Crossroads of Peace project should become one of the topics of Armenia-Georgia strategic cooperation – PM



Armenia - Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meets his Georgian counterpart Irakli Kobakhidze, Yerevan, March 25, 2024

Armenia assumes its share of responsibility for establishment of peace and stability in the region, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at a joint press conference with his visiting Georgian counterpart Irakli Kobakhidze.

"We expect other role-players to demonstrate a similar attitude," he said.

The Prime Minister stressed that Armenia is ready to move forward in the process of normalization of relations with Azerbaijan on the basis of the well-known principles agreed between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the highest level – mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity on the bases of the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration, delimitation of Armenia-Azerbaijan border on the basis of the same Alma-Ata Declaration, as well as unblocking of regional communications on the basis of respect to the authority and sovereignty of states, ensuring reciprocity and equality.

"We expect the Crossroads of Peace project brought forward by the Armenian Government to become one of the topics of future strategic cooperation between our countries," the Prime Minister added.

"We see that Georgia is not only interested in the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, bit is also taking practical steps, trying to contribute to the process," Nikol Pashinyan said, expressing gratitude to Georgian partners.

Georgia is ready to help Armenia and Azerbaijan negotiate a peace treaty, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said during an official visit.

"We really hope that the peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be signed and it will be a landmark treaty," he said after talks with his Armenian counterpart Nikol Pashinyan. "Georgia is ready to positively assist in that

process." page 4

Pashinyan, Michel discuss Armenia-EU relations, peace process with Azerbaijan Armenian parliament ratifies agreement on EU mission status

Armenia interested in developing political dialogue with NATO and member states – PM French Prime Minister demands Azerbaijan to withdraw troops from occupied Armenian positions

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Pashinyan, Michel discuss Armenia-EU relations, peace process with Azerbaijan



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President of the European Council Charles Michel have discussed issues related to Armenia-EU cooperation.

The meeting took place on the sidelines

of the inaugural Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels.

The interlocutors exchanged views on Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, the importance of implementation of the agreements reached based on the results of the tripartite meetings between the President of the European Council, the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan held in Brussels on May 14 and July 15, 2023 was emphasized.

According to those agreements, the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan mutually recognize each other's territorial integrity based on 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration, delimitation between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be carried out on the basis of the Alma-Ata Declaration, the opening of regional infrastructures will take place under the sovereignty, jurisdiction of Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the principles of reciprocity and equality.

The Armenian Prime Minister reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of the Republic of Armenia to the mentioned agreements and presented the "Crossroads of Peace" project.

Armenian PM briefs his Belgian counterpart on "Crossroads of Peace" project

On the sidelines of the inaugural Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with his Belgian counterpart Alexander De

Croo. The interlocutors discussed issues related to Armenia-Belgium cooperation.

The parties highlighted the importance

The parties highlighted the importance of the opening of the Belgian embassy in Armenia and expressed their belief that it will give a new impulse to multi-sectoral cooperation.

Nikol Pashinyan and Alexander De Croo addressed the current situation in the South Caucasus, in particular, the process of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty, the possibilities of unblocking the regional infrastructure.

Nikol Pashinyan presented to the interlocutor the "Crossroads of Peace" project of the Armenian government and its principles. The sides emphasized the activity of the EU observation mission in Armenia in terms of strengthening peace and stability in the region.

The interlocutors also exchanged ideas on Armenia-European Union cooperation.



In particular, the issues related to the democratic reforms implemented in our country with the support of the EU, the dialogue on visa liberalization were addressed.

Foreign Minister briefs Uruguayan senators on security situation in the South Caucasus

On March 21, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan held a meeting in Montevideo at the Uruguay Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The meeting was attended by Committee Chairman Jose Carlos Mahia, members of the committee representing various political parties, as well as members of the Armenia-Uruguay Parliamentary Friendship Group. According to the readout issued by the foreign ministry, a wide range of issues were discussed during the meeting. Minister Mirzoyan touched upon the process of democratic reforms in Armenia, emphasizing that adherence to democratic principles is aimed not only at strengthening Armenia's sovereignty but also at fostering closer relations with like-minded countries, including Uruguay.

Addressing the regional topics,

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Minister Mirzoyan detailed the security situation in the South Caucasus and the efforts aimed at regulating relations with neighboring countries to establish lasting stability in the region.

Ararat Mirzoyan presented the key issues currently in the draft agreement aimed at regulating relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The resolution of these issues, according to the Armenian side, is based on well-known principles: a clear commitment to territorial integrity and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

In the context of the development of the South Caucasus and the best use of logistical advantages, Ararat Mirzoyan emphasized the opportunities provided by unblocking regional economic and transport channels based on the principles of respecting sovereignty and jurisdiction, equality, and reciprocity. Minister Mirzoyan, addressing the messages of the international community during a challenging period for Armenia, added: "I am also here to express our gratitude for the principled positions that you have expressed at various times on issues that are priorities for Armenia."







Armenia interested in developing political dialogue with NATO and member states – PM

Armenia is interested in continuing to develop the existing political dialogue and expanding the partnership with NATO and its member states, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at a press conference alongside NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Yerevan.

"We hope that the new format of Armenia-NATO cooperation, the "Individually Tailored Partnership Program", will be approved soon. In light of the developments in our region, it is extremely important for Armenia to strengthen its resilience and develop appropriate defense capabilities," PM Pashinyan said.

"We also attach great importance to Armenia's participation in peacekeeping operations and consider it an important contribution to ensuring international peace and security. The Armenian peacekeeping unit continues to contribute to the Kosovo (KFOR) mission, and as you know, in July 2023, when the situation in Kosovo was somewhat unstable, Armenia increased the personnel of its peacekeeping unit with an additional 17 soldiers," he added.

