

Previously, 95-97 percent of Armenia’s defense relations were with Russia, now cannot remain the same: PM



Addressing the question regarding the lack of a concept of reforms in the Armed Forces of Armenia, considering that the new draft of the “Law on Defense” should have been ready in January 2022, the Prime Minister said: “In January 2022, that concept was ready. However, events in the winter of 2022 made it obvious that we could not move forward with that concept. Now, we need not only to have a concept but also to understand how realistic the realization of that concept is, including cooperation in the military-technical sphere. We need to understand with whom we can realistically have military-technical and defense relations.”

Pashinyan added that problem was not as challenging before because there was no such problem, and creating a concept posed no difficulty.

“Previously, 95-97 percent of our defense sector relations were with the Russian Federation. Now, it cannot be the same, for both objective and subjective reasons. We have to understand what kind of relations we have, for example, with India in this concept,” he said.

The Prime Minister also emphasized the importance of answering questions about what security relations Armenia will have with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Georgia, the United States, what security

relations it will have with Georgia, or whether security relations with Russia will change or not. Will Armenia remain a member of the CSTO or not? What kind of relations are being built with France?

“The problem here is that this concept has been already declared as a declaration. We need to formulate a concept for the implementation of which we have at least some agreements. And I think that we should finalize this concept during this year,” said the Prime Minister.

Pashinyan emphasized that the government has declared and is moving towards a professional army.

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PM Pashinyan, Foreign Policy Advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader exchange views on security issues in the South Caucasus

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on January 29 met with Kamal Kharrazi, Foreign Policy Advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader and Head of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations of Iran. According to the PM's Office readout, Pashinyan emphasized the importance of Kamal Kharrazi's visit to Armenia and expressed confidence that it would give a new impetus to the further development and strengthening of Armenia-Iran relations.

Nikol Pashinyan noted that they had agreed with the President of the Republic of Iran to take consistent steps in the direction of the continuous increase in



the volume of trade turnover. At the same time, the Prime Minister mentioned that he fondly remembered the meeting with the Supreme Leader of Iran and asked to convey his warm greetings.

According to the source, the

interlocutors discussed various issues related to the Armenia-Iran cooperation agenda. They related to political, economic relations, cooperation in energy, infrastructures and other fields and implementation of joint projects.

It is noted that ideas were exchanged on issues related to security and stability in the South Caucasus. The Prime Minister emphasized Armenia's key approaches on this issue.

In the context of unblocking infrastructures in the region, the PM Pashinyan lauded Iran's positive position regarding the Crossroads of Peace project developed by the Armenian government.

PM Nikol Pashinyan meets with visiting IPU Secretary-General

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has held a meeting with the visiting Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Martin Chungong.

During the meeting Prime Minister Pashinyan attached importance to the cooperation with the IPU and described it as a good platform for the development of inter-parliamentary dialogue with partners from various countries, the Prime Minister's Office said in a readout.

PM Pashinyan welcomed the organization of the upcoming IPU Young Parliamentarians Global Forum in Yerevan this September.

The Armenian Prime Minister and the IPU Secretary-General also discussed South Caucasus security and stability. In this context, the Prime Minister spoke about the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and the opportunities for unblocking regional infrastructures, emphasizing Armenia's key approaches and principles on

this matter. Other issues of mutual interest were also discussed.



PM Pashinyan, Markéta Pekarová exchange ideas on the prospect of establishing sustainable peace in the region



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hosted the delegation led by the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic Markéta Pekarová.

In a readout, the Prime Minister's Office said that Nikol Pashinyan attached

importance to Mrs. Pekarová's visit to our country and emphasized the importance of continuous development of Armenia-Czech Republic relations. In this regard, Nikol Pashinyan noted that bilateral high-level mutual visits give a new impetus to interaction and contribute to the expansion of relations.

The Prime Minister also emphasized the importance of close parliamentary cooperation, including within the framework of international organizations.

According to the source, Markéta Pekarová emphasized that her country also attaches great importance to

multi-sectoral cooperation with Armenia and noted that Prime Minister Pashinyan's official visit to the Czech Republic in 2023 contributed to its development.

The interlocutors discussed a number of issues related to the agenda of Armenia-Czech relations, aimed at expanding political, economic, humanitarian ties and joint projects.

It is noted that the sides exchanged ideas on the prospect of establishing security and sustainable peace in the region. The Prime Minister emphasized the key approaches of the Republic of Armenia.

Powerful army, foreign relations and legitimacy: PM Pashinyan on tools to ensure security



Ensuring the security of the country and the state is the daily work of any government and head of government, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in an interview with Public Radio of Armenia.

He said nowadays the issue is practically urgent for many countries due to the international situation, the Prime Minister said, noting that the first tool for ensuring security is the strengthening of the army.

"It's necessary to reform and strengthen the army, have a combat-ready army capable of solving problems. The second tool for ensuring security is foreign relations.

I think there is nothing new in these two statements. I consider it important to add legitimacy to these two factors, because both in foreign relations and in the context of army-building it is very important to have legitimate goals, legitimate from international viewpoint. Not only and not so much from an internal point of view, but from an international point of view," the Prime Minister noted.

"If there is a dissonance between the internal and external perceptions, this is where the security threat is generated. In order to address the security threat, that gap must be closed," Pashinyan added.

"I see legitimacy within the internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Armenia. It is the legitimate right of every country to have a strong and capable army, but this issue needs further discussion, because if you have a strong and capable army to achieve legitimate goals, no one can say why you are strengthening

your army. Problems may arise if you set a goal whose legitimacy can be questioned internationally," said Nikol Pashinyan.

