

Putin, Pashinyan meet in Moscow



Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Moscow, Russia, 8 Sept. 2018

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Armenian FM, OSCE chief discuss Karabakh issue

Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan received on September 4 OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger.

Minister Mnatsakanyan noted that Armenia values the OSCE as an important regional platform, and added that the cooperation with the latter is high on Armenia's foreign policy agenda.

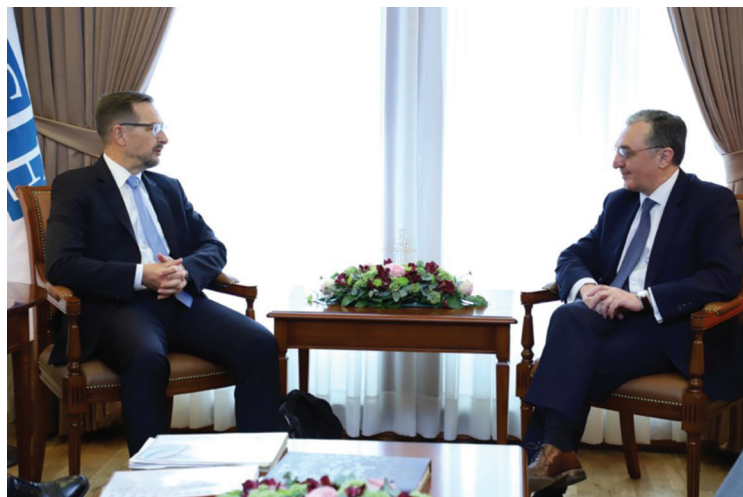
The parties exchanged views on cooperation programs between the OSCE Secretariat and the Armenian foreign Ministry.

Presenting the latest political developments in Armenia, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan noted that the priority of the new government program is to continue with the reforms agenda on the basis of the mandate granted by the people.

Referring to the organization of snap elections, the Foreign Minister attached importance to the cooperation with international partners.

Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Thomas Greminger discussed the latest development in the Karabakh settlement process. The interlocutors stressed the importance of solving the issue within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship.

Minister Mnatsakanyan stressed that in the negotiation process Armenia prioritizes the status of Artsakh and its security, and emphasized the formation of an atmosphere conducive to peace.



In this context the Foreign Minister attached importance to the implementation of agreements, commitment to the ceasefire and exclusion of bellicose rhetoric.

Armenia, Japan see potential for stepping up cooperation



Armenia and Japan have real opportunities to bring their bilateral relations at a new level, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on September 3 as he received visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono.

Kono arrived in Yerevan on Sunday on an official three-day visit during which he also met with his Armenian counterpart Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and President Armen Sarkisyan.

Pashinyan described the diplomatic relations between the two countries as "efficient and dynamically growing." At the same time, he pointed out the existing potential particularly for stimulating economic ties.

According to the Armenian prime minister's official website, Pashinyan spoke about the new political and economic situa-

tion in Armenia and the reforms that are being carried out in the country, in particular, the anti-corruption campaign, efforts to improve the environment for investments and entrepreneurship.

Minister Kono reportedly welcomed the democratic changes taking place in Armenia and expressed readiness to assist the government in that process. The top Japanese diplomat agreed about the presence of a great potential for developing and deepening relations between Japan and Armenia in different areas. He said he visited the Tumo center for creative technologies in Yerevan and was "impressed by Armenia's education model for the field of technologies."

"Tumo is one of the places where we can also work together. We are ready to discuss

prospects of deepening our cooperation in the economic sphere," he said.

Within the context of developing economic ties the two officials attached importance to the signing and ratification of an agreement between the Armenian and Japanese governments on liberalization, encouragement and protection of investments. Among possible fields where Yerevan and Tokyo can develop their cooperation Pashinyan singled out information technologies and hi-tech, tourism, infrastructure and innovations.

The Japanese foreign minister welcomed the offer of the Armenian prime minister, expressing willingness to discuss steps in this direction. Both officials stressed the need to hold culture days of the two countries in Armenia and Japan and also attached importance to the development of inter-parliamentary relations. The two agreed to form a joint agenda and actively work to realize it.

