

PM Pashinyan addresses the probability of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has referred to the possibility of establishing peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, outlining the principles within which it would happen.

In his opening remarks at the Ministerial Meeting of Landlocked Developing Countries, which the capital Yerevan is hosting, Pashinyan said that there are three main principles.

First, the agreements on the unblocking of transport links should be based on the principle of sovereignty, jurisdiction, equality and reciprocity of countries.

Secondly, Armenia and Azerbaijan should fully recognize each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, based on the understanding that Armenia's territory covers 29,800 square kilometers and Azerbaijan's 86,600 square kilometers. According to the third principle, Armenia and Azerbaijan should reaffirm their unconditional commitment to the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration as the political basis for the border demarcation.

"These principles were reached during negotiations with the President of Azerbaijan in Brussels, and these agreements had been recorded in the statements by European Council President Charles Michel after tripartite meetings on May 14 and July 15,

2023," noted the PM.

"If Azerbaijan does not abandon the already reached agreements, signing a peace treaty with Azerbaijan in the near future becomes very realistic.

Armenia reaffirms its commitment to these agreements. And the main question is about the possibility of signing the peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the near future.

One can focus on the facts that indicate that the probability of such an event is not high, and one can focus on the facts that can create a more positive impression that the probability of such developments is high.

"Both groups of facts exist. Yesterday an exchange of captured persons between Armenia and Azerbaijan took place, which is a very important event. I would prefer not to focus on facts that inspire pessimism. I would like to consider yesterday's event as a 'zero point' from which we will be able to at least make efforts so that all further developments will indicate an increased probability of signing a peace treaty-rather than the opposite," Pashinyan said.

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Armenian, French FMs discuss issues of regional security



Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat

Mirzoyan had a meeting with Catherine Colonna, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic.

The ministers discussed issues of the Armenian-French bilateral agenda, practical cooperation in various fields.

The readiness and commitment of close interaction in deepening the Armenia-EU partnership and implementation of current programs was emphasized on

both sides.

Issues related to regional security and stability were discussed; the challenges in establishing peace were addressed. Ararat Mirzoyan briefed Katrin Kolonna on the latest developments in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Thoughts were exchanged on issues of cooperation on international platforms.

Armenia, Cyprus keen to deepen bilateral defense cooperation



Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan has briefed his Cypriot

counterpart Michalis Giorgallas on the Crossroads of Peace project developed by the Armenian Government.

During a meeting in Nicosia, the Defense Ministers of the two countries discussed a number of issues related to Armenian-Cypriot cooperation in the defense field.

The parties conducted a comprehensive review of the ongoing cooperation and outlined the new opportunities for its advancement, expressing a shared commitment to cooperate across a broader spectrum of sectors including training programs, exchange of experience in various domains, military-technical cooperation, and other matters of mutual interest.

Suren Papikyan thoroughly presented the “Crossroads of Peace” project developed by the Government of the Republic of Armenia to his counterpart.

In a joint statement for the press, the Defense Ministers of the two countries reaffirmed their dedication to cooperation with a comprehensive agenda.

Armenian FM, Latvian counterpart discuss the prospects of expanding bilateral cooperation

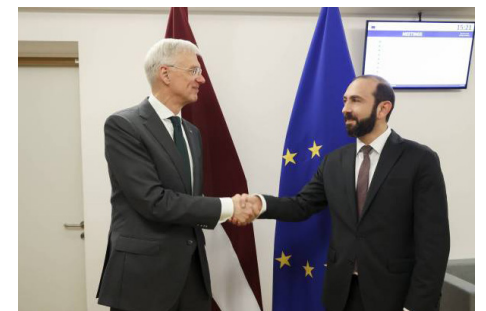
On December 11, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan, who was in Brussels on a working visit, met with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia Krišjānis Kariņš.

During the meeting, the prospects of expanding bilateral cooperation were discussed. The interlocutors also focused on issues related to deepening the partnership between the Republic of Armenia and the European Union, including a strong

commitment to supporting the agenda of democratic reforms in Armenia and enhancing political and security dialogue, the foreign ministry said.

According to the source, the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Latvia exchanged ideas on issues related to regional security and stability.

Minister Mirzoyan presented to his counterpart the Armenian perspective and approaches regarding the process of



normalizing relations with Azerbaijan.

Government okays procedure of organization of meeting between Armenian, Azerbaijani border commissions

The government has approved the working procedure for the organization and holding of sitting and joint working meetings between the state commissions for the demarcation of the state border between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The rules of procedure specifically

stipulate that the date, time and place of the meetings are determined by agreement between the chairmen of the commissions. As a rule, the sessions are held consecutively in the territory of the Republic of Armenia or the Republic of Azerbaijan, on the shared border or in third countries, as well as in the video

conference format.

In the event the meetings are held in the territory of one of the states, the host party creates all the necessary conditions for their conduct, including ensuring and guaranteeing the safety of all participants. The procedure also defines other necessary settings.

France committed to friendship with Armenia - Bertrand Bouyx

Speaker of Parliament Alen Simonyan on December 11 held a meeting with Member of the National Assembly of France, head of the French delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Bertrand Bouyx.

Speaker Simonyan lauded the warm relations and productive cooperation between the Armenian and French delegations in PACE.

He thanked the 97-member France-Armenia parliamentary friendship group, which includes Bouyx, for supporting Armenia, the parliament's press service said in readout.

During the meeting the sides discussed the strengthening and deepening

Armenia-EU ties, the Armenia-EU visa liberalization dialogue, opportunities for intensifying bilateral economic ties and the unwavering implementation of democratic reforms in Armenia.

