

PANEL TACKLES ADOPTION OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN ARMENIA

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Category: [Opinions](#)



Report, Toronto, December 2018

Ahead of the recent snap parliamentary elections in Armenia, at a public gathering in [Toronto on Dec. 1](#), a five-person powerhouse panel offered expert advice on how to establish sound participatory democracy. The gathering was held at the Armenian Evangelical Church north of Toronto. Some 40 people attended the discussions. It was organized by "[Canada's Move](#)", a network of mostly young concerned Armenians in Toronto.

The panelists were Armenia politicians Lena Nazaryan and Stepan Safaryan; Annie Demirdjian (director, Glendon College of Public and International Affairs, Toronto), Viken L. Attarian (public intellectual and chair of the Policy Commission of the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec), and Arakel Minassian, a graduate aspirant in Russian, East European and Eurasian studies.

Ms. Demirdjian emphasized the importance of democratic institutions in establishing participatory democracy. She said, "Tremendous efforts have been made in Armenia to put the three branches of the government (legislative, executive, and judiciary) on the democracy road." But to have a functioning participatory democracy the state's various institutions (health, education, finance, etc.) have to adopt participatory democracy in their operations. She also cited Daron Acemoglu's thesis that both public and private institutions should work together to build genuine democracy.

Ms. Demirdjian said she hoped Armenia would join the EU because that body is the "most democratic and methodical. We should adopt the EU's democratic model." The administrator-scholar added, "Much work is needed to be done in Armenia to copy the EU and adopt Acemoglu's approach so as to put Armenia on the right track to democracy.

Mr. Minassian focused on the benefits of participatory democracy. "Participatory democracy is desirable because it helps citizens become better educated, gives people control over their lives, and increases their sense of belonging," he said. Mr. Minassian said Armenia is well placed to adopt participatory democracy. Commenting on the rise of Nikol Pashinyan, he said the government of Armenia should make participatory democracy central to its governance. "The ball is in Pashinyan's court...whether he wants to integrate participatory democracy or keep it outside the government," said Minassian.

Former MP Stepan Safaryan said that for a long time the only institution in Armenia which enjoyed the people's trust was the military, but the April 2016 mini-war shook that trust, because of exposure of corruption. The institutions representing people were created within fraudulent constitutional framework. He stressed the importance of transparency, expansion of active participation of people, participatory democracy. He elaborated on the need of independent judiciary, inclusive social and economic policies. He went on telling, "I won't reveal a secret if I say that the Diaspora is our only strategic ally".



Mr. Attarian elaborated on the relation between elections and democracy. He said, "People confuse free elections with democracy. Elections per se do not represent democracy." Regarding whether under present conditions with the expectation of a large majority voting for Pashinyan's alliance a loyal opposition in the parliament is viable, Attarian responded, "The 'loyal opposition' will likely not be an issue at this stage, as long as the winning side is willing to listen to dissenting views and accepting the best ideas of all sides. If the large majority government dismisses the opposition as irrelevant, it will be to the detriment of our nation."

Ms. Lena Nazarian said, "We want to change the electoral code, especially the rating system ". She advocated for women's participation and electing women representatives to the National Assembly (parliament). She stated that her mission was to create conditions to transition from a corrupt, restrictive, unjust system into free and competitive environment. She talked about poverty, human rights and adoption of referendum to enable "participation of the public in making major decisions." While admitting that transitional justice is a novel idea in Armenia, she said that the process is being explored with respect to restoring the rights of people who experienced injustice under "the previous regime".

The panel discussion with the Q&A session lasted almost three hours. "Canada's Move" plans periodically to hold symposia, panel-discussions and lectures about social and political subjects of public interest.

STATEMENT

"Canada's Move" is a network of Canadian Armenians to promote awareness of the historic importance of the "Velvet Revolution", its positive impact on Armenians throughout the world, its

accomplishments and future expansion.

The network upholds sovereignty of Armenia/Artsakh, promotes the expansion and the strengthening of Armenia-Diaspora relations, advocates repatriation, rallies around specific self-relying projects that empower Armenia youth and alleviate poverty. It also advocates application of environmentally recognized best practices in utilizing natural resources, act as a platform for discussions in meritocracy, gender equality, inclusive and fair economic policies, rights of marginalized segments of society, participatory democratic governance, anti-corruption, and rule of law.

The network is well aware of the divisions within the Canadian-Armenian community, but it also recognizes and appreciates the value of cooperation with individuals or entities irrespective of political, religious and fraternity affiliations. Working in isolation has limited impact, whereas working in unison by building consensus leads to healthier relations and lasting desirable results.

Integrity, accountability and transparency will be the guiding principles that characterize the *modus operandi* of the network.

To accomplish its goals the network will utilize social media, the press and public gatherings.

We call upon our compatriots in Canada to join "Canada's Move" Network.

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- The statement is subject to review by adherents of the "Canada's Move" Network within six months.
- Previously held activities during the formative period of the Network

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