Prime Minister Pashinyan and Minister Kono also exchanged views on current regional and international issues. The head of the Armenian government said he highly appreciated Japan's "balanced position in the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict."

During an earlier joint press conference today Japanese Foreign Minister Kono and his Armenian counterpart Zohrab Mnatsakanyan also said that the two countries will, in particular, seek to cooperate in the fields of innovations and information technologies.

Armenian Parliament votes to toughen legislation on vote buying

The Armenian National Assembly unanimously voted to toughen legislation on vote buying.

In a package of amendments the government to consider the donation or the pledge to donate money, foodstuffs, securities, goods or providing services to voters during the election campaign under the cover of charity as administrative offence.

Administrative responsibility will also be set for conducting an election campaign parallel to charity.

Not only will those giving out money, but also those taking bribes be held accountable.



Putin, Pashinyan meet in Moscow



Russian President Vladimir Putin received Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at the Kremlin. Key issues of the development of the allied Armenian-Russian relations, as well as cooperation on the Eurasian space, including within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO were discussed.

President Putin stressed the special nature of the Armenian-Russian relations.

"Today the relations between Armenia and Russia are steadily developing in all directions. This refers to the field of political relations, military cooperation, security issues, economic cooperation," Putin said.

He noted that "Russia confidently ranks first among the economic partners of the Republic of Armenia. "We are the largest investor in the Armenian economy, and we can affirm that in this respect our relations are rather diversified," he said.

"This refers to energy, particularly hydrocarbon energy, as well as gas supply," he said, reminding that Gazprom sells gas to Armenia at the lowest prices – \$150 per 1000 cubic meters.

"It is particularly gratifying that the trade turnover grew by almost 30 percent last year, and the growth has made 22.2 percent in the first half of the current year.

PM Nikol Pashinyan said, in turn, he is glad for the third meeting over the past four months.

"I think such regularity stresses the special character of relations between our countries," he said.

"I want to stress that despite certain pessimism in the Armenian and Russian press and social media, our relations are developing very dynamically, very naturally and I think that the main task is

to unfold the whole potential of our relations," he stated.

"It doesn't mean that there are no questions in our relations, because that would mean there are no relations at all. I can confirm that there are no unsolvable questions in our relations," he added.

"I'm confident that these questions will be solved and we will rely on mutual respect for our allied relations, the interests of our countries, respect for the sovereignty of our countries and principle of non-interference in each other's affairs," Pashinyan said.

"We really have brilliant relations, but I don't think we should stop here. We have particularly big potential both in political and economic relations, as well as in military-technical cooperation," the Armenian Prime Minister stated.

He noted that the parties are determined to reinforce relations not only in bilateral format, but also within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

After the end of his meeting with Putin Pashinyan wrote in a Facebook post: "We've had a productive conversation as a result of which we can state that Armenian-Russian relations are brilliant. There are no problems in our relations in any direction."

The Armenian prime minister's talks in Moscow come after a strong Russian reaction to Yerevan's prosecution of a number of former government officials, including ex-President Robert Kocharyan and ex-deputy Defense Minister Yuri Khachaturov, who currently chairs the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led defense pact of six former Soviet countries, including Armenia.

Both Kocharyan and Khachaturov are accused of breaching the constitutional order during a deadly postelection crackdown in 2008. After charging Khachaturov Armenia also initiated a procedure to recall him from the top CSTO post.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov twice publicly denounced the prosecutions of former officials in Yerevan, arguing that they ran counter to the new Armenian leadership's earlier pledges not to "persecute its predecessors for political reasons."

And on August 31, the Kremlin reported a phone conversation between Putin and Kocharyan during which the Russian leader congratulated the former Armenian president on his birthday – a rare event in state diplomacy that some analysts took as a sign of Moscow's backing for Kocharyan, who recently announced his return to active politics.

In his public statements Pashinyan downplayed the significance of political implications behind Putin's congratulations to Kocharyan.

Government set to raise the amount of lump-sum childbirth benefits

The Armenian Government proposes to increase the lump-sum benefit for the second child from the current 50 thousand AMD to 150,000 AMD from October 1, 2018.