Bertrand Bouyx said it's inspiring to see that democracy in Armenia is strong and visible despite the difficulties. He said Armenia's ratification of the Rome Statute was an important step.

Speaking about regional challenges, the sides exchanges views on the ongoing talks around a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the immediate release of Armenian captives held in Azerbaijan, as well as the normalization between Armenia and Turkiye.

Bouyx reiterated that France is committed to its friendship with Armenia and stands with Armenia at this difficult time. Vice Speaker Ruben Rubinyan, the head of the Armenian delegation to PACE, also participated in the meeting.



Armenian FM congratulates Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova on progress towards EU membership

Armenian Foreign Minister has congratulated his counterparts from Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.

"I congratulate my counterparts from Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova Ilia Darchiashvili, Dmytro Kuleba and Nicu Popescu and the people of three countries for landmark decisions by the European Council. This is a historic day for the European family, for those sharing democratic principles," Minister Mirzoyan said in a



post on X.

The European Council decided on December 14 to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, President of the Council Charles Michel said.

"EUCO granted candidate status to Georgia. And the EU will open negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is reached and has invited the commission to report by March with a view to taking such a decision. A clear signal of hope for their

people and for our continent," he said on X.

Armenia and Greece sign an agreement on military-technical cooperation



Armenia Suren Papikyan to the Hellenic Republic commenced on December 14 with a wreath-laying ceremony at the monument of the Unknown Soldier in front of the country's Parliament, the Ministry of Defense said.

Afterwards a dignified welcoming

ceremony took place at the Hellenic Republic Ministry of National Defence, featuring the participation of an honor guard and a military band,

Subsequent to the ceremony, a formal meeting between the Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan and the Minister of National Defense of the Hellenic Republic, Nikolaos Dendias took place. The issues related to the Armenian-Greek defense cooperation were discussed during the meeting.

At the meeting the considerable potential for cooperative development was emphasized and, consequently, an agreement was reached to invigorate the cooperation

across various dimensions, encompassing military-technical engagements, experience exchange, educational initiatives, training programs, tactical training, and other directions.

At the culmination of the meeting, the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia and the Minister of National Defense of the Hellenic Republic signed an Agreement "On Military-Technical Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Hellenic Republic".

Afterwards, the ministers issued a joint statement to the press.

Armenia, Czech Republic Foreign Ministries hold bilateral talks

Political consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and the Czech Republic were held in Yerevan on December 13.

The Armenian delegation was represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Paruyr Hovhannisyan, and the Czech delegation was led by Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Marian.

The parties lauded the high level of political dialogue between Armenia and the Czech Republic, the need to maintain it and discussed a wide range of issues related to the Armenian-Czech bilateral agenda. Referring to the prospects of economic cooperation between the two countries, the parties emphasized the session of the Armenian-Czech intergovernmental

commission to be held in May and expressed readiness to take steps in the direction of expanding economic ties. During the meeting, the sides discussed cooperation in cultural, educational and scientific spheres, the foreign ministry said.

"Reference was made to the issues related to the Armenia-EU comprehensive partnership agenda, the possibilities of mutual support within the framework of international organizations. Amidst the discussion, the importance of regular political contacts was also emphasized. Views were exchanged on a number of issues of the regional and international agenda," the statement reads.

According to the source, Deputy Foreign Minister Hovhannisyan presented to

his counterpart the "Crossroads of Peace" program developed by the Armenian government and the latest developments in the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Reference was made to the December 7 joint statement of the staffs of the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan and the importance of further active steps in that direction.

Referring to the large-scale military attack carried out by Azerbaijan against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh in September and the resulting ethnic cleansing, the deputy minister presented the steps being taken to meet the needs of forcibly displaced people of Nagorno-Karabakh and to protect their fundamental rights.

Armenia introduces new reform aimed at 90% reduction of caseload of judges

The Armenian authorities are introducing a new regulation aimed at reducing the caseload of judges by an estimated 90%.

Announcing the reform on social media on December 11, Supreme Judicial Council President Karen Andriasyan said that starting December 11, banks, credit organizations, as well as utility operators (power, water, telecommunication) will

file forfeiture complaints not exceeding 2,000,000 drams to notary's offices, instead of courts.

"As a result of this process the workload of judges will reduce by 90%," Andriasyan said.

Civil Court Judges currently having a caseload of 2000-4000 cases will have somewhere from 200 to 300 cases from

spring 2024, Andriasyan said. "Therefore, civil cases will last several months instead of years."

It took one year to finalize the reforms because it required legislative changes, the developments of a new computer system, training of notary's and combination of programs in notary's offices and the bailiff's service.

EU to increase monitoring mission in Armenia to 209 observers from 138

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said that the bloc will increase the number of observers for its mission in Armenia (EUMA) to 209 from 138.

"You know that we are currently working on strengthening our relations with Armenia. I see that Armenia clearly sees the benefits of increasing cooperation with us, and we are ready to respond positively.

As a first step of this increasing cooperation, today the Foreign Affairs Council agreed to strengthen our civilian [CSDP] mission in Armenia (EUMA), increasing our presence on the ground from 138 staff to 209.



This is an important increase of the size of the mission, and this is a way of increasing the stability of Armenia's international border with Azerbaijan. We believe that there is a historic chance to achieve peace in the region. It is an opportunity.

We are committed to continue our support to these efforts – by working together with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The fact that we have decided to increase by such an important number our staff on this mission shows our clear commitment to the stability in the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan and [is] an important contribution to the peace efforts," High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell told reporters in Brussels after the Foreign Affairs Council meeting.