The Armenian Prime Minister noted



that "effective dialogue is also carried out at the parliamentary level, given that our parliamentarians are involved in NATO Parliamentary Assembly meetings and Rose-Roth seminars."

Baghanis, Voskepar, Kirants, Berkaber are and will always be on the map of the Republic of Armenia: PM presents details

During a question-and-answer session with members of the government in the National Assembly, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressed the opposition's accusations that the Government intends to hand over villages from Tavush Province.

The Prime Minister noted that representatives of the opposition claim that the Armenian government is going to hand over four villages in the Tavush region. According to him, it is necessary to urge or demand those who make such statements to specify which villages in the Tavush province they are referring to.

Nikol Pashinyan stated that the government is ready to start the delimitation

in the following areas.

"On the side of Armenia, Baghanis, on the side of Azerbaijan, in Baghanis-Ayrum. These are not the same villages. On the side of Armenia, Voskepar, on the side of Azerbaijan, is part of the Ashaghi-Askipara settlement. From the Armenian side, Kirants, from the Azerbaijani side, the village of Kheremli. On the Armenian side, there is Berkaber and the border section in front of it with the village of Kzyl-Hajili in Azerbaijan," he said.

The Prime Minister emphasized that the area from which the border demarcation should begin is not part of the village but the border in front of it. The Prime Minister noted that Armenia is ready for the delimitation of the borders in front of these villages.

Pointing to the map of Armenia, the Prime Minister emphasized that the village of Baghanis is located on the mentioned map and the village of Baghanis-Ayrum has always been outside.

"Voskepar is on the map and Ashaghi-Askipara has always been outside. Kirants is on this map. Kherimli village is outside. Berkaber is on this map. Kzil-Hajili has always been outside," Pashinyan said.

The Prime Minister added that the residents of Voskepar do not dispute the map he showed; they do not claim it is incorrect.

Putin's success in Ukraine risks inspiring other authoritarian entities -Stoltenberg

During a joint press conference with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on March 19, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg addressed the Russian-Ukrainian war.

"Russia's war in Ukraine is a sobering reminder that we cannot help but

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value peace. I applaud your solidarity with Ukraine and call on all partners to do everything in their power to prevent Putin from winning his war of aggression," he said.

The NATO chief said that the situation on the battlefield remains critical, that

is why, according to him, their support should be increased, not decreased.

In his opinion, if Putin succeeds in Ukraine, there is a real risk that his aggression will not stop there, and that other authoritarian entities will be inspired by it.







Speaking at a joint page 1 news briefing with Pashinyan, Kobakhidze stressed that Georgia recognizes Armenia's territorial integrity "without reservations."

PM Pashinyan said that this, coupled

with Armenia's recognition of Georgia's internationally recognized territory, is a key element of a Georgian-Armenian declaration on "strategic partnership" signed by him and Kobakhidze's predecessor Irakli Gharibashvili in Tbilisi in January.

Pashinyan said that Georgian-Armenian relations will also be "directly" affected by the European Union's decision late last year to grant Georgia the status of EU membership candidate. Yerevan welcomes the EU's decision, added the Armenian leader.

Pashinyan, Macron discuss processes taking place in the South Caucasus region



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the inaugural Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels.

The high-level political dialogue between Armenia and France and the determination to further strengthen multi-sectoral cooperation were emphasized. Reference was made to the steps towards the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, to the processes taking place in the South Caucasus region.

Thoughts were exchanged on the further development and expansion of Armenia-European Union cooperation.

Armenian parliament ratifies agreement on EU mission status

The Armenian parliament approved on March 20 the government's decision to essentially grant diplomatic immunity to members of a monitoring mission launched by the European Union along Armenia's border with Azerbaijan a year ago.

A relevant Armenia-EU agreement ratified by the National Assembly not only gives the EU monitors immunity from prosecution but also guaran-

tees their freedom of movement inside the country, exempts them and their equipment from Armenian customs checks and bans law-enforcement authorities from searching their offices and vehicles. In



addition, it commits Yerevan to guaranteeing their personal security and ensuring, if necessary, their free evacuation from the country.

"Armenia attaches great importance to

this and all other initiatives aimed at deepening our security cooperation with the European Union," Deputy Foreign Minister Mnatsakan Safaryan said on March 19 as he presented the agreement to lawmakers for ratification.

The EU mission was launched in February 2023 at the request of the Armenian government and with the stated aim of preventing

or reducing ceasefire violations along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. The EU decided late last year to increase the number of its members from 138 to 209.

Pashinyan to meet Von der Leyen and Blinken in Brussels

A meeting between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken will take place in Brussels on April 5, Armen Grigoryan, Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia told Armenpress.

During the meeting the parties will discuss aspects of trilateral cooperation contributing to the development of Armenia.

Question. Mr. Grigoryan, according to the Pashinyan-Von der Leyen joint statement of October 5, 2023 in Granada,

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President Von der Leyen informed Prime Minister Pashinyan about the preparation of a joint EU-US event to support Armenia. Is there any progress on organizing that event?

Answer: Not only is there progress, but the date of the event is set. A joint meeting between President Von der Leyen, Prime Minister Pashinvan and Secretary of State Blinken is scheduled to be held on April 5 in Brussels where they plan to discuss aspects of trilateral cooperation

that will contribute to the development of Armenia. The event also aims to strengthen Armenia's resilience. There will be an opportunity to talk about the event in more detail in the near future.

On October 5, 2023, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen issued a joint statement after a meeting in Granada. Ursula von der Leyen announced the preparation of a joint EU-US event to support Armenia.





French Prime Minister demands Azerbaijan to withdraw troops from occupied Armenian positions



French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal has demanded Azerbaijan to withdraw its troops from the positions they have occupied in Armenia, Le Figaro reports.