The proposal was discussed at the government sitting on September 6. During the exchange of opinions that followed, a number of proposals and recommendations were made concerning the draft. In particular, it was suggested to double the amount of lump-sum benefit in case of twins' birth. The Premier suggested studying the recommendations and submitting a finalized version at the next Cabinet meeting.

Stressing the importance of the issue at hand, the Head of Government expressed the hope that the amounts intended for improving maternity care and promoting fertility will prove short next year, and the need will arise to complement the funds in the middle of the year. "This is a crucial topic as we badly need a boom in childbirths," Nikol Pashinyan said.

In a bid to ensure the continuity of reforms aimed at improving the business environment, including the protection of small shareholders' interests, the meeting approved the government's legislative initiative on making amendments and additions to the Law on Joint-Stock Companies, amending the Law on Limited Liability Companies and amending the Law on Securities Market.

The Cabinet next endorsed a legislative



initiative on amending the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia and the RA Law on Administrative Offenses. The initiative seeks to enhance efficiency in the fight against different types of theft: adequate penalties shall be imposed, which in turn will curb the atmosphere of impunity. In particular, thefts committed from clothes, bags or other accessories shall henceforth be deemed as an aggravating circumstance. In this event, pocket-picking will be subject to prosecution regardless of the amount stolen.

The government next approved a legislative initiative to amend the Law on Public-Private Sector Partnership, the Land Code of

the Republic of Armenia and a number of other legal acts. The amendment is expected to create a legal framework for enforcement of public-private partnerships (PPP) mechanisms for the management of PPP programs.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister noted that the proposed bills need further consideration in order to give them the most up-to-date solutions and handle the matters as accurately as possible.

In conclusion, the meeting approved the government's legislative initiative on amending the RA Law on Road Traffic Safety, the Code of Administrative Offenses, and some related laws.

Former Armenian Defense chief no longer on wanted list in Russia

Russia has removed former Armenian defense minister Mikael Harutiunyan from the list of wanted suspects applied in its territory. This information was reported by the Armenian Police.

Armenian law-enforcement officials said they received a corresponding letter from their Russian counterparts. They did not clarify on what grounds the Russian side made such a decision, citing confidentiality of some of the information stated in the letter.

In Armenia Harutiunyan, who served as defense minister during the deadly post-election events in 2008 and issued a controversial order barracking the troops days before the crackdown on opposition supporters in central Yerevan, is charged with overthrowing the constitutional order. Under Harutiunyan's order, which was declassified recently, special groups were set up and armed with service weapons.

Andranik Kocharyan, a member of the former fact-finding group investigating the

events of March 1-2, 2008, during which 10 people were killed, once personally questioned Harutiunyan as part of his mission. He insists that without the former defense minister it would be impossible to disclose the case fully. "Harutiunyan would provide



more extensive explanations to the investigation body than he gave to the fact-finding group," he said.

"And when during a televised interview ex-president Robert Kocharyan, [who is also charged with breaching the constitutional order during the 2008 events], said he had

nothing to do with the troops barracking order, perhaps he was sure that Mikael Harutiunyan would never be questioned by the investigation body. I get the impression that it is more important to bring Harutiunyan to Armenia and interrogate him," the former member of the fact-finding group added.

After lieutenant-general Mikael Harutiunyan was charged with overthrowing the constitutional order on July 3 and arrest was chosen as a measure for restraint in his relation, his wife told the Armenian newspaper Haykakan Zhamanak that her husband had gone to Moscow for medical treatment.

While the Armenian general has been removed from the wanted list in Russia, he is still on the list of wanted suspects applied in other former Soviet countries.

According to the Russian Interfax news agency Harutiunyan has a Russian passport. Last month head of the Armenian Special Investigation Service Sasun Khachatryan, however, said that Harutiunyan is only a citizen of Armenia.

Armen Baibourtian appointed as Armenia's Consul General in Los Angeles

According to an order signed by Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Armen Baibourtian has been appointed Armenia's Consul General in Los Angeles.

Armen Baibourtian was the Senior Adviser to the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia from 2008 to 2013.

He twice served as Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister between 1997 and 2000 and from 2004 until 2008 with portfolios in International Organizations, America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and Legal Issues.