Macron commends Armenia's "courageous" decision to join the Rome Statute

French President Emmanuel Macron has commended Armenia's decision to join the Rome Statute.

Speaking on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Macron mentioned the "courage" of Armenia.



"I will add here the courage of Armenia, which decided to adhere to the Rome Statute, a very remarkable gesture given that last months have brought their share of tragedies in this country and for these courageous people," Emmanuel Macron stated.

Situation in Armenia requires the EU's strong support - Borrell

The situation in Armenia requires the EU's strong support, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the EU Commission Josep Borrell has said.

"[Now] I am going to have first a meeting with the Armenian Foreign Minister [Ararat Mirzoyan], because you know that after we have the Eastern Partnership meeting at the Ministerial level. So many things are happening in the whole region, it is important to continue to pay attention to them and, in particular, to Armenia, that has been in a very difficult situation and still is. So, I will start my day with the Armenian Foreign Minister," Borrell told reporters ahead of the EU Foreign Affairs

Council in Brussels.

During a Q&A with reporters, Borrell was asked on the Eastern Partnership meeting.

"On the Ministerial of the Eastern Partnership, I mentioned that so many things happened in this part of the world. The Belarusian seat will be empty. We continue to try to do our best to isolate Lukashenko's regime and support the Belarusian opposition. I hear that they are going to hold elections in Belarus. I wonder what kind of elections they will do. But we have the whole Eastern Partnership in a difficult situation - Belarus, Ukraine, then the Caucasus. The good news is Georgia

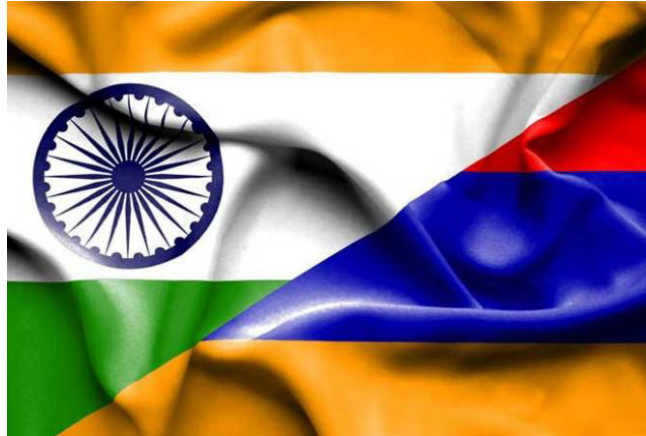
advancing towards [EU] membership, but the situation in Armenia requires our strong support. We will see how we can increase it and how we can continue having the Eastern Partnership on our agenda, because it is our Eastern border, and our Eastern border is the place in the world where more hotspots are growing," he said.



Armenian Parliament ratifies agreement on cooperation with India

The Armenian National Assembly voted unanimously to ratify the agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Governments of Armenia and India, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Hakob Arshakyan informs.

“As the leader of the Armenian-Indian parliamentary friendship group, I attach importance to the deepening of



relations with India,” Arshakyan said in a Facebook post.

He called it an important step towards the implementation of the “Crossroads of Peace” project.

“The National Assembly is also taking steps towards the development of parliamentary relations between Armenia and India,” the lawmaker said.

France to provide emergency aid of 15 million euros to Armenia



the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France said in a statement.

“France will continue its support for Armenia and the Armenian people following the November 30th vote in Parliament, providing €15 million in emergency aid for Armenia and refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh.

France will allocate 15 million euros in emergency aid to Armenia to assist forcibly displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh,

This additional aid will help support the efforts by NGOs, the ICRC, the Armenian Red Cross and UN agencies to welcome

and look after the social, medical, educational and financial needs of these particularly vulnerable populations. This latest aid package brings our 2023 contribution to €27.5 million,” reads the statement.

It is noted that emergency medical supplies were also turned over to the Armenian authorities, and French hospitals are caring for several burn patients.

According to the statement, this support is accompanied by fundraising efforts by civil society organizations and local governments to help the Armenian people.

EU sanctions training seminars conducted in Yerevan

On 7-8 December 2023, the European Union (EU) organized training seminars in Armenia on EU sanctions, with organizational support from the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC) and the Association of Certified Sanctions Specialists (ACSS), the EU delegation in Armenia said.

The primary aim of the seminars was to further raise awareness of EU sanctions and their application, and to prevent possible circumvention of these measures.

According to the source, the meeting on the first day gathered government officials. The seminar on the second day was targeted to Armenian private operators interested in improving their awareness of EU sanctions.

It is noted that the training seminars were conducted by a team of EU representatives and sanctions experts, and consisted of presentations and interactive questions and answers sessions.

The EU representatives also expressed

appreciation of Armenian Government’s steps to address the arising issues.



IMF makes \$73.3 million available for Armenia

The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed the second review under the Stand-By Arrangement with Armenia. This provides the country with access to about US\$24.4 million (SDR 18.4 million), bringing the total access to about US\$73.3 million (SDR 55.2 million). The Armenian authorities continue to treat the SBA as precautionary.

Armenia's strong growth momentum continued through 2023. Supported by robust private consumption and investment, the economy is projected to grow by 7 percent in 2023 before moderating to 5 percent in 2024. Over the medium-term, growth is projected to reach its potential of around 4.5 percent, while steadfast implementation of structural reforms under the program could increase potential growth further. Inflation is projected to revert to the central bank's target of 4 percent by mid-2024 and stabilize around it. The current account is projected to reach 3 percent of GDP in 2023 and 2024 due to robust consumption and investment demand. Foreign direct investment and capital inflows have moderated. Fiscal overperformance has persisted, with the overall fiscal balance remaining in surplus through September 2023, owing to higher than anticipated revenue collection and spending under-execution, notwithstanding the authorities' prompt fiscal support to address the urgent needs of



Nagorno-Karabakh's refugees.