The French Prime Minister said this at the annual dinner of the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organizations of France, noting that the President of Azerbaijan himself admitted that Azerbaijani forces have advanced in several areas of the Republic of Armenia.

"Our task today is to help Armenia protect its independence, democracy, sovereignty and territorial integrity," Attal said.

The Prime Minister of France also added that Russia wants to punish Armenia for its aspiration for peace, respect for its sovereignty, as well as for the principles that Moscow disrespects in Ukraine.

Attal mentioned Armenia's joining the International Criminal Court, stressing that Armenia has chosen the path of democracy and the rule of law.

The French Prime Minister emphasized that Moscow did not condemn Azerbaijan's use of force in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Armenians had lived until the end of last year, adding that the so-called Russian peacekeeping forces allowed a humanitarian crisis to occur there.

Political consultations held between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Norway

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and the Kingdom of Norway on Thursday held regular political consultations in Yerevan. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Paruyr Hovhannisyan and State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway Evind Vad Petersson conducted the consultations, the foreign ministry said.

The interlocutors discussed a wide range of issues related to the development of bilateral relations. They emphasized the need to activate the Armenian-Norwegian political dialogue, expand cooperation in legal treaty fields and strengthen



inter-parliamentary ties. They also highlighted the importance of revitalizing connections in trade, the economy, high technology, culture, education, tourism and other areas.

The parties discussed cooperation

within international organizations. They also exchanged thoughts on urgent issues on the regional and global agenda.

During the meeting, the process of normalizing relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan was addressed.

Deputy Minister Paruyr Hovhannisyan presented the interlocutor with the latest regional developments, emphasizing Armenia's positions on critical issues.

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia also presented the "Crossroads of Peace" project developed by the Armenian government to the Norwegian partners.

Armenia, UK look at ways to bolster defense cooperation

On March 19th, Armenia's Ambassador to UK, H.E. Varuzhan Nersesyan met with Gilbert Timothy George Lariston Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, the Earl of Minto, Minister of State for Defense.

Ambassador Varuzhan Nersesyan emphasized the importance of continuing to develop collaboration with the UK, particularly in defense, underscoring Armenia's unwavering commitment

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to regional stability and peace. Highlighting the positive strides in bilateral cooperation, the Ambassador referenced the defense consultations between the Ministries of Defense of both nations late last year.

During the meeting, the sides touched upon avenues for bolstering defense cooperation, reflecting the shared resolve of Armenia and the UK towards maintaining peace and security.







Armenia, Italy discuss prospects for defense cooperation



From 19 to 20 March, the Armenia-Italy defense consultations were held in Rome with the participation of the

delegation led by the Head of the Defence Policy and International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, Levon Ayvazyan from the Armenian side, the Armenian Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Throughout the consultations, the delegation of the Ministry of Defense has discussed with the Deputy Chief of Cabinet of the Minister of Defence of Italy and Defense Policy Director, Major General Enrico Barduani, and the Head of the International Cooperation Branch of the

Italian General Staff, Colonel Mattia Zuzzi, the current status of the of Armenia-Italy defense cooperation and prospects of its development.

During the discussion, Ayvazyan introduced the security situation around Armenia and the ongoing reforms of the Armed Forces.

The consultations culminated in the signing of the annual program of Armenia-Italy military cooperation, and several agreements were reached.

EU awards €150,000 for cultural grants to five cities in Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova

The EU-funded EU4Culture project has awarded grants of €30,000 each to five municipalities participating in its Regional Cities Network. These are Charentsavan and Sevan in Armenia. Kutaisi and Poti in Georgia, and Orhei in the Republic of Moldova.

The network aims to increase the sustainability of the cultural development strategies created in 2022 with the support of EU4Culture. The strategic plans of the five municipalities stimulate the regional economy by promoting the development of local creative and cultural industries.

In 2024, the selected municipalities will use the newly awarded funds to implement various cultural activities, such



as art events and training. One municipality will also produce a publicly accessible database on local culture. As members of the EU4Culture Regional Cities Network, the municipalities will also share their experiences in implementing their Cultural Development Strategies within and beyond the Network.

"The new package for the five municipalities can serve as additional encouragement to create development opportunities in the regions of Armenia, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, hence establishing new models for strengthening the resilience of cultural and creative sectors in the countries," said EU4Culture Team Leader, Anatoli Beifert.

With a budget of €7.85 million, EU4Culture is a four-year project funded by the European Union to support the cultural and creative sector with a special focus on non-capital cities and towns in the Eastern Partnership Countries. The project is implemented by Goethe-Institut (Lead), Czech Centers, Danish Cultural Institute, and Institut Français de Géorgie.

Armenia presents significant opportunities for British businesses to explore new markets for investment - Ambassador

Armenia's Ambassador to UK Varuzhan Nersesyan met with Marta Kozlowska, Head of International at the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), and Mr. James Watkins, Head of Policy at LCCI.

The Ambassador expressed his hope that the LCCI could play a role in providing a platform for networking and collaboration, aiming to connect businesses in both countries and to encourage them to expand their operations and explore new horizons.

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He emphasized Armenia's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, presenting significant opportunities for British businesses to explore new markets and avenues for investment.

Ambassador Nersesyan stressed the importance of collaborating with the LCCI and British companies to further encourage doing business in Armenia. In this regard, he highlighted the success of last year's Armenia-UK business forum, conveying his hope that it will serve as a

foundation to deepen business relations between Armenia and the UK.









Armenia-China economic cooperation discussed in Brussels



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had a meeting with Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing in Brussels.

The interlocutors discussed issues related to Armenia-China economic cooperation, emphasized the implementation of joint steps to increase the volume of trade turnover.

Reference was made to the possibilities of unblocking infrastructure in the South Caucasus region.

Prime Minister Pashinyan presented the "Crossroads of Peace" project of the Armenian government.

