

## Azerbaijani delegation suspended from PACE



The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has effectively suspended Azerbaijan's membership in the Strasbourg-based legislative body, citing, among other things, last September's Azerbaijani military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The PACE refused to ratify the credentials of its Azerbaijani members in a resolution adopted on January 24. It said Baku has failed to fulfill "major commitments" to the Council of Europe and still has a poor human rights record.

The PACE also pointed to its two earlier resolutions that condemned the Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin corridor and the September 19-20 military offensive that restored Azerbaijani control

over Karabakh and forced the region's population to flee to Armenia. It said "allegations of ethnic cleansing cannot be unaddressed by the Assembly."

In anticipation of that decision, Azerbaijan said earlier on Wednesday that it will "cease its engagement with and presence at the PACE until further notice." The Azerbaijani parliamentary delegation in Strasbourg accused the PACE of exhibiting "Azerbaijanophobia and Islamophobia" and creating an "unbearable atmosphere" in the organization.

The PACE decision came two days after the European Union expressed serious concern at what its foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, described as territorial claims to Armenia made by Azerbaijani

President Ilham Aliyev. Borrell warned that any violation of Armenia's territorial integrity would have "severe consequences for our relations with Azerbaijan." The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry rejected the warning, accusing the chief EU diplomat of "blatant misinterpretation of facts."

Aliyev on January 10 rejected a proposal by Armenia to use Soviet-era maps drawn in the 1970s to delineate the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, claiming that Azerbaijani territories had been handed to Armenia by the Soviet authorities. Yerevan said this and other comments made by Aliyev undermined prospects for a peace treaty between the two South Caucasus nations

Armenia has undertaken no obligations regarding the creation of any corridor, claims FM

Any violation of Armenian territory will have serious consequences for EU relations with Baku – Borrell

Foreign Minister advocates seeking new allies for the solutions of security issues

France's newly appointed FM vows continued support to Armenia

p. 2

p. 4

p.3

p. 5

## Centuries-old Armenian-Indian friendship entering practical stage of new achievements: Pashinyan congratulates Modi on Republic Day

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sent a congratulatory message to the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Narendra Modi, on the occasion of the Republic Day. The message reads as follows,

“I send warm congratulations to you and the friendly people of India on the occasion of the Republic Day of India.

Republic Day is a significant occasion for the nations and states that have fought for independence to reaffirm the commitment of the people and the state to the principles of justice, sovereignty, equality and fraternity established by the Constitution.

The Constitution of the Republic of



India not only embodies the historical and political culture of India, but is also the best example of harmoniously combining the provisions of the nation's political and philosophical thought in the supreme law.

It is no coincidence that the ideas of the Constitution and constitutionalism played a major role in the core of the centuries-old Armenian-Indian friendship, taking into account the drafting of the first Constitution of the Armenian people in India. Today we can already proudly record that our friendly ties formed throughout centuries and the common past of our peoples are entering the practical stage of new achievements in bilateral and multilateral

relations.

Congratulating you again on the occasion of the Republic Day, I wish you and the friendly people of India peace and prosperity.”

## Armenian Ambassador meets with Deputy Foreign Minister of Greece

Armenian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Greece Tigran Mkrtchyan on January 25 met Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Economic Diplomacy Kostas Fragoiannis.

The Armenian Ambassador presented the latest regional developments, the current state of the Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiation process. The Ambassador also addressed the issue of unblocking regional communications based on the principle of reciprocity and equal jurisdiction, the Armenian Embassy in Greece said on social media.



According to the source, the interlocutors discussed the possibility of hosting

the session of the intergovernmental commission on economic, industrial and scientific-technical cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Greece in Yerevan in the near future.

Both sides emphasized the importance of giving a new impetus to Armenian-Greek economic relations as an important basis of traditional friendly bilateral relations. During the meeting, there was also a focus

on intensifying relations among business circles.

## Armenia has undertaken no obligations regarding the creation of any corridor, claims FM

During the press conference on January 23, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan referred to the expediency of canceling the tripartite statement of November 9, 2020.

“Armenia has always fulfilled its obligations, unlike Azerbaijan and Russia, and

the evidence of non-fulfillment is more than clear and tangible, first of all, regarding Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin corridor,” Mirzoyan said.

Ararat Mirzoyan emphasized that Armenia has not undertaken any obligations regarding “the corridor.”

The Minister of Foreign Affairs noted that the Republic of Armenia is not only ready, but also interested in achieving the unblocking of the transport and economic infrastructure of the region.

## Foreign Minister advocates seeking new allies for the solutions of security issues



Armenia should try to find new allies to address its security issues, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said on January 23 during the press conference, emphasizing that every sane and rational state should always make efforts to find new allies and supporters.

“It has become particularly evident and imperative for us after the 2020 war and the subsequent events. We came up against a situation where our allied mechanisms did not meet our expectations,”

said the FM.

“Amid the created the situation it is natural for Armenia to find new allies in the direction of solving its security concerns,” Mirzoyan said, denying the information about the signing of documents related to other security systems.

In that context, the FM also recalled the deployment of the EU observation mission in Armenia, which has increased the security level at the border, as well as the statements of the partners regarding the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia and the inviolability of the borders.

“I think that there’s a risk of escalation even at this moment,” FM Mirzoyan said at a press briefing when asked whether the likelihood of tensions would grow during the U.S. presidential elections and the EP

elections, when international partners will be focused on domestic agenda. “At least the rhetoric we’ve witnessed in the Azerbaijani president’s interview doesn’t allow us to be off guard, not even for a second.”