"We need to strengthen our army, make it combat-ready in order to protect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of our country, and no one can tell us "Why are you doing this?" In case we declare we are strengthen the army in order to restore historical justice, a very simple question arises: "Why should others allow that army to grow stronger to solve a question of historical justice?" It is not reasonable to allow that army to become strong and have to deal with that strengthened army," said the Prime Minister.

"I say that we should not send such messages to the world, but I also do not want this conversation to be between us and the world, I want this conversation to be between us and us," the Prime Minister stated.

"Turkey can play a more constructive role," – Armenia's response to Hulusi Akar's statement on Azerbaijan normalization

Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Vahan Kostanyan has responded to Turkish lawmaker, ex-Defense Minister Hulusi Akar's statement regarding the Armenian-Azerbaijani normalization process.

Akar, the Chairman of the Turkish Parliamentary Committee on Defense, recently said that "Armenia should accept the hand of peace extended by Azerbaijan, otherwise it will suffer serious damages just like in the 2020 war."

In an interview with First Channel News, Kostanyan was asked to comment



on Akar's statement and said that Turkey can play a more constructive role in the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization process.

Kostanyan added that the

implementation of the agreement on opening the land border for citizens of third countries and diplomatic passport holders as part of the Armenian-Turkish normalization talks will have a positive impact on both the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani normalization processes.

Deputy FM Kostanyan said that Armenia is waiting for a reaction from Ankara regarding the implementation of the agreement. "As you know, all infrastructures in the Armenian side are ready," Kostanyan said.

Parliament majority leader, French ambassador discuss Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization

Head of the Civil Contract faction in parliament Hayk Konjoryan on February 1 met with French Ambassador to Armenia Olivier Decottignies.

In a readout, the parliament press service said the majority leader and the French ambassador discussed the course of the democratic reforms in Armenia and

attached importance to the unwavering implementation of the fight against corruption. Views were exchanged around the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization process. Konjoryan highly appreciated France's strong support to Armenia in all sectors.



Armenia formally joins International Criminal Court

Armenia on February 1 formally joined the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"ICC Rome Statute officially entered into force for Armenia on February 1," Armenia's official representative for international legal matters, Yeghishe Kirakosyan told AFP.

"Joining the ICC gives Armenia serious tools to prevent war crimes and crimes against humanity on its territory," Kirakosyan said.



"First of all, this concerns Azerbaijan," he noted.

Armenia signed the Rome Statute in 1999 but did not ratify it, citing contradictions with the country's constitution.

The constitutional court last March said that those obstacles had been removed after Armenia's adoption of a new constitution in 2015.

Last November, Yerevan formally deposited its instrument of ratification of the Rome Statute.

Armenian Minister Defends Arrested Deputy

(RFE/RL) - Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan on February 1 effectively denied corruption accusations brought against one of his deputies and other subordinates arrested on Wednesday.

Armenia's Investigative Committee raided the Ministry of Economy building in Yerevan and conducted searches there together with the National Security Service (NSS). In a statement issued afterwards, the committee said that seven individuals were taken into custody in two criminal investigations conducted by both law-enforcement agencies.

In particular, the statement said, unnamed ministry officials illegally disqualified a private entity from a procurement tender to make sure that it is won by another bidder that charged a much higher sum. Ani Ispiryan, who was sacked as deputy economy minister the night before her arrest, is understood to have been indicted in this criminal case.

The other case involves a ministry

official, also not identified by the Investigative Committee, who allegedly abused his or her position to help other individuals receive government funding for an agribusiness project in violation of rules set by the ministry.

Speaking to reporters, Kerobyan pointed out that the investigators have not accused the suspects of taking bribes or embezzling public funds.

"Therefore, I need an additional clarification of what they mean by abuse [of power,]" he said. "The bidding process was constantly under the control of lawyers, other partners, including the Ministry of Finance, and we are more than sure that both the court and the investigation will conclude that there was no violation of procurement and related laws."

It was still not clear whether Ispiryan and other arrested ministry officials also deny the accusations.

It emerged, meanwhile, that other suspects in the case include Ashot



Hovanesyan, the founder of the software development company Synergy International Systems which is registered in the United States but mainly operates from Armenia. A Yerevan court on Thursday formally remanded Hovanesyan in pre-trial custody.

Another arrested suspect, Ani Gevorgyan, is the wife of Armenian parliament speaker Alen Simonyan's brother Karlen. Simonyan is a key political ally of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Tehran not to accept any changes of geopolitical borders in the region: Foreign Policy Advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader

On January 30, a meeting was held at the Orbeli Analytical Center with the delegation led by Kamal Kharrazi, Foreign Policy Advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader and Head of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations of Iran. Several representatives from the Armenian expert community also participated in the meeting. The Iranian delegation included Abbas Araqchi, the secretary of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the

Islamic Republic of Iran to Armenia, Mehdi Sobhani, the Analytical Center 'Orbely' said in a statement.

According to the source, referring to the historical and friendly relations between Iran and Armenia, Kamal Kharrazi emphasized in his speech the determination of the Islamic Republic of Iran to expand the existing relations. He noted that Iran supports the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries in the region, and the changes

of the geographical borders are unacceptable for Iran. Kharrazi also emphasized that the Iranian side supports Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" project.

According to the source, Kamal Kharrazi confirmed that Iran, serving as the axis connecting the North-South and East-West communication routes, is ready to invest its economic and scientific capabilities in the development and progress of this region. It is noted that he answered questions from Armenian experts at the end of the meeting.

Germany indicts two Ex-MPs for taking bribes from Azerbaijan

Two former conservative politicians in Germany's parliament are facing allegations of bribery for their role in a corruption scandal known as the Azerbaijan affair, German Press Agency (dpa) reports.