Swiss Armenian businessman Vahe Gabrash briefs PM Pashinyan on upcoming initiatives

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received Swiss-Armenian businessman and philanthropist Vahe Gabrash.

The Prime Minister commended Mr. Gabrash's economic and other activities in Armenia, adding that the government is ready to discuss the progress of the projects and contribute to the



implementation of new ones.

Vahe Gabrash expressed gratitude for the reception and support, stressing that he will continue the activities in Armenia. The businessman presented details about the programs implemented in different directions and referred to upcoming initiatives.

Armenia's "National Airline" Loses Operating License

(RFE/RL) - Two months after suspending its flights, an airline declared by the Armenian government the "national carrier" has been temporarily stripped of its operating license, moving closer to liquidation.

The company, Fly Arna, was set up by the United Arab Emirates-based carrier Air Arabia and the Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF), a state agency, in July 2021 a year before launching inaugural flights to a limited number of foreign destinations. It is equally co-owned by Air Arabia and ANIF, with each of them having invested 4.4 billion drams (\$11 million) in its operations.

Armenian officials said at the time that Fly Arna will become the country's leading domestic airline. The then ANIF director predicted that it will have a fleet

The Noyan Tapan Highlights

of 15 aircraft.

Fly Arna leased only two passenger jets, however, despite hiring and training over 120 people. One of those planes was removed from Armenia's civil aircraft register and reportedly moved to India late last year in a sign of serious financial issues facing the carrier.

Fly Arna halted all of its flights on January 16, saying that it is going through "operational changes" and hopes to resume its service "as soon as possible." It appears to have also lost its sole remaining plane.

Under Armenian civil aviation regulations, airlines lacking any aircraft must have their licenses suspended for six months.

"As things stand now, the [Fly Arna] license is suspended," Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and

Infrastructures Arsen Simonyan told the Armenian parliament on Tuesday. He said the license will be revoked altogether if the company fails to acquire at least one plane within six months.

"The matter is being examined and we will inform you if there is clarity. The problem is mainly financial," he said without giving details.

The Armenian government is facing growing calls to explain why Fly Arna has found itself on the brink of collapse despite substantial public funds injected into it.

Armenia has had no large domestic airlines ever since the state-backed Armavia carrier went bankrupt in 2013. The bankruptcy led the then Armenian government to liberalize the country's aviation sector.





Nuclear power plant symbolizes and strengthens Armenia's sovereignty: PM Pashinyan addresses inaugural Nuclear Energy Summit

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan participated in the inaugural Nuclear Energy



Summit in Brussels. French President Emmanuel Macron, Belgian Prime Minister Alexandre de Croo, European Commission President Ursula van der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel, presidents, prime ministers and representatives of a number of countries also took part in the event.

Prime Minister Pashinyan delivered a speech at the summit, in which he specifically stated:

"Prime Minister De Croo, Director General Grossi, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I extend my sincere gratitude to Director General Grossi for convening this inaugural Nuclear Energy Summit, and to Prime Minister De Croo for generously hosting this important gathering.

Armenia, as a state reliant on nuclear power generation, stands firmly behind the consensus that nuclear energy is indispensable in our fight against climate change and recognizes the inalienable right of all NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons) States Parties to develop it for peaceful purposes without discrimination and political barriers. This is why Armenia was among 22 countries who fully supported the "International Atomic Energy Agency Statement on Nuclear Power" at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai in December 2023. We also proudly align ourselves with the historic decision made at the COP28, which recognized nuclear energy as one of the solutions to climate change alongside other low-carbon energy sources.

Nuclear energy stands as a cornerstone

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in our strategy, ensuring both the energy security of our nation and the mitigation of climate change. We commend Director General Grossi's efforts to elevate nuclear energy to the forefront of high-level discussions on climate change mitigation. For Armenia, nuclear energy plays an essential role and helps to achieve our Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement. For decades, the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant has been serving as a critical element of our energy system ensuring the stability and sustainability of energy production. Presently, about 30% of our country's electricity derives from nuclear energy. Our course of arrival to that point was thorny, marred with dramatic period of the closure of the Nuclear Power Plant. Today, we can proudly state that among other crucial things, it also symbolizes and strengthens our sovereignty.

However, this critical role means great responsibility. We are committed to upholding the highest standards of nuclear safety and security in the operation of the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant. This commitment is behind the large-scale modernization and re-equipment of the Plant during the recent years, which allowed to extend the operation of the Armenian NPP until 2026.

Armenia actively collaborates with the International Atomic Energy Agency, adopting a proactive stance to ensure nuclear safety and security while fulfilling all its obligations. We regularly host review and peer review missions, reports of which clearly indicate that Armenia is operating the power plant in line with IAEA safety standards. The absence of any nuclear or radiation safety incidents throughout the history of our plant's operation speaks volumes about our unwavering dedication to this cause. This achievement is a testament to Armenia's political will and expertise. We also acknowledge with gratitude the indispensable technical assistance, knowledge and guidance from the IAEA and partner countries, which have been critical in guaranteeing the safe,

secure, and reliable operation of our Nuclear Power Plant.

With such experience and set priorities, Armenia, alongside many countries present here, has decided to extend the lifetime of its nuclear power plant from 2026 until 2036. In December 2023, the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the implementation project for the extension of the operational lifespan of the Armenian NPP. We are committed to implementing timely and adequate measures related to ageing management and appropriate safety improvements in cooperation with partner states and under the guidance of the Agency.

This extension will lay a solid foundation for the smooth transition to a new power unit upon the end of the ANPP's extended operational period, which is our ultimate objective. In this regard, Armenia is committed to fostering close collaboration with and leveraging the expertise of both the IAEA and partner countries to identify the optimal solution for replacing the current unit. Our transparent and open policy for the safe and peaceful use of atomic energy will continue to guide our efforts as we explore advanced nuclear technologies to further enhance safety, efficiency, and environmental credentials in our nuclear energy sector.