FM Mirzoyan said that the Azeri President Ilham Aliyev, in his interview, made explicit territorial claims against the sovereign territory of Armenia.

“We saw them call various Armenian cities and provinces with distorted names, and they called nearly the entire territory of the Republic of Armenia as Western Azerbaijan. There’s always likelihood of escalation. Would this likelihood grow during ongoing elections in various countries? I think it would be rational not to think that way,” he said.

## FM Mirzoyan urges Russian colleagues to refrain from attributing baseless accusations to Armenia

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan, has urged his Russian colleagues to accurately narrate the chronological sequence and refrain from attributing accusations to the Armenian side for which Armenia is not guilty.

Mirzoyan said on Tuesday, referring to the accusation from Russia that the Nagorno Karabakh issue, including the status issue, was closed when Nikol Pashinyan signed a statement in Prague in accordance with the Alma-Ata Declaration. The Armenian Foreign Minister has accurately presented the sequence of events.

“In August 2022, Russia presented proposals that included the following provision: the status of Nagorno-Karabakh is postponed indefinitely. By the end of August, Armenia agreed to these proposals, but Azerbaijan expressed its



disagreement. Subsequently, in September 2022, Azerbaijan initiated an attack on the sovereign territory of Armenia.

Then Armenia turned to Russia and the Russian side stated that the boundaries are not clear enough, consequently, Russia faces difficulties in assessing the extent to which the sovereign territory of Armenia has been violated.

Afterward, in October 2022, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a quadrilateral

statement in Prague, in which they agreed that the delimitation of borders should occur based on the Alma-Ata Declaration. The declaration specifies the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, coinciding with the administrative border between the two former Soviet republics.

I want to urge my Russian colleagues to narrate the cause-and-effect relationships and chronological sequence correctly and at least not to attribute to the Armenian side accusations in which the Armenian side has no guilt,” said the Foreign Minister.

“On the contrary, there were expected and supposed actions by others, and in the absence of that action, Armenia took concrete steps, including in the form of the Prague statement,” the FM said.

## Armenia to have military attachés in Czechia and Kyrgyzstan

Armenia plans to have military attachés in Czechia and Kyrgyzstan.

The decisions on approving the new posts are included in the agenda of the

January 25 Cabinet meeting.

The move is expected to strengthen bilateral partnership level.

The military attaché of the Armenian

Embassy in Germany will cover Czechia, while the military attaché of the Armenian Embassy in Kazakhstan will cover Kyrgyzstan.

## Any violation of Armenian territory will have serious consequences for EU relations with Baku – Borrell

The European Union is concerned about the claims of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the territory of Armenia, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell stated at a press conference following the EU Council meeting in Brussels.

“Aliyev’s territorial claims are of serious concern. Any violation of Armenian territory and sovereignty is unacceptable and will have serious consequences for our relations with Azerbaijan,” Borrell said.

According to the High Representative, the Council expressed solidarity with Paris following the expulsion of French



diplomats by Baku.

“Azerbaijan needs to return to

sustentive peace talks with Armenia, he

said.

## Armenia, Europol to enhance partnership

Armenia seeks to enhance cooperation with Europol by sending a liaison officer to the agency and strengthening information exchange.

On September 28, Armenian Minister of Internal Affairs Vahe Ghazaryan and Europol Executive Director Catherine De Bolle signed an agreement on establishing cooperation, which is aimed at enhancing partnership in fighting transnational crime.



the signing of two related agreements with Europol seeking to create a secure communications line between the sides and deepen partnership.

The partnership agreement will become the basis for stationing an Armenian liaison officer in Europol, while the MoU will serve as the legal basis for creating a secure line for information exchange with Europol.

The January 25 Cabinet meeting agenda includes an item on approving

## Azerbaijan extends Ruben Vardanyan’s jail term



An Azeri court has extended the pre-trial detention of Ruben Vardanyan, the former State Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh, for another four months.

Aurora Humanitarian Initiative co-founder and former State Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh Ruben Vardanyan was arrested by Azerbaijani authorities

on September 27, 2023 while en route to Armenia together with tens of thousands of others amid the mass exodus of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh. He has been jailed in Azerbaijan since then on fabricated charges of terrorism financing and border trespassing.

## France's newly appointed FM vows continued support to Armenia

We will continue to support Armenia in the South Caucasus, Stéphane Sejourne, France's newly appointed Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs said in his address to diplomats accredited in France

"Armenia and Azerbaijan must finally reach peace. A peace that will be fair and long-lasting, based on international law and respect for the territorial integrity of both countries. The peoples of this region

must be able to live in dignity, and their history, memory and culture must be respected," the Minister stated

## At PACE, Cyprus President speaks of mass exodus of Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh, calls for humanitarian relief measures

Cyprus supports the normalization and the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan within the framework of EU mediation, said Nikos Christodoulides, President of Cyprus, in his address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

He said it "will undoubtedly contribute to the long-term stability and prosperity of the wider region."

"Any incentives to facilitate and encourage such development should be balanced, and carefully planned and implemented,"



Nikos Christodoulides noted.

Referring to Nagorno Karabakh, he said "we have become witnesses to yet another humanitarian crisis, affecting tens of

thousands of people."