Prosecutors in Munich announced the bribery charges on Monday against Axel Fischer and Eduard Lintner, both former lawmakers from the centre-right CDU/CSU bloc.

The politicians both allegedly took bribes aimed at influencing decisions in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in favour of Azerbaijan, according to prosecutors.

PACE is the parliamentary arm of the Council of Europe, an organization of 46 countries. Among PACE's responsibilities

are electing judges to the European Court of Human Rights.

Lintner, who spent 33 years in Germany's parliament and was a member of PACE until 2010, allegedly received "several million euros via 19 foreign letterbox companies" from two firms until 2016, according to prosecutors.

He allegedly passed some of the payments on to other politicians who were supposed to influence decisions in favour of Azerbaijan.

Fischer, who was active in PACE as group leader for the conservative European People's Party (EPP) faction from 2010 to 2018, allegedly made favorable speeches in the interests of Azerbaijan and forwarded confidential documents,

according to prosecutors.

In return, he allegedly received a bribe totaling €21,800 (\$23,570) in 2016.

Lintner described the suspicions of bribery as "utter nonsense" in an interview on Monday with dpa.

After leaving his political post, Lintner said he worked as a paid lobbyist advocating for Nagorno-Karabakh to be assigned to Azerbaijan, which he argued is proper under international law, but denied paying bribes to others.

Fischer told dpa on Monday that the accusations against him are untrue, but that he was happy prosecutors had finally presented allegations in court after a lengthy three-year investigation.

Armenian envoy briefs PACE President on latest developments in the process of normalization of relations with Azerbaijan

On January 29, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the Council of Europe, Ambassador Arman Khachatryan met with President Theodoros Roussopoulos, the newly elected President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

Congratulating Teodoros Roussopoulos on his election as PACE President, Ambassador Khachatryan reaffirmed Armenia's support to PACE in its important mission of protecting human rights, strengthening



democracy and ensuring the rule of law in Europe.

In the context of issues related to regional security, Ambassador Khachatryan presented the latest developments in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. He emphasized the importance of support and involvement of international partners in efforts to establish peace in the region.

Reference was made to the discussions and decisions made during the PACE winter session.

Armenia expects the civilized world to condemn Azerbaijan's unlawful actions – Ambassador

On January 28, the Japan-Armenia Friendship Association (JAFA) organized a presentation of photos taken in Berdzor corridor by Japanese photojournalist Makio Matsumura.

Mr. Matsumura visited Armenia in October and personally photographed the flow of Artsakh refugees to Armenia through the Berdzor Corridor.

Addressing the audience, Ambassador Hovhannisian thanked Japan-Armenia Friendship Association and Mr. Hideharu Nakajima, for organizing the exhibition

and for standing by Armenia in difficult times.

"What Mr. Matsumura recorded in his photos and presented to us was the inability of current international order and mechanisms to make certain states to act according to international law," noted the Ambassador and added that pursuant to Azerbaijan's international obligations, the Berdzor Corridor must have been functional to this day.

The Ambassador noted, that Armenia expects that the democratic world, which

Japan is part of, will condemn the unlawful actions of Azerbaijan and thus contribute to the peace in South Caucasus.



Pashinyan considers economic development as the state interest of Armenia

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan considers economic development and overall progress to be the state interest of Armenia.

Pashinyan expressed this viewpoint in an interview with the "Safe Environment" program on Public Radio of Armenia.

"I am convinced that Armenia's state interest lies in its economic development and overall progress because what we are talking about

– the army, education, border security – involves specific budget expenditures,"



said Pashinyan.

Speaking about the security component, the Prime Minister emphasized that the economy is also important in a wartime situation.

Addressing the government's salary increase for the military, he mentioned that if there is no income in the state budget, it is impossible to raise the salary of the military, to purchase weapons and ammunition, or to finance education so that the military has proper education.

Debt estimated at 48,4% of GDP



Armenia's state debt as of 2023 is estimated to comprise around 48,4% of the GDP, according to preliminary data, finance minister Vahe Hovhannisyan has said.

"In 2023, Armenia's economic potential increased," he said at a press conference. "And the state debt, according to preliminary data, will be around 48,4%,"

increasing a bit compared to the 2022 level. Tax revenues grew progressively. And as a result of 2023 we have a 24,1% tax revenue-GDP indicator," Hovhannisyan said.

GDP estimates are still preliminary.

Citing the growing share of investments by non-residents, the minister said that Armenia is becoming attractive for international institutional investors.

First two business projects now featured in ARFI crowdfunding platform

Two Armenian companies are now looking to attract investors for their projects through ARFI, the first Armenian crowdfunding platform.

The two companies are Barekam Logistic Services, the first Armenian organization of its kind that provides international door-to-door postal and courier services, and Planet Fiber, an IT infrastructure provider.

ARFI is gradually expanding the list of business projects.

ARFI CEO Edgar Evoyan told Armenpress that investors from all over the world can participate in the Armenian

projects.

Furthermore, the company has received numerous new submissions and is simultaneously working to expand the circle of investors.

"We are now working to select the right targets," Evoyan said.

Planet Fiber CEO Armen Hayrapetyan lauded ARFI, noting that the platform has a good opportunity to expand and develop. It will also enable to acquire bigger audiences, according to Hayrapetyan.

Meanwhile, Barekam Logistic Services, which was founded in 2017, decided to apply to ARFI due to an increase in the

demand of its services. "As a result of growing demand for our services around the world, we decided to apply to ARFI in order to be able to expand and render more high-quality services," Barekam Logistic Services Founder and Director Narek Mkrtychyan said.