Today we renew our collective commitment to unleashing the full potential of nuclear power and fostering conducive conditions for its development. Regrettably, ongoing conflicts worldwide, including recent ones in our regions, not only jeopardize the safety and security of nuclear facilities but also hinder the advancement of peaceful nuclear initiatives.

Armenia calls upon all international partners to seize the historic opportunity of the current Summit and with joint efforts advance the commitments and goals set out in the Summit Declaration to pave the way towards a cleaner, safer, and more sustainable future for the generations to come.

Thank you."





Armenia seeks stronger EU involvement in regulating Armenia-Azerbaijan relations: Khandanyan



Armenia anticipates continued and stronger engagement from the European Union in the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the member of the delegation of the National Assembly to Euronest PA, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations Sargis Khandanyan said in his speech at the Plenary Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

Khandanyan first congratulated the Ukrainian and Moldovan colleagues for the EU's decision to open the accession negotiations, and the Georgian counterparts for getting EU member candidate status.

"Over the past two years, the relationship between Armenia and the European Union has experienced significant improvements in both quality and pace. I express my gratitude to our colleagues in the European Parliament for acknowledging the efforts and aspirations of the Armenian government in this regard, and for their unwavering support for our democracy and independence.

The deployment of the long-term European civilian monitoring mission to Armenia not only enhances Armenia's security architecture but also fosters opportunities for cooperation in the security sector. I am optimistic that a decision regarding access to the European Peace Facility will be reached soon too.

We are also eager to start the visa liberalization dialogue at the earliest opportunity and remain committed to fulfilling our part of the job under the CEPA, as well as pursuing joint initiatives in connectivity, the energy sector and more.

Armenia also anticipates continued and stronger engagement from the European Union in the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this regard I express my appreciation for the resolution adopted by this Parliament on March 13, on closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This resolution accurately reflects the evolving dynamics and positive

developments in the relationship between Armenia and the European Union, as well as the guiding principles of the peace process and negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Paragraph 16 of this resolution clearly expresses the principles that should form the basis of normalization and future peace agreement.

My colleague has already spoken about these principles. I just want to add that these principles have been agreed and reconfirmed between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan during the negotiations of the past two years. Armenia at the highest level reconfirmed its commitments to those fundamental principles for the normalization of relations as soon as possible. Regrettably, Azerbaijan continues to impose additional demands on Armenia and obstruct progress in the peace process.

It is imperative to underscore that adherence to the principles outlined in the Almaty Declaration is not only actual for the context of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan but also fundamental for respecting the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova," Sargis Khandanyan said.

PM Pashinyan reiterates Armenia's commitment to democratic route

The agenda of democratic reforms remains a top priority for our government, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in an address to the third Summit for Democracy held online. The event is chaired by the Republic of Korea this year.

The Prime Minister reminded that according to the reports of the Freedom House, Armenia has been ranked as a "Free Internet" country several years in a row. "We have registered improvement of Global Freedom Index, advancing our positions by two points within one year. Armenia has also registered progress in the World Press Freedom Index and improved its positions by two points in 2023."

"The fundamental question that arises

among democracies nowadays is whether democracy can deliver security and stability. Over the past several years we have experienced multiple times how democratic institutions can ensure internal stability," PM Pashinyan said.

"On the other hand, Armenia has been attacked by some external undemocratic forces through military and hybrid means that targeted not only the territorial integrity and independence of our country, but democracy as well. And we decided to join the International Criminal Court to protect our independence, territorial integrity and democracy," he added.

"Being committed to the peace process with Azerbaijan, Armenia views its security primarily in peaceful coexistence and cooperation with its neighbors in the region and beyond. Hence, the project "Crossroads of Peace" introduced by the Government of the Republic of Armenia aims to contribute to the security, stability and peace in the South Caucasus. This project is another indicator of my Government's commitment to contribute to the lasting peace and security in the region by means of cooperation," the Prime Minister noted.

He reiterated the commitment of Armenia to the democratic route in the benefit of the region in general and in the benefit of the statehood of the Republic of Armenia, its sovereignty and its international role.



The EU-Armenia Relationship: Analyzing Recent Developments and Prospects



"Noyan Tapan" welcomes its audience to a thought-provoking discussion featuring Hovsep Khurshudyan, Chairman of the "Free Citizen" NGO and an esteemed analyst. In this episode, the focus lies on the recent visit of Stoltenberg, which took place in Armenia on March 19, following stops in Baku and Tbilisi.

Khurshudyan suggests that a key objective of this visit is to solidify the European Union's commitment to ensuring peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Another crucial aspect that Stoltenberg may address is about Turkish-Azerbaijani military collaboration and its implications, including the establishment of a joint army. With Turkey's NATO membership in mind, the question arises: Does this collaboration imply NATO membership for Azerbaijan? Clarity is needed on whether such cooperation involves NATO's collective defense commitments.

These agreements must be made with clear boundaries. NATO membership requires rigorous standards, not merely alignment with Turkey. While military discussions are important, political considerations, especially regarding Armenia, are paramount. NATO's criteria extend beyond military capabilities to democratic values, human rights, and anti-corruption efforts, posing significant challenges for aspiring members.

The growing discontent within NATO towards Turkey isn't coincidental. Turkey's admission, driven by geopolitical interests rather than democratic alignment,

has led to dissatisfaction. Calls for NATO reform, including the exclusion of Turkey due to its incongruity with alliance values, highlight the severity of the situation.

Given these circumstances, there has been discussion about the need to reform NATO, with some suggesting the exclusion of Turkey. This notion underscores the significant discord within the alliance, as Turkey's divergent political system hampers NATO's ability to address internal issues effectively.