"This acute humanitarian crisis has turned into a mass exodus of the Armenian population from the region. We need to take all necessary measures to provide immediate humanitarian relief and also address the long-term situation of the ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, the increased and immediate needs of Armenia, stemming from the events of last September, should be properly and adequately addressed," the President of Cyprus said.

## Theodoros Rousopoulos elected PACE President

Theodoros Rousopoulos (Greece, EPP/DC) has been elected President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Taking over from Tiny Kox (Netherlands, UEL), he is PACE's 35th President since 1949 and the first Greek national to hold this office. The President serves for a one-year term of office, which may be renewed once.

"Our Council is confronted every day with the lack of concern for human rights, with oppression caused by the lack of democratic ideals even in countries that democratically elect their leaders," Mr Rousopoulos said in his opening remarks. "We are here to remind them of what they have signed up to in ratifying the European Convention of Human Rights and all the many other commitments they have designed and created together," he added.

Among the challenges highlighted by European leaders at the Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavik last May, "there are some that are particularly close to my heart," he said. The first, he underlined, "concerns the problems and dangers that

may arise for democracy from any indiscriminate expansion of Artificial Intelligence. AI is to be welcomed and it must remain a tool to assist human capabilities and not a substitute for human will and autonomy."

The second challenge, he stated, is "the urgent need to agree upon how best to protect our fragile environment. My own country is witnessing the ravages of climate change in real time, and we must act." The third one, Mr Rousopoulos pointed out, relates to "social, professional, economic and other gender inequalities which have not been eliminated to the extent we would like. We must continue this struggle until the equality we all desire is achieved."

He also underlined his will to work towards "even greater visibility" for the Council of Europe among its member states and the rest of the world. "Not visibility for its own sake, but so that what we do here is taken up and multiplied by governments, parliaments, civil society, and citizens."

Referring to his will to work "in

harmony" with the different Council of Europe statutory bodies, the leaders of the political groups and "every single Assembly member", he promised "to continue on the path of synergy on which the previous PACE President, Tiny Kox, has worked so hard and which certainly has borne its fruits".

"As in any parliament, battles are fought within this Assembly", the newly-elected President said. "But our weapons are not bullets; they are merely the words that combine to create arguments. Sometimes I know that words hurt just as much and can be used to break our opponent's spirit. Let us remember that words too are often the best – sometimes the only – way to heal wounds", Mr Rousopoulos concluded.



## Armenian car re-exports hit new record in 2023

Armenia's re-export of mostly second-hand cars more than doubled last year as local traders continued to take advantage of Western sanctions imposed on Russia over its war in Ukraine.

Armenian government data shows the total value of those exports rising to almost \$533 million in January-November 2023 from \$217 million in the same period a year earlier.

This growth was particularly rapid in the first half of the year when used cars became the country's number one export item. It appears to have somewhat slowed in the following months after the Russian government imposed higher duties on imports of such vehicles.

The sanctions include serious restrictions on trade with Russia. Also, Western automakers pulled out of the Russian market following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, pushing up the prices of new cars and forcing many Russians to switch to cheaper used models.

Car traders from other nations, including Armenia, rushed to capitalize on the market opportunity.

According to Armenia's State Revenue Committee (SRC), the number of cars imported to the South Caucasus country jumped nearly six-fold to almost 45,300 in 2022. The SRC has been struggling to cope with long lines of cars formed outside its main customs terminal processing imported vehicles.

They include not only used cars but also brand new ones. The SRC reported sharp rises in taxes collected from local dealers of carmakers such as Mercedes-Benz and Toyota in the first-half of 2023. Both Mercedes-Benz and Toyota stopped directly supplying their cars to Russia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Armenia has also been re-exporting consumer electronics and other Western-manufactured goods to Russia. This is the main reason why its exports to Russia tripled in 2022.

The re-exports prompted concern from EU and especially U.S. officials about a year ago. They pressed the Armenian authorities to comply with the Western sanctions. The authorities introduced in May mandatory government licenses for shipments of microchips, transformers, video cameras, antennas and other electronic equipment to Russia.

According to the Armenian government's Statistical Committee, exports to Russia rose by 50 percent to \$3.2 billion in January-November 2023.

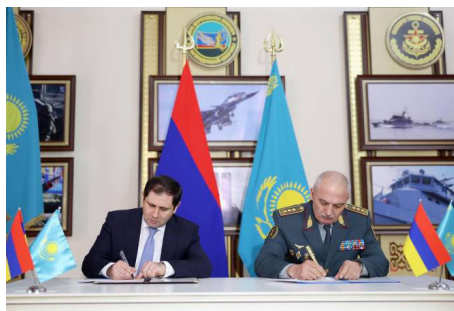
Armenia's overall exports reached a new record high of almost \$7 billion. This includes \$2.1 billion worth of what the Statistical Committee describes as precious stones and metals and jewelry items. Rough diamonds imported from Russia and re-exported to other countries, notably the United Arab Emirates, are believed to account for a large part of that figure.

## Armenia, Kazakhstan Ministries of Defense sign cooperation plan for 2024

As part of the official visit to Kazakhstan, a welcoming ceremony of Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan was held on January 23 at the Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Suren Papikyan said on social media.

It is noted that after the ceremony, the meeting with the Minister of Defense of Kazakhstan, Ruslan

Zhaksylykov commenced with an expanded composition. Discussions during



the meeting centered on security and various mutual interests concerning Armenian-Kazakh defense cooperation.