The Executive Board today also concluded the 2023 Article IV consultation with Armenia. The associated press release will be issued separately.

Following the Executive Board's discussion on December 13, Mr. Bo Li, Deputy Managing Director and Acting Chair, made the following statement:

"Armenia's economy has managed to overcome recent external shocks and faces a favorable outlook, with strong growth in the context of moderate inflation. The program performance remains broadly satisfactory. However, an uncertain domestic and external environment warrant continued policy prudence and unwavering reform effort.

"The policy focus of the 2024 budget on preserving macroeconomic stability and providing humanitarian and development support to NK refugees is welcome. In the medium term, a gradual fiscal deficit reduction, anchored on Armenia's fiscal rules, will ensure that public debt remains moderate. Progress on structural

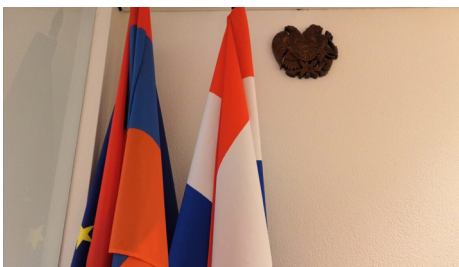
fiscal reforms including tax expenditure rationalization and SOE ownership policy will help contain fiscal risks and mobilize revenues to support priority expenditures on health, social protection, and capital projects.

"The monetary policy stance is appropriate and has helped ease inflation. The CBA should remain proactive in case strong demand conditions pose risks to the inflation outlook. The CBA's plan to transition to a risk-based approach to price stability should ensure that the credibility of the inflation targeting framework is preserved. The flexible exchange rate has served Armenia well in absorbing external shocks, while building reserve buffers.

"In the face of rising financial sector risks, particularly in the housing sector, the CBA should advance its prudential regulation and supervisory reforms. Efforts should focus on preserving capital buffers, enhancing supervisory powers and capacities, and strengthening crisis management.

"Advancing structural reforms will support sustainable and inclusive growth. The authorities' efforts to raise labor force participation and reduce structural unemployment, ease access to finance, diversify exports, and strengthen governance will enhance economic resilience and uplift potential growth."

The Netherlands contributing €10 million for Armenia



Through the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCF) the Netherlands supports middle-income countries that

receive large numbers of refugees but are not usually eligible for concessional financing from development banks. One such country is Armenia, which has taken in over 100,000 residents from the enclave Nagorno-Karabakh since September.

On 19 September, Azerbaijan launched offensive operations against Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, more than 100,000 people were forced to flee their homes, nearly all of whom found refuge

in Armenia. Those from Nagorno-Karabakh taken in represent about 3% of the Armenian population.

The sudden population increase has put a great deal of pressure on the country's social services, labor market and overall economy. Taking in so many people also entails considerable costs. To help Armenia in this regard, the Netherlands is contributing €10 million to the Global Concessional Financing Facility.

Armenia committed to coming closer to EU to the extent the EU will deem it possible – FM

Armenia is committed to coming closer to the European Union to the extent the EU will deem it possible, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said in his remarks at the Eastern Partnership Ministerial meeting in Brussels.

Minister Mirzoyan noted that Armenia is currently facing enormous challenges and expressed gratitude to the EU and its member States for humanitarian assistance in response to the mass influx of people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Below are Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan's remarks in full:

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I am very pleased for this opportunity to meet and openly discuss the recent developments in the EaP region and share our ideas on the future of this format. Given the diverse challenges the Eastern Partnership region has been facing for the last couple of years, including the shake of the security architecture and humanitarian issues, the consistency of the EaP Ministerial meetings is quite welcoming.

Since EaP was launched, it has aimed to strengthen the ties of the partners with the EU and EU Member states based on common values, deepening economic and political cooperation and support for the reform agenda.

The Eastern Partnership has contributed to the democratic transition of my country, which made a clear decision to take an irreversible path of democratization and reforms. Despite all the challenges we had during the recent couple of years the democratization process and implementation of the ambitious reform agenda did not stop in Armenia for a single moment. And Armenia is resolute in continuing this journey with the substantial support of the European Union. The most recent manifestation of our determination is the ratification of the Rome Statute by Armenia. By joining the ICC Armenia contributed to the strengthening of the international legal order while at the same time reclaiming its sovereign right of taking



decisions based on its national interests.

My Government warmly welcomes the European Commission's decision to recommend the European Council to open accession talks with Moldova and Ukraine and to grant candidate status to Georgia. This decision is welcomed not only by the Government of Armenia but also people of Armenia, who also have European aspirations.

We think that this new development should not be the cause for further weakening of their interest in EaP, but rather it should serve to transform the welcome progress of the trio into an additional bridge for those partners who have the firm intention and resolve to come closer to the European Union.

We are not only committed to continuing this path, but even coming closer to the European Union to the extent the EU will deem it possible.

Dear colleagues,

As you are well aware Armenia is currently facing enormous challenges. The efforts of my Government and all the competent authorities are focused on addressing the humanitarian situation of the forcibly displaced Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, who, within a week, had to abandon their houses and run as a result of use of force.

