA IN 2008: CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY

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Category: Opinions

By The Civilitas Foundation, Yerevan, December 2008

The full report may be viewed in PDF Form. A synopsis of a panel discussion related to the matters appears below. ***Keghart.com***

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The report was launched with a public reception on December 26. Just as the report is the first of its kind Armenian-prepared country self-reflection, the format of the event was also unprecedented. Four panelists discussed the topics covered by the report.

Vartan Oskanian opened the discussion saying that the crisis and tension in Armenia, resulting from the events of March 1, have not eased, but have even escalated. Is the governing coalition conscious of the growing crisis and its possible consequences? Mr. Oskanian posed the question to Armen Roustamian, a member of the governing coalition member Dashnaktsutyun.

Mr. Roustamian admitted that there is indeed an ongoing crisis, that he would not avoid the word, and that the crisis started even before the events of March 1 (when 10 people were killed during the post-election clashes between police and protesters.) Mr. Roustamian said he believed that perhaps Armenia was not ready for the new approach necessary in this recent election period, and that the root cause of this according to Mr. Roustamian is in the first years of Armenia's independence.

Mr. Oskanian also spoke about the fact that the parliament does not reflect the society's political leanings. Even according to official statistics, 50 percent of the population had voted for the opposition.

The two parties that are now in the coalition, Dashnaktsutyun and Orinats Yerkir (Rule of Law) received votes because of their opposition stance. On the other hand, Mr. Oskanian said he doesn't see that new elections would be a solution. He stated that the authorities and political forces have to work instead to make sure that the elections to come will truly represent society's leanings. He also said that in his view, the Dashnaktsutyun would have been more useful if it was in the opposition, instead of being in the coalition as it is now.

Armen Roustamian explained that the parliament doesn't reflect the views of the society because the electoral mechanisms and institutions didn't function as they should have, and that is in part because society seems indifferent about its own destiny.

In response to Mr. Oskanian's statement about the Dashnaktsutyun's role in the coalition, Mr. Roustamian noted that in a country like Armenia, the opposition can't implement its programs and it's better to be a part of government obe effective.

Hovhannes Igitian described how the government of Armenia has been trying to persuade the Council of Europe for nine months that the democratic process is moving forward, even as prominent members of the opposition are still under arrest, even as it doesn't do enough to investigate the events of March 1, and continues to hold shameful court hearings.

Hovhannes Igitian felt certain that it would only take a few days for the authorities to resolve these issues, including allowing television station A1+ to return to the air.

Armen Darbibian expressed the belief that the economic crisis will cause serious problems for the country in the near future. Mr. Darbinian stated that Armenia's internal situation doesn't allow the country to practice a strong foreign policy. He stated that Armenia's economy will suffer greatly from the global crisis. To find solutions, Armen Darbinian believes the government needs to make firm decisions and take certain steps. But, he said, the government's actions are going in the wrong direction, which in his belief might bring Armenia's economy to the early 1990s level

A lively Question and Answer session followed the discussion with prominent members of civil society taking part, including Vardan Khachatrian from the opposition Zharangutyun party, Davit Harutyunian, head of the Armenian delegation to PACE, Vladimir Karapetyan, representative of the opposition Armenian National Congress.