At the end of the meeting, the defense cooperation plan for 2024 was signed between the Ministries of Defense of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Kazakhstan, which includes a range of activities both in Armenia and Kazakhstan.

## Armenia strongly condemns exploitation of food security for political goals, economy minister says at GFFA

Armenia strongly condemns exploitation of food security for political purposes, Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan said at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) in Berlin, where he participated with his deputy Arman Khojayan.

"We are deeply concerned about the growing food security crisis in Europe and the Middle East and we strongly condemn the exploitation of food security as

a method of achieving political goals. I believe that only together we can create a better future, by initiating changes that would accelerate economic growth and have deep impact on social welfare both nationally and globally," Kerobyan said, according to a press release issued by the Economy Ministry.

Kerobyan also held meetings with agriculture ministers of Italy, Brazil and

Botswana.



## World Bank releases summary of Armenia's economic development in November 2023

Growth in economic activity accelerated to 11.2 percent (yoy, in real terms) in November 2023, compared to 6.2 percent (yoy) in October 2023 (Figure 1).

The data is presented in the World Bank's monthly summary of Armenia's economic development.

Growth in industry increased from 0.6 percent in October to 24 percent in November, driven by 33 percent real growth in manufacturing output. This in turn was driven mostly by 13.7 times higher jewelry production (yoy) in November, which, by value, exceeded food production, traditionally the largest manufacturing group. High manufacturing growth in November was partly offset by challenges in mining sector production, affected by the temporary closure of the Sotk mine located on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Trade growth also rose, from 26 percent (yoy) in October to 32 percent (yoy) in November, fueled by cash transfers provided by the Government to displaced people from Nagorno Karabakh (NK). Construction growth slowed but remained in double digits at 11.4 percent (yoy) in November. At 2.4 percent (yoy), services (excluding trade) had the least growth; however, this was due to a high base growth of 31 percent in November. Economic activity index growth remained at 9.4 percent (yoy) over January-November 2023 and continued to exceed expectations.

Unemployment rose slightly in Q3 2023 (yoy) and labor force participation also increased. Unemployment was at 12 percent in Q3 2023, up from 11.6 percent in Q3 2022, due to a 2 percent increase in the labor force (net employed and unemployed). Labor force participation increased to 61.7 percent in Q3 2023 from 60.9 percent in Q3 2022.

Net money transfers in November 2023 were down 82 percent from November 2022 and 68 percent compared to October 2023. Money transfer inflows



contracted 21 percent (yoy) and outflows increased 26 percent (yoy). The contraction in inflows was mainly due to 29 percent fewer inflows from Russia (Figure 2). The main destinations for increased outflows were Monaco and the USA.

Prices registered 0.6 percent deflation in December 2023 (yoy). This brought average inflation down to 2 percent in 2023, a sharp fall from 8.6 percent in 2022. In response, in its December 12, 2023, meeting, the CBA Board cut the policy rate 25 basis points, to 9.25 percent. A 5 percent (yoy) fall in food prices was the main factor in deflation in December. However, prices of other commodity groups rose, with the highest increase recorded for alcohol and cigarettes, up

8.4 percent (yoy), reflecting increased excise tax on these products (Figure 3).

Export growth was exceptionally high, driven by a significant increase in gold and jewelry exports. Export of goods grew 86 percent (yoy) in November 2023, driven by a 7-fold increase in exports of precious and semi-precious stones. This increased the share of this group in total exports, up from 18 percent in November 2022 to 66 percent in November 2023. Within the group, exports of unwrought or semi-manufactured gold grew 12-fold (yoy), and jewelry and parts 17-fold (yoy). Textiles and footwear also grew 36 percent and 29 percent, respectively, while exports of other commodity groups mostly contracted. Imports of goods grew 25 percent (yoy), also driven by semi-manufactured gold imports. Cumulatively over

January-November 2023, exports and imports grew 45 percent and 41 percent, respectively.

The AMD continued to depreciate gradually against the USD. As of January 9, 2024, the AMD/USD exchange rate stood at AMD 405.6, or 0.6 percent weaker compared to December 2023, and 2.7 percent weaker year-on-year (Figure 4). At year-end 2023, international reserves stood at USD 3.6 billion, equal to 3 months of import cover and USD 510 million lower compared to year-end 2022 reserves (Figure 5). This is partly due to the early buy-back of USD 188 million out of a USD 500 million Eurobond due March 2025, as well as to some delays in project-linked loans.

The budget recorded an AMD 44 billion deficit in November 2023. This brought the cumulative budget deficit through November to AMD 63 billion, or 0.7 percent of annual projected GDP. Tax revenue growth was modest at 5 percent (yoy) in November, driven by growth in income and excise taxes (up 15 percent and 16 percent, respectively), while VAT and profit tax collection declined 5.5 percent and 22 percent, respectively. Expenditure contracted 11 percent, driven by flat current expenditure and 29 percent lower capital expenditure, related to reduced spending on defense. However, social transfers and subsidies grew 4 percent (yoy) and 51 percent (yoy), respectively, reflecting cash transfers and other assistance to displaced NK people.

The financial system continued to grow in November 2023 and financial stability indicators remained sound. Loans and deposits grew 2.3 percent and 1.5 percent (mom), respectively. The capital adequacy ratio remained unchanged at 20.1 percent, and the ratio of non-performing loans to total loans remained below 3 percent. The return on assets, an indicator of the banking system's profitability, stood at 3.3 percent.