He was the Co-chairman of the Security Dialogue with the USA between 1998 and 1999. In the capacity of Chief Negotiator with the European Union, he led negotiations with the European Commission on the European Neighborhood Policy in 2005 – 2006.

Dr. Baibourtian was Armenia's first Consul General in Los Angeles from 1995 until 1997 and later its first Ambassador to India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Indonesia from 2000 until 2004. He also worked as Deputy Permanent Representative of Armenia to the UN in New York where he focused on international security and conflict resolution issues.



Emirates' The National: Orbelian Revitalised the 85-year-old Historic Opera House

The Highlights has already written about big and very well-prepared tour of The Natl Opera and Ballet Theater to Dubai with two operas, "Carmen" by Bizet and "Magic Flute" by Mozart.

UAE newspress, in particular *The National*, in its story The Highlights readers could find below a publication in *Asbarez*, a largest Armenian newspaper in the US, heaped praise to the Armenian artists and their Artistic and General Director **Constantine Orbelian** by saying that "...ever since Orbelian, 62, was enlisted for the top job last year, he has revitalised the 85-year-old historic opera house. With more than three decades of experience performing with and conducting some of the world's greatest orchestras and ensembles, he is well accustomed to the laborious set-up procedure".

While at the recent press conference Armenian Minister of Culture **Lilit Makunts** sounded an opinion that it is necessary to divide the positions of the General Director and Artistic Director of the Opera and Ballet Theater with the aim of "more efficient work".

At a press conference held on 30 August Constantine Orbelian, Honored Artist of Russia (the first foreigner, and even more so, an American who received this high

title), Knight of the Friendship Order of the Republic of Armenia, in response to the statement of the RA Minister of Culture noted that when the Theater was directed by **Tigran Levonyan** and **Hovhannes Chekijyan**, the same person combined the above men-

here since 1977.

And the invited baritone **Mkrtich Babajanyan**, who lives in Germany for more than a decade, said that in Germany, and in many other countries, the positions of the director and artistic director of the theater are divided.



tioned positions.

"After that, when these two posts were divided for 17 years, only 8 performances were staged, 4 of them being worthless, while in just six months we already have six sets," Orbelian said.

And the same thing was confirmed by the Chief Choirmaster of the Theater, Honored Artist of the Republic of Armenia **Karen Sargsyan**, who has been working

Maestro Orbelian asked the Minister of Culture to let him work. According to him, "I signed a contract for a certain period, and if they are not satisfied with the results, then ... please" (in sense - let it not be prolonged ...).

Speaking about the problems existing at the Theater, Maestro Orbelian said that, for example, the rain water seeps thru the roof, and there is no money to repair it, and

there is no money in the budget for new strings for instruments, so musicians are forced to buy them at their own expense, since 85 million drams was cut off the budget of the Theater.

"I myself pay for new productions of "Carmen", "Magic Flute", the state has not allocated a single dram," said Constantine Orbelian.

By the way, in production of the "Manon" opera, which, as it became known, the favorite opera of the French President **Emmanuel Macron**, and which he and dozens of Presidents of other countries will listen to during the Summit of the Francophonie to be held in Yerevan in October, considerable money from his own pocket was invested again not by anyone another, like generous Maestro Orbelian.

On direct question from the journalist crowd "Why do you need this?", Maestro Orbelian answered: "Why??" "Cause it is decent in relation to my name and in relation to the Theater ... Because I want to show what we, our Theater is capable of ... Why did I invest in the trip of the Theater to Moscow (for the first time in the history Aram Khachaturian's "Gayaneh" immortal ballet was shown at the Bolshoi Theatre legendary stage)?

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Pashinyan government mulls flat income tax

Describing the current levels of taxes as “heavy” for citizens and the tax legislation as “bad and encouraging tax evasion”, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on September 6 suggested at least two options to tackle the issue.

In a live Facebook broadcast following government session Pashinyan advocated a flat income tax system that he said would be fair to all and would close loopholes for employers to evade taxes, while stimulating the growth of salaries.