In this regard, we are grateful to the EU and its member States for humanitarian assistance to Armenia in response to the mass influx of people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Distinguished colleagues,

ladies and gentlemen,

The Government of Armenia has political will for building sustainable and lasting peace in the region. We are ready to move forward to that end on the basis of the principles adopted in Granada by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia, President Michel of the European Council, President Macron of France and Chancellor Scholz of Germany. The same principles about mutual recognition of territorial integrity, mutual recognition of borders, opening of communications, transport infrastructures, that were previously acknowledged during the trilateral meetings of leaders in Brussels.

On numerous occasions, we have demonstrated our willingness and determination to establish long-lasting peace and stability in our region through the normalization of relations with our neighbors, where all countries will live with open borders and be connected by active economic, political and cultural ties. My Government has recently presented our vision for the future named "The Crossroads of Peace" as a part of the peace agenda. At the core of this project is the development of regional communications by means of renovating, building, and operating roads, railways, pipelines, cables, and electricity lines. Moreover, the joint statement recently adopted with Azerbaijan regarding the exchange of detainees and Armenia's agreement on the COP29 is yet another demonstration of our determination to reach peace and stability in the South Caucasus. We do hope that after this positive impulse Azerbaijan will adhere to the peace process.

Dear colleagues,

We believe that this format and initiatives we are engaged in should serve the ultimate goal of bringing us closer to our partners and neighbors. We feel the need to reiterate that all of the EaP partner states should adhere to the same values and principles, as without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, without a secure and peaceful environment any endeavor is doomed to failure.

Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister participates in the 47th meeting of the BSEC Council of Ministers

Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia Paruyr Hovhannisyan on December 5 participated in the 47th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) held online, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Commending the achievement of the agreement on important issues reached under the current

presidency, particularly the adoption of the 2024 budget, the completion of the process of updating the fundamental document “BSEC Economic Agenda”, and the reactivation of the Project Development Fund (PDF).

In his statement, Paruyr Hovhannisyan presented the national macroeconomic policies and legislative reforms and emphasized Armenia’s continuous strong



economic growth as well as significant increase of foreign trade volumes, including with several BSEC member states.

According to the source, Hovhannisyan reiterated Armenia’s position on unblocking the communication links in the region on the basis of sovereignty, territorial integrity and national jurisdiction. The Deputy Minister briefed on the “Crossroads of Peace” project, recently presented by the

Armenian Government, which, through regional connectivity, will contribute to strengthening economic cooperation and political dialogue between the countries of the region.

The Deputy Minister drew the participants’ attention to the issue of the flow of more than 100,000 forcibly displaced refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia in September this year, which seriously affected Armenia’s socio-economic development. He highlighted the measures by the Government of

Armenia to address the life-saving and early recovery needs of the refugees, among them 30 thousand children, with the support of the international partners.

It is noted that the Council of Ministers endorsed a number of important resolutions and decisions and at the conclusion, the Chairmanship-in-Office of BSEC was handed over to Albania.

Round-table discussion held at Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs ahead of World Refugee Forum



Under the chairmanship of the Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Vahe Gevorgyan, a round-table discussion was held in the ministry on December 8. The discussion was dedicated to Armenia’s participation in the World Refugee Forum to be held next week in Geneva, the foreign ministry said in a readout.

“During the discussion, the Republic

of Armenia’s priorities regarding the protection of refugees were presented.

Specifically, the importance of international community support to address the needs of forcibly displaced refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh was emphasized.

It was mentioned that the support is crucial not only for the solution of urgent problems, but also for the medium and long term, in order to create stable living conditions.

In this context, the need to ensure the continuity of the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was mentioned.

In the context of the voluntary commitments to be undertaken by Armenia during the Forum, it was noted that the commitments encompass various aspects. They include creating opportunities for

economic activity, employment, and housing for Nagorno-Karabakh refugees, ensuring access to health services and the right to education, implementing special programs for women and other initiatives.

The participants emphasized that Armenia, having a long-term experience of accepting refugees and addressing their needs, will also share its positive experience of working with refugees during the Forum,” the statement reads.

According to the source, in addition to the members of the delegation heading to the Forum, the meeting was also attended by representatives of interested departments, international organizations, including the representatives of the Armenian office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as representatives of refugees.

Over 150 global humanitarian, business and political leaders demand freedom for Armenian prisoners

Nobel Laureates, Captains of Industry, former heads of state and civil society leaders unite, calling for unconditional release of ethnic Armenians illegally held in Azerbaijan.

Nobel Prize laureates, business leaders, former heads of state, and human-



itarians are among the more than 150 global figures who have signed a letter calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the "Armenian Prisoners," which includes eight Armenian political prisoners, who are former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh's government illegally detained following Azerbaijan's invasion and seizure of the region in September. More than a dozen other prisoners of war arrested during the conflict also remain in custody.

The collective plea echoes growing concerns over conditions and treatment of these imprisoned individuals, including prominent Armenian businessman and humanitarian, Ruben Vardanyan. Their arrest follows a campaign of ethnic cleansing by the Azerbaijani forces. While the December 7th release of 32 Armenian prisoners of war is a welcome first step, all of the others must be released. The failure of Baku to release the remaining 8 political prisoners raises deep concerns over the motives by the Aliyev regime of their continued detention.

"The human rights abuses witnessed in the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demand urgent attention and action," said Nubar Afeyan, another signatory as well as the co-founder of the Aurora

Humanitarian Initiative. "President Aliyev chooses political retribution over justice. We believe in the inherent dignity and rights of every individual and call on the international community to join us in condemning this injustice."