## We should combat culture of impunity: Vladimir Vardanyan gives a speech at PACE Session



It is quite alarming that in some countries of the Council of Europe, torture has started to be used in a widespread or systematic manner for the oppression of certain persecuted groups, which amounts to crimes against humanity, the member of the Armenian National Assembly delegation to PACE Vladimir Vardanyan gave a speech at the Assembly Session.

First of all, the deputy congratulated Mr. Constantinos EFSTATHIOU for the brilliant report reflecting all the topical issues of combating torture and addressing the main strategic challenges of the organization in that respect.

“Absolute, imperative, unacceptable, prohibited, and immoral: these are the adjectives which may be used to describe torture as a phenomenon prohibited under general international law for a long time.

But torture is not just prohibited. It is absolutely prohibited under general international law, having the status of jus cogens prohibition with no derogation possible and no justification acceptable.

Frankly speaking, for the first time I read the draft resolution and faced some factual events mentioned there. I thought that I was mistaken, and I was not reading a contemporary document but I rather faced something which came to me from medieval times.

How is it possible, in the digital era, that there are such kinds of manifestation of torture in the member countries of our organization.

Ladies and gentlemen, the absolute prohibition of torture is not just a legal imperative, it is a moral obligation that defines our civilization, our wellness, our organization. And hence, a zero tolerance approach towards torture should be the only option for our Assembly,” Vardanyan said.

He noted that despite the existence of innumerable international documents on the absolute prohibition of torture at a universal and European level, torture persists in various corners of the globe, reminding them of the need for continued vigilance and advocacy.

“We do not naively believe that torture would be demolished as a social phenomenon entirely. The problem is not in the phenomenon of torture, but rather in a gap existing between international obligation taken and their implementation in practice. We should combat the culture of impunity, which is one of the main challenges.

It is quite alarming that in some countries of the Council of Europe, torture has started to be used in a widespread or systematic manner for the oppression of certain persecuted groups, which amounts to crimes against humanity.”

Vardanyan underscored that the Committee on the Prevention of Torture (CPT) is one of the main international instruments combating torture within the Council of Europe, and its activity should be supported in the widest possible manner, not only by incorporation of the standards in the national legislation, but also providing their full implementation on national level.

“The automatic publication of all the CPT reports, past and present, would be a manifestation of goodwill of all the countries concerned and would contribute to the elimination of culture of impunity and torture.

Last but not least, we fully agree with the rapporteur that, in the digital era, the usage of information technologies, video recording, and other technologies would be served as a very efficient measure to prevent torture and ill treatment and for giving up the culture of impunity.

Let’s make the digital era synonymous of an era without torture,” concluded Vladimir Vardanyan.



## Draft Concept of the New Insecurity Assessment System discussed

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan chaired a consultation, during which the draft concept of the new Insecurity Assessment System was discussed. It was developed by the interdepartmental commission established in 2021 in accordance with the instructions of the Prime Minister, the PM's Office said in a statement.

Before the draft concept would be presented, Nikol

Pashinyan referred to the data presented at the Cabinet meeting regarding the average monthly salary and noted. "The average monthly salary in December 2023 was AMD 356,180, which is AMD 133,399 or 59.9 percent more compared to December 2018, a little lower than I expected. Compared to December 2022, it is more by 25,273 AMD or 7.6 percent."

According to the source, presenting the concept of the new Insecurity Assessment System, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Anna Zhamakochyan first presented the problems in the current system of insecurity assessment related to the formula, addressability and effectiveness of the system.

Next, the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs presented details about the new system's implementation policy, goals, new formula, and hybrid verification method based on the system. According to Anna Zhamakochyan, the flaw in the formula of the current system is that based on the indirect assessment of vulnerability, assumed insecurity is measured and the calculation of income plays a secondary role.



"The most important thing we need to change is changing the formula in the new system, that is, not only the procedures, not only the issue of the target, but the logic of the formula itself. Taking this into account, the hybrid means-testing method was chosen as the basis of the new formula. At the moment, the most important thing is to put the income measurement in the logic of the formula, so that the real picture of our insecurity and the estimated insecurity is visible and understandable, and the policy of the Government is measurable," said the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs. According to Anna Zhamakochyan, through the new method, the right to benefit will be determined based on the family income.

According to Anna Zhamakochyan, the target of the new system is the extremely poor family with monthly income below the Minimum Expenditure Basket. "With this model, it is proposed to target extremely poor groups and achieve the goal that the Government has set before itself, that is, to have 0 percent extreme poverty," said the deputy minister.

According to him, through the new

system, necessary efforts will also be made for those registered in the insecurity system to obtain employment and improve living conditions through capacity development. According to Anna Zhamakochyan, integrated case management will be implemented, that is, social work will be conducted with families based on complex needs.

In terms of encouraging people to work, the Prime Minister emphasized that there are various programs in the labor market and added. "We can plan further incentives to increase interest among both the employer and the employee. What's the point of what I'm saying? A person has been in the benefit system for 20 years, and for 20 years the state spends huge resources for him, but his life does not improve. This is the problem. We have to approach this program in the logic of these 20 years, because we can accompany him with subsidies, income tax, and other programs before the work we mention becomes a mentality for him."

It is noted that an exchange of ideas on the draft concept took place, observations were presented about the process of transition from the old system to the new system, the steps for launching the new system, the features of the hybrid method, and the expected results.