Currently Armenia has a three-tier income tax system, implying that workers who get a monthly salary of up to 150,000 drams (about \$310) pay an income tax at the level of 23 percent, those whose monthly salaries are in the range between 150,000 and 2 million (about 4,100) drams pay a 25-percent tax and those whose salaries are higher than that are taxed 36 percent on anything that is above 2 million drams.

According to Pashinyan, the government initially considered



about a dozen variants of reforming the tax legislation, but eventually arrived at just two options, with the first being the introduction of a two-tier income tax system. Under this system, citizens receiving a monthly salary of up to 250,000 drams (about \$515) would be taxed 23 percent, while those receiving higher salaries would be taxed 25 percent of their income.

“This system has its logic, which is social justice. Those who will get more will pay more. On the other hand, in that case employers would still not be interested in raising salaries of their employ-

ees,” Pashinyan said.

In contrast, according to the prime minister, the introduction of a flat income tax of 23 percent for all, given that it is equivalent to the sum of the profit tax and dividend tax, would help solve several problems, including simplification of tax laws for potential foreign investors.

Pashinyan said that the government hopes the additional revenues of citizens enabled by this reform would return to the country’s economy and will, in particular, help develop small and medium-sized business.

At the same time, Pashinyan

said that he also backed the idea of the income tax being cut by at least 0.5 percentage points every year. “In five years or so our income tax rate would be at 20 percent,” said the prime minister, adding that in his opinion this would provide an additional impetus to economic growth.

The prime minister also announced plans to lower profit and dividend taxes for non-resident investors to make them equal to those paid by local investors. “We think that we should not discriminate between resident and non-resident investors for the simple reason that among non-resident entrepreneurs there are many Diaspora Armenians... Besides, we think that such discrimination between foreign and local investors is not a good message in terms of improving the investment environment,” he said.

Pashinyan said his government is ready to hear proposals from all stakeholders and promised to continue to present to the public all ideas that his cabinet has in terms of tax reforms.

MONEYVAL publishes a follow-up report on Armenia



As a result of Armenia’s progress in strengthening its framework to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing since its mutual evaluation in December 2015, MONEYVAL – the permanent monitoring body of the Council of Europe – has re-rated the country on two recommendations originally rated as “partially compliant”.

Armenia has been in a regular

follow-up process, following the adoption of its mutual evaluation report, which assessed the effectiveness of Armenia’s anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing (AML/CFT) measures and their compliance with the Recommendations by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). In line with MONEYVAL’s rules of procedure, the country has reported back to MONEYVAL on the

progress it has made to strengthen its AML/CFT framework.

This report analyses Armenia’s progress in addressing the technical compliance deficiencies identified in the mutual evaluation report. It also looks at whether Armenia has implemented new measures to meet the requirements of FATF Recommendations that have changed since the country’s 2015 mutual evaluation.

To reflect this progress, MONEYVAL has re-rated Armenia on Recommendations 1 (assessing risks) and 7 (targeted financial sanctions related to proliferation). These Recommendations are now re-rated as “largely compliant”. Recommendation 8 (non-profit organizations) has been re-rated as “compliant”.

MONEYVAL welcomed progress made on Recommendations 12 (politically exposed persons), 28 (regulation and supervision of

DNFBPs) and 31 (powers of law enforcement and investigative authorities), but considered that shortcomings (which are more than just minor ones) remain. Consequently, the ratings for these Recommendations remain “partially compliant”. The ratings for Recommendation 5 (criminalisation of the financing of terrorism, originally rated as “largely compliant”) and Recommendations 18 (internal controls and foreign branches and subsidiaries) and 21 (tipping-off and confidentiality), both originally rated as “compliant”, the requirements of which changed since Armenia’s evaluation in 2015, remain unchanged.

MONEYVAL decided that Armenia will remain in regular follow-up and will continue to report back in two-and-a-half years to MONEYVAL on further progress to strengthen its implementation of AML/CFT measures.

U.S. Embassy's franchise conference connects American businesses with Armenian investors

The U.S. Embassy in Yerevan and the U.S. Commercial Service in Moscow, in partnership with IDBank, organized a one-day conference focused on franchise business opportunities on September 5 in Yerevan. The event is part of an ongoing effort to foster trade and investment between the United States and Armenia. The conference gave participants rare and valuable early access to well-known American brands eager to enter the Armenian market.