There have indeed been discussions about establishing NATO Plus, an organization that would succeed NATO but exclude Turkey. However, there is currently no mechanism in place to remove any country from NATO, as decisions within the alliance are made by consensus. Turkey's inclusion in NATO means it would naturally oppose any move to exclude itself, making such an action practically unfeasible.

While it's theoretically possible for countries to leave NATO and form a new structure like NATO Plus, this scenario seems unlikely at present. Turkey has recently shown signs of becoming more cooperative, albeit with ulterior motives. However, any significant changes in Turkey's behavior may take time, especially considering the upcoming elections and President Erdogan's statements about not seeking reelection.

It's conceivable that Western powers have calculated that Turkey must undergo certain transformations within the next few years to address its stubborn behavior. However, the timeline for such changes is uncertain, and it remains to be seen how events will unfold in Turkey and its relations with the West in the coming years.

According to the analyst, the ongoing dialogue between Armenia and the West regarding potential EU membership unfolds as follows: Recently, the European Parliament passed a significant resolution with an overwhelming 504 votes in favor, signaling strong support for Armenia's integration into the EU. Subsequently, Peter Stano, as reported by "Izvestiia," expressed that Armenia is eligible to apply for EU membership.

In response, Armenia's Acting Deputy Minister, Paruyr Hovhannisyan, conveyed that Armenia had initially pondered its response, but eventually announced plans to develop a new cooperation document with the EU, scheduled for signing in July of this year. This development raises questions about Armenia's path towards EU membership.

The Deputy Minister highlighted that full implementation of the Armenia-EU comprehensive expansion partnership agreement would qualify Armenia as a candidate country for EU membership. However, the concept of "full implementation" warrants clarification. What precisely constitutes full implementation, and where does Armenia currently stand in fulfilling these criteria? The possibility remains that despite progress, certain aspects may remain incomplete, leaving uncertainties about Armenia's eligibility for EU candidacy.

As discussions unfold, it is crucial to understand the specific requirements for EU membership and how Armenia's actions align with these criteria. Tomorrow, there may be further clarifications, shedding light on any outstanding issues preventing Armenia from achieving full compliance with EU standards.

According to the analyst, Armenia faces significant challenges in fulfilling its obligations under the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), particularly in the realm of public administration.

Many aspects of





At least 137 killed in Moscow concert hall attack



At least 137 people were killed and

more than 140 injured when gunmen attacked a packed concert venue on the outskirts of Moscow.

A large fire engulfed the roof of the complex and dramatic video shows panicked concertgoers taking cover as shots and explosions ring out.

Russian President Vladimir Putin says all four gunmen have been arrested, and

that the suspects were trying to flee to Ukraine. Kyiv says allegations of Ukrainian involvement are "absurd."

Putin calls the attack a "barbaric terrorist act" and announces a day of national mourning for 24 March

Muscovites are queuing to give blood for those injured and flower tributes have been placed at the scene of the attack.

CEPA remain unimplementpage 10 ed, indicating incomplete "homework" on Armenia's part. One critical area of concern is public administration, where Armenia lags behind in meeting European Union (EU) standards.

Recently, the analyst participated in discussions concerning the principles of public administration reforms outlined by the EU in 2023, which are obligatory for all EU member and candidate countries. If Armenia aims to attain candidacy status, it must undertake comprehensive public administration reforms, encompassing governmental effectiveness, digitalization, and combating corruption. However, the analyst notes that Armenia's state institutions currently lack the necessary readiness and understanding to implement these reforms effectively.

The implementation of such reforms demands a combination of methodological rigor and technological proficiency, which Armenia's governmental bodies often lack. Many officials are ill-equipped to comprehend the intricacies of these principles, requiring specialized knowledge, skills, and experience. To address this gap, a systematic process for implementing these reforms is underway, focusing on rapid retraining and personnel changes where necessary, to align Armenia's management system with European standards. The successful execution of these reforms is crucial not only for meeting EU requirements but also for improving Armenia's economic situation and overall governance.

Armenia faces a multitude of indicators outlined in agreements like the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership

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Agreement (CEPA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The DCFTA alone spans thousands of provisions across over 2000 pages, emphasizing trade relations and economic integration.

To navigate these complexities, a systematic tracking approach is vital. A schematic list detailing various aspects of public administration reforms—such as governmental effectiveness, digitalization, anti-corruption measures, and institutional capacity-building—would streamline progress monitoring.

Recent announcements by EU officials, including Josep Borrell, stress the importance of adhering to these agreements. Priorities include economic diversification, security assistance via the European Peace Instrument, and fostering investments in Armenia. However, delayed investment disbursements highlight governance challenges requiring effective program implementation.

Prime Minister Pashinyan's advocacy for deeper relations with the European Union sparks discussions against a backdrop of historical fluctuations in Armenia's EU aspirations. Prior to 2013, enthusiasm for EU membership surged, only to wane under Serzh Sargsyan's leadership shift. The aftermath of the 2020 war reignited debates, driven by perceived Russian betrayal and a search for alternatives within the EU.

The shaping of public opinion is evident, seen by some as part of a targeted effort amid what's termed a hybrid war. External influences on public sentiment are acknowledged, with concerns raised about narratives surrounding Russia's role, particularly in the CSTO.

Amidst these developments, crucial

questions arise regarding Armenia's alignment with the West versus Russia. From assessing risks associated with Western cooperation to understanding the rationale behind such alignments given existing partnerships, the complexities of Armenia's geopolitical stance demand transparent discourse.

Russian officials' rhetoric reflects imperialist ideologies, linking sovereignty and prosperity to subservience to Russia. Aspiring for self-sufficiency and a strong military is seen as adversarial, while loyalty requires dependency on Russian assistance, sacrificing sovereignty and autonomy.