Summarizing, the Prime Minister noted that the results of the discussion show that the package has been developed and the implementation of the new system can be started.

## Assemblymember Holden welcomes Armenian delegation to California



Assemblymember Chris Holden on January 22 welcomed a delegation of Armenian leaders from California and the province of Syunik, Armenia to mark the Assembly Concurrent Resolution 105 of 2022 and Assembly Joint Resolution 1 of 2023, Asbarez reports.

“The establishment of a sister state relationship between California and Syunik, Armenia will foster educational, cultural and economic opportunities for both California and the Syunik province, a critical area for Armenia’s sovereignty as a democratic nation. We look forward to the establishment of a committee, which will accelerate this important relationship between the two states. We also salute Assemblymember Holden for his continuous

and unwavering support for significant issues concerning the Armenian American community in California,” said Aida Dimejian, Armenian National Committee of America National Board Member.

ACR 105, chaptered on February 22, 2022 was a result of a two-year effort to establish a sister state relationship between California and the Province of Syunik – the southernmost province in Armenia. Syunik is home to the Armenian Stonehenge, Karahounj, which dates back to the Bronze Age, the Ughtasar Mountain petroglyphs that are 7,000 years old, as well as the 9th Century Tatev Monastery that served as a center of scholastic and spiritual activity. The most populated town in the province is its capital, Kapan with 43,000 residents. The resolution declares California’s unity with Syunik to encourage and facilitate mutually beneficial educational, economic, and cultural exchanges.

“We salute Assemblymember Holden’s leadership and commitment to the Armenian American community, and his steadfast support of the Republic of Armenia’s Syunik Province. We look forward to bold and fruitful collaborations between California and Syunik, Armenia,” said Dr. Alice

Chalian Manoukian, Chair of Armenian National Committee of America, Crescenta Valley Chapter.

Last year, Holden also authored Assembly Joint Resolution 1, which passed the Legislature with unanimous support and was chaptered on July 17, 2023. The resolution called on President Biden and the State Department for the enforcement of Section 907 restrictions on military assistance to Azerbaijan, the imposition of sanctions on Azerbaijani officials complicit in the enforcement of the blockade and commissioning of war crimes. AJR 1 urged the Administration to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Armenians of Artsakh.

“Both resolutions reaffirm California’s solidarity with Armenia and our 1-million-strong community of California-Armenians,” said Assemblymember Chris Holden. “There is power in our solidarity and there is even more when we acknowledge the wrongs committed and urge for justice. We set precedent for the future with our action or inaction and today, we are creating long-lasting ties to thread forward a better tomorrow.”

## Australian Federal Liberal Party adopt National Armenian Genocide Policy

The organizational wing of the Liberal Party of Australia has officially adopted a party policy that, among other things, condemns the genocide of the Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks and calls for the Commonwealth Government to officially recognize the genocides, reported the [Armenian National Committee of Australia](#).

The motion was spearheaded by the Young Liberal Movement of Australia President, Mr Dimitry Chugg-Palmer, who was present at the 2023 Federal Council, the organisational wing’s highest forum for debating Federal policies. Due to time constraints, the motion was referred to the Liberal Party’s Advisory Committee on Federal Policy in 2023, where an



overwhelming number of attendees voted in favour of the motion.

ANC-AU Executive Director Michael Kolokossian thanked the Federal Young Liberal President Dimitry Chugg-Palmer for his steadfast support and readiness to advance the interests of Armenian-Australians.

“This is a mammoth step for

recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Australia. Whilst the views of the Federal Council are not binding on the party’s parliamentary wing, it sends a clear and strong message to elected Liberal parliamentarians that the organization’s 80,000 members and over 2,000 branches believe the party should stand on the right side of history and recognize the Armenian Genocide.”

The Liberal Federal Council now join the state Parliaments of New South Wales (1997), South Australia (2009), Tasmania (2023), the Australian Greens, and several other state and territory Labor and Liberal Party branches in formally adopting a policy on the Armenian Genocide.

## European Parliament hosts conference on “Protecting Armenian Cultural and Religious Heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh”

The conference on “Protecting Armenian Cultural and Religious Heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh” was held on January 24 at the initiative of MEP Miriam Lexmann and the EPP Group.

Professor of international law Pierre D’Argent, Very Rev. Fr. Garegin Hambardzumyan, author of the book “The Armenian Cultural Heritage of Artsakh: Mechanisms for Protection in the International System for Preservation of Heritage” Armine Tigranyan, Ambassador of Armenia to Belgium/Head of Mission to the EU Tigran Balayan, Secretary General of Europa Nostra Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic were among the speakers.

Members of the European Parliament, members of the Europa Nostra organization, spiritual leaders, journalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations attended the conference.

In his speech, Ambassador Balayan spoke in detail about the ethnic cleansing carried out by Azerbaijan, the current situation of the forcibly displaced Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the vital importance of preserving religious and cultural heritage.

He underlined that as long as Azerbaijan does not bear severe consequences for its destructive and catastrophic actions, the Aliyev regime will continue to violate the international law, international legal order and binding rulings of the



International Court of Justice.

Ambassador Balayan presented the pictures of the church in his native village, which, according to satellite images, had been destroyed by the Azerbaijani armed forces. He added that they would continue this policy of deliberate destruction, since they were never held accountable.