Fitch Sees Armenia's Continued Dependence On Russia

The Armenian economy will remain heavily dependent on Russia in the foreseeable future, according to credit rating agency Fitch.

"Armenia's economy is highly dependent on Russia for trade and energy, and Fitch does not expect meaningful diversification away from Russia in the near term," it said in a weekend statement that reaffirmed its "BB" rating for the country.

Fitch noted that Russian-Armenian trade has increased dramatically since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine.

"Armenia continues to implement Western sanctions targeted at Russian entities within its banking sector," it said. "Nevertheless, goods exports to Russia increased by nearly 300 percent since 2021, and Russia accounted for 51 percent of exports and 30 percent of imports in [the first nine months of 2023.]"

Russia accounted for more than one-third of Armenia's foreign trade in



January-November 2023, with bilateral commercial exchange rising by over 40 percent to \$6.3 billion, according to Armenian government data.

Armenian re-exports of used cars, consumer electronics and other Western-manufactured goods remained the main driving force behind this growth. They are included in overall Armenian exports to Russia that totaled about \$3.2 billion in that period, up by 50 percent year on year. These and other cash inflows from Russia are a key reason why the Armenian economy was on course to expand by over 8 percent last year.

Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan said recently that his government is trying to "diversify" Armenia's foreign trade by helping local manufacturers find new export markets. He said they should export "products of high standards and quality" that can find buyers "in many countries of the world and not just a small circle of countries." It is not clear just how the government will go about achieving this declared objective.

Russian-Armenian commercial ties have been deepening despite Yerevan's strained relationship with Moscow noted by Fitch. Citing food safety concerns, a Russian government agency blocked the import of many food products from Armenia for more than a week in November. Observers believe that Moscow thus underlined its strong economic leverage against Armenia to warn Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan against further reorienting the country towards the West.

China says it's looking into Armenia's Crossroads of Peace project, ready to support initiatives conducive to peace

China is ready to support any initiative conducive to regional peace and development, the Embassy of China in Armenia said in response to a query from Armenpress regarding Beijing's position on the Crossroads of Peace project.

"We pay attention to the Crossroads of Peace project proposed by Armenia and we are ready to support any initiative conducive to peace and development in the region. We are ready to support the

countries in strengthening relationships, enhancing mutually beneficial cooperation and achieving common development," the Embassy of China in Armenia said.

The Armenian government's [Crossroads of Peace](#) project is designed to establish connections between the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea via a consolidated, regional railway network and via the North-South and East-West

roads.



USAID provides \$1,000,000 in additional assistance to forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is providing \$1,000,000 in additional assistance to the forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh.

19,300 forcibly displaced persons of Nagorno-Karabakh will receive humanitarian assistance through the USAID-funded



Protection, Inclusion, and Empowerment activity implemented by Democracy International.

Since the end of September 2023, the USAID provided over \$9.2 million in humanitarian assistance for those affected by the hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Having a strong and combat-ready army is the sovereign right of every country, and we will continue to follow this path – PM Pashinyan



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended the festive event dedicated to the 32nd anniversary of the formation of the Army of the Republic of Armenia at the Karen Demirchyan Sport and Concert Complex in Yerevan. The President of the Republic Vahagn Khachaturyan, the President of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan, representatives of the legislative, executive, judiciary bodies, the top military officers of the Republic of Armenia, ambassadors accredited to the Republic of Armenia were also present at the event.

At the beginning of the event, the national anthem of the Republic of Armenia was performed, and then the attendees observed a minute of silence in memory of the Armenians who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the motherland.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan made a speech, in which he specifically stated:

“Honorable President of the Republic of Armenia,

Honorable President of the National Assembly,

Dear representatives of the legislative, executive, judiciary, local self-government bodies,

Dear Minister of Defense, Deputy Ministers, Gentlemen Generals and Officers, dear servicemen, dear attendees, dear compatriots,

Today we celebrate the 32nd anniversary of the establishment of our army, and on this day, we first of all kneel before our servicemen and volunteers who fell, remaining faithful to their oath to the Republic of Armenia.

It should be noted that the 32nd

anniversary of the formation of the Army of the Republic of Armenia is an opportunity to think more, to face the problems we have in the field of army building and security, and even failures.

This makes us record that we cannot continue to have an army based on outdated standards and outdated concepts of military affairs, because this would mean questioning our will to have a state.

The first thing that should change in our army is the mindset. And that change should be expressed in every detail, starting with the uniform, continuing with the appearance of each soldier, continuing with the environment at permanent deployment sites, weapons and equipment, the salary of servicemen and the system of social guarantees, our requirements for the professional skills of servicemen and the degree of ideological training of each serviceman. We have started this process, but I also cannot say that we are moving fast enough.

As in many circles of the state system, here too, I think, our ideas about speed need to change. The ideas about speed in the army should also be changed, and here we are talking not only about the speed of reforms, but also about the speed of the army’s actions. What we used to think of as fast is now hopelessly slow, starting from the speed of assessing the situation to the speed of decision-making, commanding and execution of orders.

Strategically, we are proceeding with the logic of having a professional army, and in this sense, the “Motherland Defender” program is our greatest success in recent years, which is right now becoming the foundation and cornerstone of a professional army. This is a system that allows conscripts to become at least 5-year contract soldiers, receive a monthly salary of 450,000, sometimes 500,000 AMD or more as a result of voluntary certification, serve in the nearest military unit and live at home during the service as a professional, and at the end of the five-year term, receive 5 million AMD in a lump sum, regardless of whether he wants

to extend the term of the contract for another 5 years or not.