Afeyan has long collaborated on global and regional economic development and humanitarian projects with Vardanyan, who has become a symbol of the broader struggle for political freedom and human dignity in the region. His unjust imprisonment has galvanized some of the world's most respected voices to champion his cause and that of others unjustly detained.

"We call on President Aliyev to fulfill his obligations to international rules and law, ensuring those unjustly imprisoned can return safely to their families," said Paul Polman, Vice Chair of the United Nations Global Compact and former CEO of Unilever. "All individuals in Nagorno-Karabakh have a right to experience a life of peace and security, including the freedom to move without hindrance or the looming specter of inhuman treatment. Given Azerbaijan's bid to host COP 29 in 2024, I sincerely hope the United Nations will only agree if Baku releases all these prisoners."

Polman is one of the letter's signatories, alongside former heads of state,

such as Ernesto Zedillo, former President of Mexico; Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland; Oscar Arias, former President of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and Elisha Wiesel, Chairman of the Board of the Elie

Wiesel Foundation for Humanity and Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, and son of the late Elie Wiesel, former Co-Chair of Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity. Other prominent signatories represent a wide range of sectors, including Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin, Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce; Ariana Huffington, founder of Thrive and The Huffington Post; and Serj Tankian, renowned musician and lead vocalist of System of a Down.

"The unjust detention of Ruben Vardanyan and so many others being held in Baku violates their basic human rights," said Mary Robinson, Former UN High Commissioner of Human Rights. "For the government of Azerbaijan to be respected in the global community, it is critical they respect the rule of law, especially in light of the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh. They must release these detainees immediately.

Their unified plea serves as a powerful reminder that global political leaders are closely monitoring developments in Azerbaijan and calling for the release of the detainees. As asserted in the letter issued today, the detention of Armenian prisoners is a clear violation of international norms, including the Third Geneva Convention.

Armenian, Azeri prisoners exchanged



(RFE/RL) - Armenia and Azerbaijan exchanged over three dozen prisoners on December 13 one week after reaching an agreement to that effect welcomed by the international community.

In line with that agreement, Azerbaijan freed 32 Armenian soldiers and civilians in exchange for Armenia's release of two Azerbaijani servicemen. The swap took place at the border between the two countries.

As part of the deal, Yerevan also dropped its objections to Baku's bid to host the COP29 climate summit next year. The United Nations officially announced Azerbaijan as the summit host on Monday.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan posted the list of the freed Armenians on his Facebook page. He said that they will undergo

medical examinations before reuniting with their families.

Most of them were taken prisoner in Nagorno-Karabakh in December 2020 just weeks after a Russian-brokered ceasefire stopped the last Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

Also repatriated was Gagik Voskanyan, an Armenian army reservist who was mobilized a few weeks before straying into Azerbaijani territory in August this year in unclear circumstances. An Azerbaijani court convicted Voskanyan of "terrorism" just hours before the announcement of the prisoner swap.

"Up until the last minute we were not sure [about Voskanyan's release] because we feared that the Azerbaijanis could do something at the last minute," his mother,

Ashkhen Avetisyan, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "So it really was a surprise, a big surprise."

According to Yerevan-based human rights activists, 23 Armenians remain in Azerbaijani captivity after the latest swap. They include eight current and former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh arrested following Azerbaijan's September military offensive in the region.

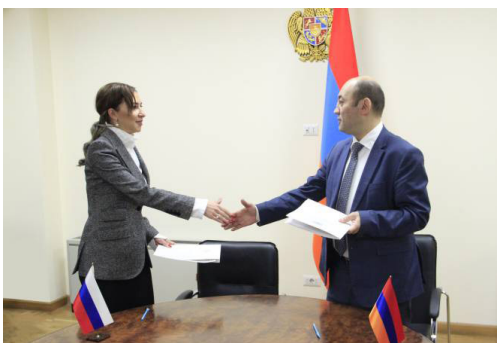
The Azerbaijani soldiers set free by Yerevan were detained in April after crossing into Armenia's Syunik province from Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan exclave. One of them, Huseyn Akhundov, was charged with murdering a Syunik resident the day before his detention. Armenia's Court of Appeals sentenced him to life imprisonment last week.

The 56-year-old murder victim, Hayrapet Meliksetyan worked as a security guard at a waste disposal facility of Armenia's largest mining company. Meliksetyan's daughter has reportedly condemned Pashinyan for agreeing to Akhundov's release.

The United States, the European Union and Russia were quick to welcome the Armenian-Azerbaijani deal on the prisoner swap. EU Council President Charles Michel called it a "major breakthrough in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations."

Russia accepts violations recorded by Television and Radio Commission of Armenia

Bilateral consultations between the Ministry of High-Tech Industry of Armenia and the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of Russia were held on Dec.14 in Yerevan. The meeting was held on the issue of maintaining the provisions outlined in the agreement on cooperation in the field of mass telecommunications signed between the governments of the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation.



According to the Ministry of High-tech Industry of Armenia, at the meeting the Armenian side reported that the Commission on Television and Radio of Armenia had recorded violations of the agreement.

Thus, the Russian side accepted the fact of the violations and both parties have reached an agreement to take steps toward proper observance of all points of the agreement.

Cultural heritage of the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem must be safeguarded from the developers – Lemkin Institute

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention expressed deep concern over the threats to the integrity of the Armenian Quarter in East Jerusalem. It calls on the United States and other close allies of Israel to take it upon themselves to guarantee the Armenian community due process in this land dispute.

“The global Armenian community has already lost one important historical land this fall — Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), which was forcibly depopulated when Azerbaijan invaded, massacred Armenians, and terrorized almost the entire Armenian population into fleeing. The Armenian people cannot lose another,” the Lemkin Institute said in a statement.