"I know there are many success stories waiting to be written here today," Ambassador Richard M. Mills, Jr. said at the event's opening. "It is my hope that we, at the U.S. Embassy, can set the stage for success by connecting Armenian and American companies. Then we can step back and let you do what you do best and build your businesses."

The franchise conference brought U.S. and Armenian businesses together, helping to forge new partnerships in various sectors, including hospitality, retail, and tourism. More than 50 Armenian business leaders and government officials attended the conference, along with representatives from three U.S. corporations: Papa John's Pizza, Baskin Robbins, and Domino's Pizza. The American business representatives presented their franchise concepts and learned about the Armenian business environment.

Along with presentations from each of the American franchise businesses, participants heard from well-known Armenian organizations about business, financial, and legal considerations, including the importance of intellectual property rights as franchising in Armenia develops further.

The event builds on the success of a similar event in 2015 which resulted in Tutti Frutti Frozen Yogurt opening two franchises with local partners in the region.



Armenia to host workshop on consultation mechanisms between local and national authorities

In the framework of its co-operation activities in Armenia, the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is organizing a Workshop on consultation mechanisms between local and national authorities, on 12 September 2018, in Yerevan. The workshop aims to launch a dialogue on different consultation mechanisms which can be adapted to the Armenian context, with a longer term objective of establishing a framework for regular consultations and institutionalizing a functional consultation mechanism in this country.

The discussions will be organized in three sessions: on the legal framework for consultation – in particular in the light of the European Charter of Local Self-Government; on the institutional



mechanisms for political consultations through case studies in Poland, Iceland, Latvia, Serbia and Georgia; and on the existing practice and future

prospects in Armenia.

The workshop will be opened by Congress Secretary General Andreas Kiefer, First Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Development Vatche Terteryan, Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Yerevan Loreta Voiu, President of the Communities Association of Armenia and Head of the Armenian Delegation to the Congress Emin Yeritsyan, and National Program Officer of the Swiss Cooperation Office South Caucasus Sergey Hovhannisyanyan.

This meeting will bring together representatives of the Armenian Government and the National Assembly, local authorities and their associations, as well as national associations of local authorities in other European countries.

Ex-Armenian PM charged with abuse of power, Illegal enterprise



(Yerevan – RFE/RL) Former Armenian Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan has been charged with “exceeding official authorities” and “illegally participating in entrepreneurial activity” as part of a criminal probe into a claim by an entrepreneur that his business was snatched from him a decade ago.

The Special Investigation Service told on September 8 that Abrahamyan was not taken into custody after pledging not to leave the country pending investigation.

The Investigation Committee of Armenia earlier said that Abrahamian is suspected of abusing his powers in 2008 by allegedly forcing a businessman to give up a majority stake in a mining company that later went to other people, including the former prime minister’s brother Henrik Abrahamyan.

Witnesses in the case, according to the report, among the people involved in the alleged abuse also named former police chief and current lawmaker Alik Sargsyan, who is linked with the former ruling Republican Party of Armenia.

Today’s official information makes no mention of Abrahamyan’s connection to the 2008 post-election events.

On August 9, law-enforcement authorities launched a probe into Abrahamyan’s possible involvement in the breakup of opposition protests staged in Yerevan fol-

lowing a disputed presidential election a decade ago.

The National Security Service then arrested Abrahamyan’s brother Henrik after raiding a former industrial plant effectively owned by Hovik Abrahamyan. It claimed to have found a weapons cache there and said the arsenal would be verified on its possible use against opposition protesters on March 1-2, 2008.

In a separate statement, the security agency said it arrested Henrik Abrahamian and the property’s formal owner, Ambik Gevorgyan, on suspicion of illegal arms possession.

In a Facebook post on September 8 the former prime minister denounced his prosecution describing it as a manhunt. Abrahamyan said that no illegal items were found by law-enforcement bodies during searches at the legal address where he is registered and in the home where he actually lives. He claimed he did not have anything to do with the property where security officials found the weapons. “First, they publicly tried to connect that place with me and then the weapons found there with the March 1-2, 2008 events. It is clear that I was the target of this series of distortions,” he claimed.

