



## **State of the Union – U.S. Senator Ben Cardin**

By Dr. Maija Harkonen

(St. Mary's City, Md.) Friday, February 2, 2017 -- U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, discussed international and national challenges facing our nation at St Mary's College of Maryland. The event was organized by the Center for the Study of Democracy at St Mary's College of Maryland, The Patuxent Partnership (TPP), Historic St. Mary's City, and League of Women Voters of St. Mary's County.

The Executive Director of the Center, Dr. Maija Harkonen welcomed Senator Cardin, thanking him for his outstanding leadership in fighting against corruption and human rights violations. Senator Cardin co-sponsored the 2012 Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act that was aimed at reducing corruption and human rights violations first in Russia, then elsewhere in the world. Harkonen also praised Senator Cardin's work as Senior Democratic Senator on the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Better known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, it monitors compliance with the Helsinki Final Act that was also signed by Russia in 1975. The Russian seizure of Crimea in March 2014 violated the principles of the Final Act and fundamentally changed Western perceptions of Russia.

### **Recognizing the Center's Work**

Senator Cardin started his remarks by recognizing the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Center for the Study of Democracy and noting the importance of civic education in keeping American democracy strong and resilient. He recognized the important work of the Center's founders, including *The Washington Post* executive editor Ben Bradlee, who started his tenure at the Center's Advisory Board in 2002, the same year Senator Cardin came on board. Cardin recalled how Bradlee had fought for the transparency and truthful reporting that form a foundation for a well-functioning democracy. He had challenged the federal government over the publication of the Pentagon Papers and oversaw the Post's exposure of the Watergate scandal. Paying homage to the Center's history and its continued work to research, inform and engage ordinary people in a democratic process, Cardin also recognized U.S. Representative Steny Hoyer, another member of the Center's Advisory Board, for his excellent service to Maryland and the whole nation.

### **Russia Is Undermining Our Democracy**

U.S. intelligence agencies stand behind their conclusion that Russia meddled in the 2016 presidential elections. They used hacking and fake news to interfere not only in the United States but also in the elections of many European countries, including France and Germany. Why? "Because the Kremlin is trying to undermine Western democracy," Cardin said.

Cardin has remained steadfast in his refusal to dilute the magnitude of Russian interference, noting that Moscow's meddling in the U.S. elections weakens our confidence in the American voting process. Strong measures are needed to counter Russian cyberattacks and its efforts to undermine American values. But who would take the lead? "President Trump has been negligent in responding to the Russian threat to U.S. national security," Cardin said. The United States should counter Russian attacks in a systematic way.

In early January, Cardin and other Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a 200-page report detailing Russian interference in European and U.S. democracies and their use of social media platforms to spread disinformation. "We will not be prepared to defend our country against possible Russian meddling in future

elections unless we take action now,” Cardin warned. One of the report’s recommendations was for the U.S. government and NATO to lead a coalition of countries committed to mutual defense against cyberattacks.

In 2017, Senator Cardin co-signed the bill that would impose mandatory visa bans and asset freezes on those who undermine the cybersecurity of public or private infrastructure and democratic institutions and sanction anyone who assists in such activities.

Russia has repeatedly denied U.S. intelligence agencies’ conclusions that Moscow meddled in the election and President Donald Trump has denied any collusion between his campaign and Russian officials.

### **More Transparency – Less Corruption**

Senator Cardin is a leading advocate of anti-corruption and good governance policies. His efforts to reduce corruption world-wide and improve transparency in governance dates back to his early years in public service. At the global level, corruption fosters the conditions for violent extremism as it corrodes public trust and undermines the rule of law. The diversion of public funds also reduces the government’s resources available for development, hurting ordinary people especially outside the metropolitan areas.

Russia is one of the most corrupt nations in the world, Senator Cardin noted. Cardin received international attention in 2010 when he requested immediate cancelation of U.S. visas held by corrupt Russian officials who were responsible for the death of the Russian anti-corruption lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky. The attorney had discovered tax fraud involving 23 companies and a total of \$230 million linked to the Kremlin. He died in a Russian prison at the age of 37. In 2012, the Sergei Magnitsky Act, that was co-sponsored by Senator Cardin, came into law. It blocks corrupt Russian government officials and businessmen from entering the United States and getting access to the U.S. banking system. Russia lobbied hard for repeal of the act and also retaliated by enacting its own legislation, ending U.S. adoption of Russian children.

### **Working for Peace and Stability**

When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it violated one of the basic principles of the Helsinki Final Act, namely that European borders are not to be changed by force. As the Senior Democratic Senator on the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission), Senator Cardin took a firm stand on the issue. By violating international law in Europe, Russia showed total disregard for the territorial integrity of an independent state of Ukraine. In the eyes of both Americans and Europeans, Russia had become a significant threat to their security.

In 2014, Senator Cardin joined other American lawmakers to impose sanctions over Russia's occupation, and then annexation, of the Crimea from Ukraine. Subsequent sanctions followed, targeting especially members of President Putin's inner circle. In early 2017, Senator Cardin and five other Senators introduced a bill that would prevent President Donald Trump from easing sanctions on Russia without congressional approval. President Trump signed the Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017 into law in August but left open the possibility that he might choose not to enforce its provisions.

Senator Cardin blames Russian President Vladimir Putin for undermining democracy and the rule of law in Europe and the United States. Moscow uses a spectrum of means for the purpose, including hacking, internet trolling and financing for extremist political groups, he says. Europeans have already ramped up their anti-disinformation efforts. Americans, too, need to devise new strategies to combat Russian disinformation campaigns. Fact-checking operations are important, but not sufficient. Among many other measures, citizens in democratic countries need to be educated to recognize fake news that is made up, not just inconvenient.

### **Immigration Reform**

“Americans are known for their compassion,” Senator Cardin said when talking about the immigration issue. While the United States needs to protect its borders, pursuing a border wall on the U.S.-Mexico border only damages U.S. relations with Mexico, Cardin said. The Dreamers, those brought to the U.S. illegally as children, are living in a

constant state of uncertainty. The only country they know is the United States and asking them to leave their American homes for what their parents did is not in line with our values, the Senator emphasized.

The Dreamers were protected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, DACA, created under the Obama administration in 2012. When it was rescinded by the Trump Administration in September 2017, Senator Cardin called for quick action to restore the program. More recently, he had insisted that Dreamers' fate should not be tied into comprehensive immigration reform. Instead, Cardin said, Congress should extend Temporary Protected Status for them and consider permanent legal solutions.

The Center for the Study of Democracy is currently implementing a yearlong program on immigration. One of the goals is to discuss the professional, cultural and economic contributions immigrants have made in Southern Maryland. The Center received a grant from Maryland Humanities for one of the projects under the theme, St Mary's County Oral History Project, which is the first oral history collection in St Mary's County that focuses on recent foreign-born immigrants. The project is expected to provide significant insights into this group of more than 600 immigrants and help strengthen their integration into local communities.