Ambassador Balayan also drew the attention of the participants to the resolution “On the destruction of the cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh” adopted by the European Parliament, stressing the need to create mechanisms for its implementation.

Miriam Lexmann also stressed the disastrous consequences of impunity. She underlined that the double standards and the policy of sacrificing European values for political expedience are unacceptable.

Pierre D’Argent presented the legal aspects of the issue and unveiled the details of the discussions in the International Court of Justice and the counterclaims by the Azerbaijani side. He mentioned that

Azerbaijani policy is one of mirroring the claims of Armenia thus trying to divert the attention of the international community.

Fr. Garegin Hambardzumyan highlighted the importance of preservation of the religious heritage and displayed a number of cultural monuments that have either been destroyed, alienated, or are on the verge of destruction.

Armine Tigranyan gave a detailed presentation on endangered monuments and underlined the importance of preserving the intangible heritage of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, including traditions and community life.

The author’s books were distributed among the participants of the conference.

The Secretary General of Europa Nostra firmly condemned the ethnic cleansing committed by Azerbaijan against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and underlined that the organization she leads has repeatedly raised alarms about the ongoing violations, thus stressing the importance of the cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh for the European civilization. She also emphasized that “Armenian heritage is the European heritage”.

In his closing remarks the Member of the European Parliament François-Xavier Bellamy underscored the need to protect the right of return of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to their ancestral homeland.

## Armenian Ombudsperson participates in the Leadership Forum of European Network of National Human Rights Institutions

Armenian Human Rights Defender Anahit Manasyan participated in the Leadership Forum of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) in Belgium on January 23-24.

According to the Human Rights Defender’s Office, about 30 representatives of the ENNHRI member countries took



part in the event. Various issues related to human rights and the rule of law were included in the agenda of the discussions.

According to the source, European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reyniers gave a keynote speech at the Leadership Forum organized for the heads of national human rights institutions.

## Armenian activist physically assaulted in Jerusalem

On the 23rd of January 2024, following an attack by the hired thugs of Xana Capital on the members of the Armenian community of Jerusalem, one of the aggressors, with visibly clear intent, approached Hagop Djernazian, co-founder of Save The ArQ (movement for the defiance and preservation of the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem) and punched him in the face in front of the Israeli Police.

The local authorities immediately arrested the assailant and sent him to the "Moscobieh" prison pending a court hearing. The following day, the Israeli Police issued a 15 day restraining order against



the aggressor from the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as a 30 day restraining order from the Cows' Garden property located in the Armenian Quarter.

After emergency consultations with global lead counsel for the SavetheArQ

movement, Karnig Kerkonian of Kerkonian Dajani LLP, it was decided to direct the ArQ's criminal lawyer in Jerusalem, Assaf Golan, to prepare a court filing and legal package in the coming days aimed at ensuring the safety and security of the community from further attacks.

Since the 5th of November 2023, Danny Rothman and George Warwar, representatives of Xana Capital, have continued their intimidation tactics against the community via bulldozers, Israeli settlers, and thugs. This marks the 10th attack that the Armenian community has faced in defense of the Armenian Quarter.

## Armenia gearing up to host Mars analog simulation mission: Details discussed in Vienna

The teams of the Austrian Space Forum and the Armenian Space Forum were hosted at the Armenian Embassy in Austria/Slovakia.

Armenia gears up to host the AMADEE24 Mars analog simulation in March.

Armenia's Ambassador to Austria Armen Papikyan commended the fact that "Armenia will turn into Mars research center for one month in the spring."

Emphasizing the scientific and educational significance of the "AMADEE-24" simulation, the Ambassador expressed

gratitude to the Austrian Space Forum for choosing Armenia as the host country.

The Austrian Space Forum (OeWF) has chosen Armenia as the host country for its next Mars analog simulation AMADEE24 in March 2024.

The missions help test materials, analyze the defects in the system and seek solutions.

The crew for the mission has already been determined: two women and four men from Austria, Germany, Israel, Italy and Great Britain will participate in the



simulation. Anika Mehlis from Germany will be the first woman to lead the mission.

In April 2023 the delegation of the Austrian Space Forum visited the AMADEE24 site in Armenia.

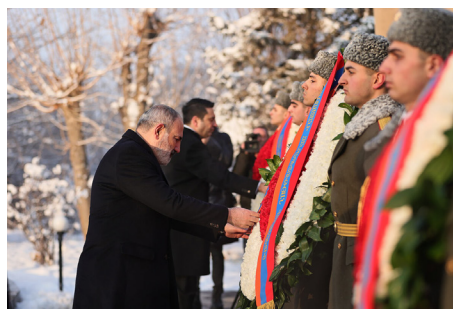
## Armenia marks Army Day

Armenia celebrates the 32nd anniversary of formation of the Armed Forces.

The Armed Forces were formally established on January 28, 1992, by the decree of President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan, several months after the country declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Army Day was first observed in 2001, the same year the President signed Army Day into law as an official holiday and a non-working day

On this day officials usually visit



Yerablur memorial to pay homage to the fallen soldiers who lost their life defending the homeland.

On the occasion of Army Day, Prime

Minister Nikol Pashinyan, President of the Republic Vahagn Khachatryan, Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan, other top officials visited the Yerablur military pantheon to pay tribute to the memory of the Armenians who sacrificed their lives for the independence of the motherland.