But also against this background, I consider it necessary to emphasize that the army should stop being an object of cheap toasts or a cheap object of toasts. Because when you try to understand what is hidden in the depths of those toasts, you face the bitter reality that less than half of the military draft age group is drafted into the army.

This either means that our generation has serious health problems, or the draft remains the most flourishing environment of corruption in the Republic of Armenia, where representatives of the medical community, the military and the public are allied with each other. If this is the case, and there is such a possibility, this is an alliance that destroys the state, and it is our duty to break the backbone of that alliance, because that alliance calls into question the right of our state to exist. Here, of course, the question of the effectiveness of the law enforcement system is very acute, on the other hand, we must go the way of institutional reforms, resolute decisions, so as not to leave room or minimize the possibility of abuses.

Starting from this year, we are introducing the women’s voluntary-compulsory military service model, and I believe that our women can make a significant, greater contribution to the country’s defense, and it is symbolic that today the first female soldier to be conscripted under the new system will be sworn in here.

I also want to remind that women who are conscripted for voluntary-mandatory military service will receive a one-time honorarium of 1 million AMD at the end of the six-month service, and all women aged 17-27 can apply for the six-month service. We hope that a significant part of the women passing the six-month service will continue service as a contractual, where there will already be salary opportunities that are also available for men through voluntary certification under the “Motherland defender” program. Women should become one of the reliable pillars

of our professional army.

It should also be noted that no professional army alone is capable of protecting the country's security in war situations, and having a combat-ready reserve force is our next strategic task. In this sense, the 25-day training camps alongside the regular military service are extremely important. But today we see many gaps in that system and I expect that these problems will be solved with resolute decisions. Those problems start from the level of army drafting, to the quality and content of the 25-day training camps. Above all, here we have serious cracks in soldier-soldier, soldier-officer, officer-officer relations that we have to fill. In general, all attempts and factors to turn the army into an open or semi-open regime penitentiary must be eradicated with consistent and decisive steps. This applies to both 25-day training camps and mandatory and contract military service.

We pay special attention to military education and increasing the attractiveness of officer work, and in this regard, I would like to highlight the programs of providing housing for graduates of the military academy named after Vazgen Sargsyan, as well as the establishment of the Officer High School and the Officer University in the Academic City. Strengthening the intellectual pillar of the Army of the Republic of Armenia is a key component of increasing combat capability and we must pay special attention to it as well.

Dear attendees,

We also need to reconsider our strategic thinking about security.

It is necessary to admit that the ideas rooted in us about safety and security systems and their operational formulas turned to be disastrous for us and there is no other option for the Republic of Armenia than the diversification of security relations.

And we're going that way. We are on the path of acquiring new and modern weapons and equipment, and in recent years the Government has signed contracts for the purchase of several billion USD weapons and ammunition.

The military-industrial complex of the Republic of Armenia has an unprecedented order from the Armenian government worth several hundred million dollars, and of course, we will

continue to invest in the military-industrial complex, simultaneously increasing the funding of science and education.

For these achievements and the investment opportunity, I want to thank again and again all the law-abiding taxpayers of the Republic of Armenia, who are practically implementing the motto "get rich and make others rich" proposed by us in 2018. And I must record that the tax revenues of the 2023 budget exceeded the revenues of the 2017 budget by about 2.5 billion USD. And it is also with these funds that the reform of the army and armed forces is being carried out.

Reforming the army, having a strong and combat-ready army is the sovereign right of every country and we will continue to follow this path. A strong and capable army is one of the most important factors ensuring the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Armenia, but it is not the only factor. From the point of view of ensuring security, I would like to emphasize two more key factors: foreign relations and the legitimacy of the conducted policies from the point of view of international law.

Hence, legitimacy should be the most important factor ensuring Armenia's external security. What do I mean? I mean that the Republic of Armenia should identify itself within the territory on which it was recognized by the international community. It is the territory of the Armenian SSR, which is identical to the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia. We must state clearly and unequivocally that we do not and will not have any ambitions for any other territory, and this should become the strategic basis for ensuring Armenia's external security.

Honorable President of the Republic of Armenia,

Dear attendees,

I have to also refer to a number of aggressive statements coming from different sides, and in particular from Azerbaijan, related to the reforms of the Republic of Armenia's army, the acquisition of weapons and equipment. I already said that having a strong and capable army is the sovereign right of every country and no one can question our right. If anyone

questions that right of ours, they question our right to exist. In this case, we will have no choice but to defend our statehood, our independence, our territorial integrity by all possible and impossible means.

I record once again that the Republic of Armenia has no claim to any territory other than its sovereign territory and no one should have any claim to any territory of the Republic of Armenia. As I said, we are ready to give such guarantees, lasting and irreversible guarantees, but we expect similar guarantees from others.

We are ready to go that way and we have offered several additional security guarantee mechanisms to Azerbaijan. For example, a simultaneous withdrawal of troops from the administrative border of the Armenian SSR and the Azerbaijani SSR. That border became a state border with the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration, and Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on October 6, 2022 in Prague that they recognize each other's territorial integrity on that basis. The simultaneous withdrawal of troops will make it possible for all the territories of the Azerbaijan SSR to be under the control of Azerbaijan, and all the territories of the Armenian SSR under the control of Armenia.

We have also offered demilitarization of the border to Azerbaijan. Also a mutual arms control mechanism, also the signing of a non-aggression pact if it turns out that signing a peace treaty will take longer than expected.

The Republic of Armenia is committed to the peace agenda and will not deviate from that agenda.

Honorable President of the Republic of Armenia,

Dear attendees,

Summarizing my speech, I want to thank all the servicemen of the Army of the Republic of Armenia who are impeccable, professional and loyal to their oath to the Republic of Armenia.

Glory to the martyrs and long live the Republic of Armenia.