Lastly, Levon Kocharyan's question to Mirzoyan can be summarized as: "Have you thoroughly evaluated the risks of Armenia aligning with the West, potentially antagonizing Russia, a key partner?"

In response, the analyst Hovsep Khushudyan asserts that in situations where no alternatives exist, action must be taken despite risks, as inaction itself poses a threat. Failure to proceed may embolden Azerbaijan's aggression, and Russia might interpret Armenia's neutrality as a green light to act. While aligning with the West entails risks, the lack of viable alternatives cannot be ignored.

In summary, Hovsep Khurshudyan's analysis highlights Armenia's efforts to align with the EU and navigate geopolitical complexities amidst historical ties with Russia. Challenges in public administration reforms underscore the country's path toward EU integration, while strategic decisions will shape its future relations with the West and Russia.

Translated by Liana Sargsyan







European Parliament hosts conference on Armenian POWs

Conference on "Armenian Prisoners of War in Azerbaijan: the situation three years after the adoption of the European Parliament resolution on the topic" was held in the European Parliament at the initiative of the AFET Standing Rapporteur on Armenia, MEP Andrey Kovatchev (EPP Group).

At the conference, Mr Andrey Kovatchev and the Ambassador of Armenia in Brussels Mr Tigran Balayan delivered opening remarks, and the main panelists were Yeghishe Kirakosyan, Representative of Armenia for International Legal Affairs, Simon Papuashvili, Programme Director of the "Eastern Europe/South Caucasus, International Partnership for Human Rights" (IPHR) organization, Siranush Sahakyan, Co-founder of the "Path of Law" NGO and international law specialist, Arif Yunus, Head of Department of Conflict and Migration of the Azerbaijani Institute of Peace and Democracy, and Hilda Tchoboian, representative of the "Libertas 2020" project and the President of the "Covcas" Centre for Law and Conflict Resolution and the Armenophobia Observatory. Member of the European Parliament François-Xavier Bellamy sent a video message.

In his speech, Andrey Kovatchev emphasized the importance of the resolution adopted by the European Parliament regarding the Armenian prisoners of war and its implementation, he also referred to the recent exchange of prisoners, but pointed out that there is still a lot to be done. Mr Kovatchev also stressed that this humanitarian problem should always be kept high on the agenda and efforts should be made to conclude a peace agreement between the parties.

Ambassador Balayan mentioned the importance of the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament, but emphasized the need to develop mechanisms for the implementation of these resolutions. He stressed that the Armenians illegally held in the prisons of Baku are actually hostages. Mr Balayan also pointed out the need to implement the agreements reached through the mediation of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, in this context underlining the consistency, which is of utmost importance. He stressed that the implementation of those agreements by the Aliyev regime can only take place if the EU demonstrates consistency.

Yeghishe Kirakosyan made a comprehensive presentation about the activities carried out on this issue in international courts. He particularly noted that the international toolbox tailored specifically for the repatriation of prisoners of war is quite limited, and Azerbaijan greatly benefits from it. The Azerbaijani side labels the captives as terrorists and subjects them to sham trials with fabricated verdicts. In his speech, Mr Kirakosyan presented specific cases and the legal nature of those cases.

Siranush Sahakyan presented more in detail the cases under the European Court of Human Rights and gave examples of many others. She also emphasized the impermissibility of subjecting the prisoners of war to additional torture and suffering. Ms Sahakyan mentioned that even the repatriated POWs are still suffering psychologically.

Simon Papuashvili noted that as a result of the investigation carried out by his organization, it became clear that the

Armenian POWs held in Azerbaijan are not provided with the necessary medical and legal aid, in other words, the Armenian prisoners of war do not have the opportunity to have a human rights defender of their choice. He added that the POWs are subjected to unspeakable tortures and sufferings, most of the deaths occur because of this inhumane treatment. He also referred to the cases of enforced disappearances.

Arif Yunus referred to the mindset of the leadership of Azerbaijan and the authoritarian regime, as a result of which there is no freedom of speech in the country, and every such case is subject to severe punishment. Moreover, he also presented the goals of the Aliyev regime, noting his obsession of punishing everyone and presenting himself as invincible.

Panelist Ms Hilda Tchoboian noted that it is unacceptable to politicize such a humanitarian issue, but Azerbaijan clearly uses people to achieve its political goals. She referred to specific cases and informed the audience about the campaign launched by her organization for the repatriation of prisoners of war, by urging to join the initiative.

During the Q&A session, the relative of the missing Armenian soldier took the floor, who presented the importance of the issue.

At the end of the conference, Andrey Kovatchev thanked everyone for their participation, and Ambassador Balayan, in his turn, thanked the Standing Rapporteur on Armenia for fulfilling his mission in the best possible way.

Armenian Banks to Block Russian Cards after U.S. Sanctions

Virtually all Armenian banks have decided to stop processing payments via Russian Mir cards following sanctions imposed by the United States on Russia's National Card Payment System (NSPK) last month.

The cards issued by the NSPK became an alternative for Russian travelers in March 2022 when Visa and MasterCard shut off their Russian networks over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The Mir system has been widely used by Russian tourists and expats in Armenia since then.

The NSPK announced on Tuesday that it was officially notified that 17 of Armenia's 18 commercial banks will stop servicing Mir cards through the domestic

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payments system ArCa from March 30. It said that only the local subsidiary of Russia's VTB bank will continue to carry out transactions with them from its 53 branches and over 190 ATM machines across the South Caucasus country as well as online banking platforms.

The Central Bank of Armenia insisted that the other banks made the decisions to ditch Mir cards independently. The Union of Armenian Banks attributed the decisions to "the risk of secondary sanctions."