“The Armenian Quarter makes up about one-sixth of the city of Jerusalem. It is 1,600 years old, dating back to the reign of Roman Emperor Constantine. The first settlement of Armenians in Jerusalem predates Constantine even, with Armenians having settled in Jerusalem as early as the first century BCE when the Armenian Empire controlled nearby territories in Syria. Although the Armenian population in Jerusalem today is very small, the Armenian Quarter remains an important part of the Armenian Diaspora presence as the oldest remaining living diaspora



of Armenians. The Quarter houses a diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church,” it noted.

In July 2021, the Armenian Patriarchate signed an agreement to lease a significant plot of land (called the “Cow’s Garden”) to Australian developer Danny Rubenstein for 98 years at a low annual rent of a few hundred thousand dollars per year. Rubenstein planned to build a luxury hotel on the site, necessitating the destruction of many of the existing buildings. The deal came as a shock to the local community, the greater Armenian Diaspora, and Palestinian authorities, the latter of which felt as if the deal encroached on their own sovereignty. It also raised eyebrows due to its asymmetric rewards.

In response to this opposition, the Patriarchate announced on November 1, 2023, that it would be canceling the deal. However, Danny Rubenstein’s company, XANA, has refused the Patriarchate’s

cancellation. It has brought bulldozers to the site and is beginning construction in the Cow’s Garden area.

Local Armenians have responded to the destruction of Cow’s Garden with peaceful protests in the form of public gatherings and a sit-in where construction had begun. Israeli police and civilians have met these protests with violence, using dogs and firearms to intimidate the peaceful protestors. Danny Rubenstein and George Warwar, Chairman and Director of XANA International, appear to be using force and intimidation to deter the Armenian community from attempting to protect its land.

“The cultural heritage of the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem must be safeguarded from the developers and the armed settlers who are enabling them, ostensibly with the aim of creating a homogenized Jewish ethnostate in Palestinian territories. We stand with the Armenian community as they continue to resist the development of this land through peaceful demonstrations and by refusing to leave the premises. The Armenian community has already lost one significant historical community in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh this year. It must not lose another,” the Lemkin Institute said.

Armenia elected member of the committee of UNESCO 1954 Convention



Armenia has been elected a member of the committee of the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1999 Protocol.

The election took place on December

12 during the committee’s meeting in Paris.

Armenia has been elected for a 4-year term.

The Armenian delegation to the meeting was led by Alfred Kocharyan, the Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport.

In his remarks, Kocharyan warned that the Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh is endangered and underscored that in the past three years Azerbaijan has been blocking a UNESCO mission proposed by the organization’s

director general.

Kocharyan presented multiple evidence on the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as in Nakhchivan and other parts of Azerbaijan.

He cited the statement issued to Azerbaijan by the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights expressing concern about the destruction and appropriation of Armenian historic and cultural, as well as religious sites, which constitutes a violation of international standards of human rights.

Forbes names Armenia a “tech powerhouse”



Armenia has emerged as a tech powerhouse with the presence of global players and a vibrant startup ecosystem, Craig S, Smith writes in an article published by [Forbes](#).

He notes that people like Noubar Afeyan, co-founder of biotechnology powerhouse Moderna, Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of Reddit and Avie Tevanian, former CTO of Apple and creator of the macOS operating system have all remained connected to the country.

“In October, Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen was in the vibrant capital Yerevan to speak at the country’s Silicon Mountains conference and open a new Adobe building. Across town, dozens of startups displayed their innovations at the annual Digitec expo. Already, the small, landlocked country has produced one unicorn (Picsart) with more on the way,” the

author writes.

“With the snowcapped summit of distant Mount Ararat – the Armenian national symbol that rises across the border in Turkey – visible on clear days, Yerevan is filled with sophisticated restaurants crowded with tables of young tech entrepreneurs drinking apricot brandy and eating platters of stuffed grape leaves as they discuss the latest innovations,” he continues.

According to Forbes, Various indexes show Armenia as the emerging tech powerhouse of the Southern Caucasus region, a legacy of its role as one of the Soviet Union’s top technology centers – the USSR’s first general-purpose computers were developed there in the early 1960s.

“That history faltered during the breakup of the Union and the subsequent war with Azerbaijan to define Armenia’s national borders – a conflict that continues to reverberate today. But, Armenia recovered and has drawn on the success of its diaspora in the United States to become one of the strongest economies in the region,” Smith writes.

He notes that following its independence in 1991, Armenia began developing as a behind-the-scenes builder of software for Western companies, many founded by

Armenians. But gradually, it has climbed the value chain to produce products of its own.

That trend only accelerated with the outbreak of Russia’s war with Ukraine which drove companies from both countries to relocate to Yerevan. The subsequent influx of capital drove up the Armenian dram against the dollar, hurting the competitiveness of the country’s outsource industry. Meanwhile, a small venture capital industry coalesced to fund tech development and today startups can raise as much as \$1 million domestically before turning to VCs abroad.

Consequently, the country’s economy is booming – with projected 7 percent growth this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, making it the fastest growing economy in the region.

“The tech industry is now the country’s the fastest-growing sector, expanding by more than 30 percent in 2023, surpassing resource extraction and agriculture as the primary drivers of the economy. And it is drawing foreign investment. Besides Adobe, many of the world’s most powerful technology firms have set up shop there, including Microsoft, Google, IBM and Cisco,” the author emphasizes.