The Prime Minister laid flowers on the graves of Sparapet Vazgen Sargsyan, Andranik Ozanyan, and a wreath at the memorial complex in memory of the fallen freedom fighters.

## “Europeans for Artsakh” movement mobilizes across Europe on 27-28 January



The movement “Europeans for Artsakh” organizes events in support of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh in over fifty cities of fourteen European countries on 27 and 28 January, namely in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Citizens of European countries will join forces through diverse actions and gatherings to call on their national and the EU leadership to:

Clearly and unequivocally condemn Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing and

genocidal policy towards the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh.

Impose individual targeted sanctions against the military-political leadership of Azerbaijan involved in the illegal blockade of the Lachin corridor, ceasefire violations, the attack on 19-20 September, and the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh.

Utilize all available leverage to compel Azerbaijan to immediately and unconditionally release all Armenian captives, civilian hostages, prisoners of war since 27 September 2020, as well as the political and military leadership of Artsakh abducted since the end of September 2023.

Contribute to the establishment of tangible international security guarantees, enabling the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh to exercise their inalienable right to return to their homeland, along with providing Artsakh an internationally guaranteed status of self-governance supporting this right.

Apply effective pressure on Azerbaijan

to exclude any form of aggression towards the Republic of Armenia and any action endangering Armenia’s sovereignty.

Provide Armenia with adequate assistance to manage the influx of forcibly displaced Armenian population from Artsakh.

*The ‘Europeans for Artsakh’ is a pan-European collaborative platform/movement bringing together representative bodies of the Armenian community in 15 European countries. The first initiative of the ‘Europeans for Artsakh’ was a letter addressed to the leadership of the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as to the leaders of the Member states of the Council of Europe in support of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, which was co-signed by over 500 European associations.*

*The mission of the platform is to mobilize citizens, fostering support for the fundamental rights of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh while raising awareness on this issue across political, social, and cultural spheres in Europe.*

## Armenian Church celebrates the Feast of St. Sarkis the Captain

By the order of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, the Feast of St. Sarkis the Captain and his soldiers-companions is proclaimed day of blessing of the youth.

Captain St. Sarkis is one of the most beloved saints among the Armenian nation. Together with his 14 soldiers-companions he was martyred for the sake of Christian faith.

During the period of reign of the king Kostandianos the Great (285-337) St. Sarkis, being very courageous, was appointed the prince and General in chief of the region of Cappadocia bordering Armenia. When during the period of reign of the king Julianos the Betrayer (360-363) the persecutions against Christians started by God’s will St. Sarkis and his only son – Martyros, came to live in Armenia, and the Armenian king Tiran, grandson of Tiridates, received them very well. From Armenia St. Sarkis and his son went to Persia, and started serving in the army of



the Persian king Shapouh as the captain of regiments.

Lerning that Sarkis was Christian the king Shapouh ordered him to worship the fire and offer sacrifice to the heathen gods. But the captain immediately refused to obey the order saying, “We should worship one God – the Holy Trinity, which has created the earth and the heaven. Whereas fire or idols are not gods and the human being may destroy them.”

After these words the saint destroyed the temple. The annoyed crowd fell on the saint and his son. First the son of the

saint was martyred. The saint was put into prison and remaining unshaken in his faith was beheaded. After the martyrdom of the saint light appeared over his body. 14 soldiers-companions of the saint also were martyred for the sake of Christian faith.

For the Armenian nation St. Sarkis is one of the most beloved. St. Mesrop Mashtots brought the relics of the saint to the village Karbi (Ashtarak Region) and the Church of St. Sarkis was built over his relics.

St. Sarkis, Patron of Youth and love

In Armenia it is accepted to celebrate the Feast of St. Sarkis not only according to church rites and prayer, but also according to various folk traditions. St. Sarkis the Captain is the patron of youth. Many miracles are believed to happen thanks to his intercession. On the day of the feast young people pray the saint asking him to make their prayers audible to God. St. Sarkis is the realizer of the love longings.

## Armenian tourism experts to participate in trainings at Les Roches Global Hospitality

Armenian tourism experts have been enabled to participate in special training courses at the renowned Les Roches Global Hospitality educational institution in Switzerland.

First Vice President of the Tourism Committee Susanna Hakobyan told Armenpress that the trainings are part of an MoU signed with Les Roches Global Hospitality.



Two candidates have already been chosen after passing several selection procedures and the trainings will start in March 2024.

The committee had been looking for candidates who are 23-37 years old, have at least a BA in tourism or a related field, and at least 2 years of working experience.

“We want to further elevate experienced spe-

Similar other programs will be launched in the future.

Hakobyan described Les Roches Global Hospitality as “one of the top 5 tourism

and hospitality schools” in the world. She said that the committee will cover all expenses of the training for the selected applicants.

cialists,” Hakobyan said, adding that the program is not for beginners.

She attached importance to education and training programs.

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In February 9th, five lucky winners will be randomly selected who will get a chance to win a fuel card worth AMD 50,000 on the idplus loyalty platform.

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## Armenian gymnast wins three gold medals at international tournament in Norway

Representative of Armenia Anna Badalyan won three gold medals at The Northern lights 2024 international rhythmic gymnastics tournament in Norway, the Armenian Gymnastics Federation informs.

Anna was first in the all-around, on

rings and clubs.

In October last year Anna Badalyan clinched one gold and three bronze medals at the international tournament in Amsterdam. She was the best in ribbon, ball and all-around exercises.



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