Long live the Republic of Armenia."

On the occasion of the Army Day, Prime Minister Pashinyan awarded a group of servicemen of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia with a commemorative medal of the Prime Minister for their contribution to the security and defense of the motherland.

Armenia presents Crossroads of Peace project at Global Gateway forum in Brussels



Armenia has presented its [Crossroads of Peace](#) project at the Global Gateway Investors Forum in Brussels.

The project was presented by Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures Armen Simonyan at the forum's *South Caucasus and Türkiye: the strong connectivity link between Central Asia and Europe* panel discussion.

Simonyan highlighted that the main principle of Crossroads of Peace is that all infrastructures will function under the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the countries through which they pass.

"The latest geopolitical developments proved that the diversification of transport routes is a vital necessity for the continuity of supplying goods to regional markets," the Armenian official said.

He added that Armenia estimates the

project to ensure 4,7 million tons of cargo and 300,000 passenger transportation through regional countries during the first year of operation of Crossroads of Peace. By 2050 the volume of goods transported through regional countries by Armenian railway infrastructures will reach 10 million tons.

Simonyan then held meetings with his counterparts from various countries.

The Investors Forum takes forward the conclusions of the EU-commissioned Study on Sustainable Transport Corridors between the EU and Central Asia, and aims to translate the political commitments of the EU and the five countries in Central Asia to enhance and reinforce connectivity into tangible operational deliverables.

The Forum contributes to the long-term objective of making the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor a multimodal, modern, competitive, sustainable, predictable, smart and fast route linking Europe and Central Asia in 15 days or less. For this, the Forum aims to:

send a strong and concrete signal to the five Central Asian countries of the EU's political and operational commitment to strengthen connectivity with the region through the Global Gateway initiative

kick-start the process for implementing and coordinating investments along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor by following up on specific actions identified in the Study, notably by mobilising investors on projects, with concrete and realistic timelines and financial commitments

commit key stakeholders for continued participation in the Forum as the main platform for implementing the projects identified in the Study

The event brings together high-level representatives from Central Asian countries, EU Member States, partner countries along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor, EU Institutions, international and bilateral financial institutions, as well as representatives of the private sector and members of civil society.

The Crossroads of Peace project is designed to establish connections between the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea via a consolidated, regional railway network and via the North-South and East-West roads.

The Crossroads of Peace project is about creating new infrastructures or improving the scope and quality of the existing ones.

Foreign ambassadors, Galaxy Group and Ucom leaders spoke at the largest event of European Business Association

Over a dozen diplomats accredited in Armenia and approximately 50 representatives from the business community took part in one of the most significant events in Armenia's business community – the annual business breakfast. The gathering aimed to foster discussions on business and culture, exploring potential collaborations. This event, organized for the third consecutive year, was a joint effort of Galaxy Group of Companies and the European Business Association, with active support and participation from European embassies accredited in Armenia.

Aram Khachatryan, Co-Founder and

Chief Executive Officer of Galaxy Group of Companies, highlighted the strategic significance of the European direction for Galaxy Group, emphasizing the presence of over 200 partners from Europe. He underscored the importance of such events as more than just breakfast, considering them a platform for fostering creative and innovative approaches. Mr. Khachatryan views these gatherings as an opportunity to address challenges, share successes, and strengthen the connection between Europe and Armenia. Additionally, he holds a position of Board Member of the European Business Association.

Petr Pirunčík, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Czech Republic to Armenia, emphasized the value of Armenian businessmen connecting with potential foreign partners. He regarded this aspect as one of the most significant outcomes of the meeting. Pirunčík personally engaged in discussions with Armenian businessmen post-event, emphasizing the irreplaceable importance of face-to-face contacts and discussions for fostering further cooperation.

The business breakfast took place at the primary exhibition space of the

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Armenia, Greece consider concluding labor mobility agreement

On January 30, the Ambassador of Armenia to Greece, Mr Tigran Mkrtchyan, met with the Minister of Migration and Asylum of Greece, Mr Dimitris Kairides.

During the meeting, Mkrtchyan informed the minister of the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus following Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. They also discussed issues related to the development of bilateral relations, including migration mobility.

The Greek minister expressed his solidarity with the Armenian people, underlining the cultural and historical commonalities between the two peoples and stressing the high level of bilateral relations.

In addition, within the framework of the meeting, an agreement was reached to intensify further activities aimed at developing bilateral relations.

The *Greek City Times* quotes a source from the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum as saying that the two officials discussed concluding a bilateral transnational labor mobility agreement to allow



Armenians to work in Greece.

The discussion with the migration minister comes only a day after Mkrtchyan met with First Deputy Speaker of the Greek Parliament Giannis Plakiotakis.

During the meeting with Plakiotakis, the Ambassador expressed his gratitude for the establishment of a Greece-Armenia friendly group in the Greek Parliament, highlighting the effective activity of the two friendly groups, the effective application of parliamentary diplomacy toolkit.

The Ambassador notified Plakiotakis about the latest regional developments, the current state of Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiation process, highlighting the role of the EU in establishing peace and stability in the region.

In this context, the Ambassador thanked Greece and the European Union for the support provided to the needs of those displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh.

Referring to bilateral relations Ambassador Mkrtchyan stressed the importance of giving a new boost to economic relations, activation of mutual visits.

In turn, the Greek Parliament Deputy Speaker noted the high level of cooperation between the two countries, emphasizing that the Greek Government is ready to lead Armenia in all possible directions.

Referring to regional developments, the Deputy Speaker reaffirmed Greece's position, condemning all manifestations of violence in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh, expressing concern for resolving humanitarian problems, expressing unequivocal support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia.