Prime Minister chairs consultation with the participation of representatives of IT companies



A consultation was held on December 15 chaired by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in which representatives of about 30 large IT companies participated.

Vice President of the National Assembly Hakob Arshakyan, Minister of High-tech Industry Robert Khachatryan, Minister of Finance Vahe Hovhannisyanyan

and other officials also participated in the consultation, the Prime Minister’s Office said in a readout.

“At the beginning of the meeting, the Prime Minister noted that the purpose of the consultation is to understand what problems exist in the sector, to find out the effectiveness of the policies implemented by the government for the development of the sector, as well as to discuss the future tasks.

The representatives of the IT sector presented the problems solved in the sector through the programs carried out by the government, presented their ideas on improving the existing regulations, as well as suggestions for long-term solutions of

the existing problems in the sector, reads the statement.

According to the source, based on the results of the discussion, the Prime Minister instructed to create a working group, to carry out follow-up work on the raised issues, to develop an effective solution model, to set a timetable and to present it at the next meeting. The Head of the Government emphasized that seeing Armenia as a technological and technologically developed country has been a strategic goal since 2018. **“My message is that the government has that political will, and it is a program thesis for us,”** added the Prime Minister.

System of a Down's Serj Tankian, Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi team up to raise money for Armenia Fund

System of a Down frontman Serj Tankian and Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi, who recorded the song "Patterns" together in 2000, have reunited for a new song that will help raise money for imperiled Armenians, the *Rolling Stone* reports.

The tune was the brainchild of Cesar Gueikian, CEO of Gibson Brands. Gueikian, an Argentine member of the Armenian diaspora, teamed with Tankian and Iommi on a new song, "Deconstruction," that's coming out under the banner of the Gibson Band via Gibson Records as a charity single. The tune is a six-minute descent into psychedelic doom metal that finds Tankian singing about "deconstruction of the human mind" while Gueikian plays meaty riffs and Iommi slices through it all with a wah-wah-inflected, bluesy solo. One hundred percent of the money the song makes will go to Armenia Fund's Artsakh Refugee Initiative, which provides aid to



Armenians displaced following Azerbaijan's 2020 invasion.

"We asked ourselves how to use this song to bring awareness to Armenia and the Armenian situation and raise funds for Armenia," Gueikian told the *Rolling Stone*. "In addition to making music, Serj is an activist in service to Armenia, and Tony has ties to Armenia because many years ago, he was part of a group that funded a music school there. So the three of us have pledged any income the song makes to go

to Armenia through the Armenia Fund."

Gibson has also built a unique Les Paul Special that sports Tankian's painting, *Our Mountains*, which depicts Armenia's beloved Mount Ararat and is selling via Julien's Auctions. Corporación América, owned by Argentine billionaire and Armenian diaspora member Eduardo Eurnekian, and the Eurnekian family are matching the funds the endeavor raises.

"Because it was Armenia Fund, I thought it appropriate to donate a painting called *Our Mountains*, which refers to the two mountains of Mount Ararat, where Noah's ark landed," Tankian told *Rolling Stone* over Zoom. "It's one of the symbols of Armenia and our culture and history. ... [Armenia Fund] is one of the recipients of System of a Down's donations from the two songs we did in 2020 during the war with Azerbaijan. They help with the rehabilitation of veterans."

Armenian conductor Tigran Arakelyan named one of the Top 30 Professionals of the Year by Musical America Worldwide



Armenian-American executive director, conductor, podcaster, and radio host, Dr. Tigran Arakelyan has been named one of the Top 30 Professionals of the Year by Musical America Worldwide, the oldest classical music magazine in America.

This year's Musical America Top 30 Professionals are the entrepreneurs, the worker bees, the creative minds that ensure the health of the artform and its essential value in our lives, now and for generations to come. 30,000 industry professionals were asked to nominate people "who persistently and relentlessly strive to keep the performing arts vital. They are

thoughtful, creative, and often innovative; they are the hard workers."

"Tigran Arakelyan finds it hard to recount everything he's accomplished in his 36 years without being overwhelmed with gratitude. He's "been fortunate," he insists. Or he'd sooner credit his many mentors—like his first music teacher in Armenia, or Ludovic Morlot, former music director of the Seattle Symphony—and his parents, who encouraged his "crazy ideas." Crazy to some, maybe. But many can't imagine classical music in the Seattle area without Arakelyan. Recently named one of 425 Business magazine's 40 under 40, Arakelyan has conducted numerous regional orchestras in Washington and California; he took the Federal Way Youth Symphony on three tours to South Korea in 2014, 2017, and 2019, and is known for finding unusual venues for all of his projects, from bars to cafes to homeless shelters. On his podcast, Let's Talk Off the Podium, he has interviewed a huge variety of notables including George Walker, Vijay

Iyer, Evelyn Glennie, JoAnn Falletta, Sharon Isbin, and Christopher Theofanidis," the Musical America Worldwide said.

Tigran Arakelyan is an Armenian-American executive director, conductor, podcaster, and radio host. Tigran held conducting positions with the California Philharmonic, Los Angeles Youth Orchestra and made his Walt Disney Concert Hall conducting debut in 2019. He played alongside Sir James Galway during Galway's induction into the Hollywood Bowl Hall of Fame with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. Tigran received awards from The American Prize and the Global Music Awards. Currently, he is the Music Director of Northwest Mahler Festival and Port Townsend Symphony. He conducted regional premieres by renowned composers Paul Hindemith, Keith Jarrett, Brenno Blauth, and James Cohn. Since 2009, Tigran has founded three orchestras, music festivals, competitions, and numerous scholarship/grant and funding initiatives.

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