"These risks arose when the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced sanctions against the Mir payment system," the union told the Russian Sputnik news agency.

The OFAC said in February that Russia has been using the system to evade the sweeping Western sanctions.

Armenian entrepreneurs have cashed in on the sanctions, re-exporting second-hand cars, consumer electronics and other goods manufactured in Western countries and their allies to Russia. This explains why Armenia's exports to Russia tripled in 2022 and doubled in January-August 2023.

A resulting dramatic increase in cash flows from Russia has also greatly benefited Armenian banks. They tripled their combined profits to a record 253 billion drams (\$626 million) in 2022. The figure fell slightly in 2023.





At UN Human Rights Council, Armenian envoy slams Azerbaijan's "final cleaning" ceremony in Stepanakert

Two days ago, Azerbaijan organized a lighting of a huge ceremonial fire in the city of Stepanakert in Nagorno-Karabakh and officially called it a "final cleaning," Andranik Hovhannisyan, Armenia's Permanent Representative said at the Human Rights Council.

"A "final cleaning" in a region where according to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe almost the entire Armenian population left their ancestral homes "out of a genuine threat of physical extinction, a long-standing policy of hatred towards Armenians, and a lack of trust in their future treatment," he stated.



"A "final cleaning" in a region, where according to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights for Armenians "leaving home was the only reasonable option available" out of the "deep-rooted fear for their lives" and "future stemming from previous unresolved atrocities and

ongoing intimidator acts"," he added.

"A "final cleaning" in a region, where according to the joint statement supported by forty states here at the HRC the "massive displacement of Armenians from their homes stemmed from Azerbaijan's military operation and nine-month long blockage of the Lachin corridor leading to dire humanitarian conditions"," the envoy said.

"The human rights are under serious threat when such slogans as "final cleaning" are used and remain unchallenged," he concluded.

ARARAT Brandy as the General Partner of Charles Aznavour 100th Anniversary Celebration Events



On March 21, The Residence of the President of the Republic of Armenia hosted a ceremony, marking the opening of



celebrations dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Charles Aznavour. The following

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event was implemented as a result of the collaboration with the "Aznavour" Foundation, ARARAT Brandy taking on the role of the main partner for upcoming events commemorating Aznavour's centennial.

The series of celebration events marking the 100th anniversary of Aznavur will unfold both in the capital and across the regions. The primary aim is to preserve the cultural heritage of the Maestro, to promote his charity activities, and to spread the human values, he invariably followed throughout his entire life.

Aznavour's legacy, comprising a vast area of work and humanitarian activities, was commemorated during the event. A tribute was paid to Aznavour, celebrating, and reevaluating his remarkable journey as an artist, writer, humanist, and diplomat. An exclusive exhibition was also presented to the guests, showcasing Aznavour's stage costume.

Yerevan Brandy Company has long revered the Maestro's mastery. In 2018, it introduced the ARARAT Charles Aznavour Signature Blend, a special brandy that embodied Charles Aznavour's eternal legacy. This blend, composed of rare spirits, mirrors the pinnacle moments of Aznavour's career.

Throughout the event, guests were offered with ARARAT Armenian brandy and



cocktails based on it. They also enjoyed rich facets of Charles Aznavour Signature Blend, which symbolizes the collaborative effort between the legendary artist and



ARARAT Armenian brandy.





Armenia worth giving a go in 2024 – Euronews



Culturally-rich Armenia, one of the world's safest countries, is worth giving a go in 2024, according to *Euronews*.

Author Ally Wybrew reminds that Armenia has ranked within the top 10 safest destinations in the world, according to Numbeo's safety index for 2024. It came eighth out of 146 nations, rated according to survey responses addressing topics

including violent crime, property crime and perceived safety. Armenia's historic capital, Yerevan, also performed well, landing 19th out of 333 cities.

"It's an attractive proposition for holidaymakers, but there are reasons other than peace of mind to visit Armenia. Ancient religious sites, delicious cuisine and a vibrant culture are abundant in Armenia

and experiencing them all is easy, thanks to Armenia's petite size (the landlocked country is less than 30,000 km2)," she writes.

Susanna Hakobyan, Deputy Head of the Tourism Committee for Armenia, recommends heading into Armenia's rural regions to experience the best of the country. "It's better to get out of the capital city because in the regional areas we have this authentic feel," she explains. "We have authentic food and **culture** and exploring these things will help visitors to dive deep into the real Armenian tradition, history and way of life."

Ally Wybrew presents a few other reasons to give Armenia a go in 2024. In particular, she point out the local cuisine, the country's ski slopes, different Armenian festivals, its UNESCO Heritage Sites and more.

Finland is world's hippest country, Armenia ranked 82nd

Finland is once again the world's happiest country. That's according to the annual report that marks the United Nations International Day of Happiness on March 20.

Denmark is the world's second happiest country, followed by Iceland, Sweden and Israel. Armenia is ranked 82nd. Armenia's neighbor Georgia is 91st, Azerbaijan and Turkey are ranked 101st and 98th respectively.



The report draws on global survey data from people in more than 140 countries. Countries are ranked on happiness based on their average life evaluations over the three preceding years, in this case 2021 to 2023. The report is a partnership of Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and an editorial board.

Paris Mayor says will not attend COP29 in Baku

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo will not attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku to denounce the Azerbaijani regime guilty of the ethnic cleansing of Armenians of Artsakh in September 2023.

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She made the statement at the annual dinner of the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organizations in France (CCAF) on Wednesday, Jean-Christophe Buisson, Deputy Director of Le Figaro Magazine said on X.

"And yet you know my ecological commitment," Hidalgo stated.

The CCAF annual dinner was attended by a number of politicians and public figures. Prime Minister Gabriel Attal represented the President at the event.





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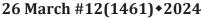
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