At the same time, Plakiotakis expressed his gratitude for Armenia's firm support on the Cyprus issue.

page 10 → Union of Artists of Armenia, serving as a symbolic convergence of business and art within a shared venue. This setting not only encapsulates the synergy between business and art but also provides an excellent platform for participants to showcase their respective potentials and explore innovative formats for collaboration.

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Poland to Armenia, **Piotr Skwieciński**, warmly greeted the attendees of the business breakfast. He highlighted, "Poland is actively engaged in developing its own products for export, with a parallel focus on bolstering domestic sales. In this endeavor, Armenia stands out as a reliable partner, and we look forward to strengthening this collaboration."

Ralph Yirikian, Director General of Ucom, present at the meeting, highlighted the alignment between Ucom's regional policy and the strategies of certain embassies in Armenia. "I will share the story

of today's and tomorrow's Ucom. I assure you that in the coming years, Ucom will reach remarkable heights as we remain dedicated to our country and subscribers. Currently, we lead in fixed communication and hold prominent ranks in various telecommunications sectors. Our success is attributed to fortifying regional infrastructures and fulfilling corporate social responsibility to assist our fellow citizens," highlighted Director General of Ucom, **Ralph Yirikian**.

Highlighting such initiatives, **Diana Sarumova**, Director of the European Business Association, remarked, "This format provides a space for the business community to engage with diplomatic representatives. We frequently organize forums fostering public-private dialogue, serving as platforms for diverse sectors to convene and share information."

At the event, **Cristina Conesa Sancho**, Chargé d'affaires of the Kingdom of Spain, discussed the potential for

Armenian-Spanish business relations and collaboration in innovation and technology.

"We must convene regularly to actively shape the business landscape through constructive discussions, as our aim is the progress and enhancement of the sector. Gatherings like these, bringing together esteemed ambassadors from European countries and Armenian business leaders, hold significant value. In my view, they provide a gateway of opportunities for Armenian entrepreneurs to engage with Europe. I am confident that these meetings will foster new partnerships, ones we can proudly highlight in the coming years," expressed **Artyom Khachatryan**, Co-Founder and Co-Chairman of Galaxy Group of Companies.

The event was organized by "Axel-Mondrian and Partners" communications firm, an EU qualified network member company.

Pro-Artsakh demonstrations held in 50 European cities



The Europeans for Artsakh movement gathered thousands of supporters across Europe on January 28-29 to condemn Azerbaijan's policy of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The movement advocates for EU sanctions against Azerbaijan, condemns the ethnic cleansing and genocidal policies of Azerbaijan, demands the immediate release of Armenian POWs and hostages, calls for the defense of Armenia, particularly Syunik, and expresses solidarity with Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and seeks international guarantees for them to live freely and independently in their homeland, safeguarding their fundamental rights.

The 'Pan-European Mobilization' demonstrations and events took place

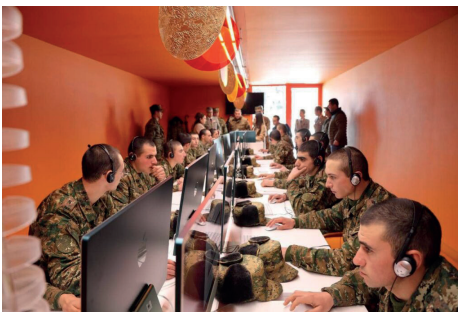
in 50 cities across Europe, such as Paris, Vienna, London, Hamburg, Athens, Stockholm and more.

Turkish author Pinar Selek attended the demonstration in Nice, France. She expressed support to the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and said she's ready to fight for Armenia because the world 'has a debt to pay to Armenia.'

"By protecting Armenia, we will protect justice, dignity and peace," she said.

Demonstrations took place in Georgia as well, where participants gathered outside the EU representation in Tbilisi.

French classroom inaugurated at Armenia's Military Academy named after Vazgen Sargsyan



On February 2, representatives from the leadership of the Saint-Cyr Military Academy of the Armed Forces of the Republic of France conducted a visit to the Military Academy named after Vazgen Sargsyan, under the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia.

Armen Khachatryan, Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee on Defense and Security of the National Assembly, was

also in attendance during the meeting.

The guests had the opportunity to tour the academy premises, gaining familiarity with the facilities, available opportunities, and the curriculum. They were briefed on the structure, activities, and educational programs of the academy. Discussions were held on matters related to the interaction and cooperation between the two academies.



Furthermore, on the same day, in the

presence of RA Deputy Minister of Defense Arman Sargsyan and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the French Republic to Armenia, Olivier Decotigny, a modernly equipped French classroom was inaugurated at the academy. The symbolic act of cutting the red ribbon was performed jointly by a French cadet studying in Armenia and an Armenian cadet set to pursue studies in France, exemplifying the cooperative ties between the two academies.



Center of Armenian studies to be established in Greece in near future – Ambassador

On February 2, Armenian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Greece Tigran Mkrtchyan had a telephone conversation with Greek Minister of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports Kyriakos Pierrakakis.

During the conversation, the possibilities of expanding the legal framework



with Greece in the field of education were discussed. Reference was made to the increase the student exchange programs.

Ambassador Mkrtchyan informed the Greek minister that a center of Armenian studies will be established in Greece in the near future, details will be announced later

Iran provides three digitized bilingual manuscripts to Armenia's Matenadaran



On a visit to Iran, the Matenadaran

delegation had a meeting with the leadership of the Scientific Research Center for the Study and Publication of Written Heritage in Tehran.

The parties discussed the need to deepen the joint work in studying the Armenian-Iranian written heritage.

As a first step, three bilingual manuscripts in Armenian and Persian were

selected and provided in digital format. The staff of Matenadaran will study these manuscripts in the coming months.

Ara Khzmalyan, the director of Matenadaran, invited the director of the Center, Dr. Akbar Irani, to participate in the "Poetry of Image" international conference, which will be held on March 21-22 in Matenadaran, Armenia.

Armenian Ambassador participates in the sitting of France's Hauts-de-France Regional Council



At the invitation of Xavier Bertrand, President of the Council of the Hauts-de-France Region, Armenian Ambassador to France Hasmik Tolmajian participated as a guest of honor in this year's first plenary session of the Council, during which President Bertrand and members of the Council reaffirmed their full solidarity with the people of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The representative of Nagorno-Karabakh Hovhannes Gevorgyan was also present at the meeting.

Condemning Azerbaijan's encroachments on Armenia's territorial integrity and the ethnic cleansing carried out against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, the chairman of the Council noted that the region has always been and will continue to stand by the Armenian people in the struggle to guarantee their rights and security. President Bertrand also attached importance to the preservation of the Armenian historical and cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh and the soonest release of Armenian prisoners illegally held in Azerbaijan, reaffirming

the commitment of the region he leads to make efforts in this direction.

The Council of the Hauts-de-France region also unanimously supported the resolution adopted by the French Senate on January 17, by which the latter condemns the military attack carried out by Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh and demands to guarantee the implementation of



the Armenian population's right to return to Nagorno-Karabakh.

During the session, to the standing ovation of the audience, President Bertrand awarded the medal of honor of Hauts-de-France Region to Armenian Ambassador Hasmik Tolmajian and Representative of Nagorno-Karabakh Hovhannes Gevorgyan.

Immediately after the meeting,

Ambassador Tolmajian and President Bertrand opened a photo exhibition entitled "Historical and Cultural Riches of Armenia" in the large hall of the Hauts-de-France Regional Council, where the works of famous French-Armenian photographers Roger and Lidia Kasparyan are presented. The exhibition will run until February 29.

Goddess Anahit statue to be displayed in Yerevan for first time

The head of the state of Goddess Anahit kept in the British Museum will be exhibited in Yerevan for the first time in September 2024 thanks to an agreement reached between the Museum of the History of Armenia and the British Museum.

The worship of the Goddess Anahit in the Armenian Highlands began from time immemorial and was closely related to the worship of motherhood.

The main temple of Anahit was located in Yeriza town in Upper Armenia. The

temple was looted in 34 B.C. during the invasion of the Roman general Mark Antony. His soldiers broke the huge golden statue of Anahit and took it to Rome.

Rumors say the first soldier who attacked the statue of Anahit went blind, then went mad and died.

The relics kept in the British Museum were found at the end of the 19th century in Yerznka by a peasant during farming. The relics of the statue were moved to England under some circumstances, and

the copy is kept in the Museum of the History of Armenia.



Armenia's 7th-century Amberd shortlisted for Europe's 7 Most Endangered heritage sites project

The monuments and heritage sites in Europe shortlisted for this year's edition of the 7 Most Endangered Programme were announced today by Europa Nostra, the European Voice of Civil Society Committed to Cultural and Natural Heritage, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) Institute.

Armenia's 7th-century Amberd is included in the shortlist.

These are the 11 most endangered monuments and heritage sites in Europe shortlisted for 2024:

Archaeological Site of Muret e Portès, Durrës, ALBANIA
 Amberd Historical and Cultural Reserve, ARMENIA
 Palais du Midi, Brussels, BELGIUM
 Working-class Housing (courées) in Roubaix-Tourcoing, FRANCE
 Cycladic Islands, notably Sifnos, Serifos and Folegandros, GREECE
 Church of San Pietro in Gessate, Milan, ITALY
 Synagogue of Siena, ITALY
 Palace in Sztynort, northern Masuria, POLAND
 Home of the Yugoslav People's Army in Šabac, SERBIA
 Greek Orthodox Church of St. Georgios, Altınözü / Hatay province, TÜRKIYE
 Iron Gate of Antioch, Antakya / Hatay province, TÜRKIYE



The Executive President of Europa Nostra, Prof. Dr. Hermann Parzinger, stated: "The selected heritage sites are threatened by demolition, unsuitable development, the devastating impact of natural disasters, neglect or lack of funding. By publishing this shortlist, we wish to convey a strong message of solidarity and support to the activists and local communities who are deeply committed to saving these sites. Europe's heritage must be preserved not only as a testimony of our shared past, but also as a catalyst for a sustainable, cohesive and peaceful future."

The Dean of the European Investment Bank Institute, Shiva Dustdar, said: "Cultural heritage is a key resource for European identity, attractiveness and economic growth. This shortlist reminds us how fragile it is and how much we take it for granted. Together with our long-time partner Europa Nostra, the Institute amplifies

the efforts of local communities throughout Europe who know that saving cultural heritage sites will help them tackle other pressing challenges. We hope to see the sites restored and preserved for generations to come."

The above-mentioned endangered heritage sites were shortlisted by an international Advisory Panel, comprising experts in history, archaeology, architecture, conservation, project analysis and finance. Nominations for the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2024 were put forward by member organisations, associate organisations or individual members of Europa Nostra, as well as by members of the European Heritage Alliance.

The selection was made on the basis of the outstanding heritage significance and cultural value of each of the sites, as well as the serious danger that they are facing today. The level of engagement of local communities and the commitment of public and private stakeholders to saving these sites were considered crucial added values. Another selection criterion was the potential of these sites to act as a catalyst for sustainable socio-economic development.

The final list of 7 Most Endangered heritage sites in Europe for 2024 will be unveiled in April.

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