Abrahamyan linked the charges brought against him with his September 4 interview to a local news website in which,

he said, he criticized the actions of the authorities. “Immediately after that they pressed ungrounded charges against me... with the purpose of silencing any dissidence,” he claimed.

“The manhunt and pressure on free speech and dissidence that are being carried out by the Armenian authorities will not lead to any good place,” Abrahamian warned.

Abrahamyan’s case is the latest in a series of prosecutions against former government officials launched by Armenian law-enforcement authorities in the wake of the April-May change of power in the South Caucasus country.

Nikol Pashinyan, who came to power as prime minister in the wake of large-scale anti-government protests led by him, has vowed to stamp out corruption, monopolies and to deal with other crimes that he believes have not been detected under the previous governments.

As part of a reopened criminal probe into 2008 post-election violence that left 10 people dead Armenia’s then president Robert Kocharyan and several other former officials have already been charged with “overthrowing the constitutional order.”

Several members of the extended family of Serzh Sargsyan, who succeeded Kocharyan in 2008 but was forced by the Pashinyan-led movement to resign earlier this year, are also under investigation in connection with different crimes, including an attempted murder and illegal enrichment.

Abrahamyan, 60, held high-ranking state posts and developed extensive business interests during Kocharyan’s and Sargsyan’s tenures. He managed Sargsyan’s 2008 and 2013 presidential election campaigns before being appointed as Armenia’s prime minister in April 2014.

Abrahamyan, who also served as Armenia’s parliament speaker in 2008-2011 and 2012-2014, fell out with Sargsyan a few months after being sacked by the latter as head of the government in September 2016. He left Sargsyan’s Republican Party of Armenia in January 2017 and has kept a low profile since then.

OECD: Armenia should take vigorous measures against entrenched corruption



Armenia should take vigorous measures to tackle entrenched corruption and widespread conflict of interest, according to a new OECD report.

Armenia has continued to reform its anti-corruption legislation and institutions over the past four years. A comprehensive legal framework for the civil service and public service integrity, including regulations on ethics and conflict of interests, was adopted; trading in influence and illicit enrichment criminalized; and laws on whistleblower protection and the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption introduced, as well as the legal provisions on asset declarations and public procurement enhanced. The report also welcomes the introduction of various e-governance tools and services, a system

for the publication and verification of asset declarations, and the expansion of e-procurement.

However, a lack of enforcement of anti-corruption laws, together with a monopolized economy, remains a serious concern, according to the report. Armenia should take bold measures to ensure judicial and prosecutorial independence and integrity, and step up efforts to detect, investigate and prosecute high-profile and complex corruption cases using diverse sources of detection and analytical tools.

The report further recommends that Armenia:

- Ensure the transparent and objective selection of members of the Corruption Prevention Commission;

- Implement in practice the newly adopted laws on civil service, public service and whis-

tleblower protection;

- Provide systematic and objective scrutiny of asset declarations with a focus on high-level officials and a subsequent follow-up on violations;

- Ensure a participatory and transparent process of the election of the Prosecutor General and increase the independence of individual prosecutors;

- Introduce, without delay, corporate liability for corruption offences, ensure its effective enforcement in practice, and ensure that sanctions for corruption offences are proportionate;

- Ensure the integrity of state-owned enterprises and promote business integrity;

- Increase transparency and strengthen the monitoring of public procurement. Further reduce the use of non-competitive procurement procedure.

The report also provides an analysis of the higher education sector with recommendations focusing on anti-corruption policy, prevention of corruption and effective enforcement.

The report is published under the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, an initiative launched in 2003 under the Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ACN), which is a part of the OECD Working Group on Bribery's outreach work.

Turkish court issues international arrest warrant for publisher Ragip Zarakolu

Massis Post

A Turkish court has issued an Interpol Red Notice for Ragip Zarakolu, a publisher, writer, and free speech activist, as well as his extradition to Turkey on terrorism charges, the Evrensel daily reported on Wednesday.

Zarakolu, the founder of the Belge Publishing House in Turkey, has been living in Sweden since 2013.

In 2011, a case was launched against the publisher on charges of aiding and abetting a terrorist organization due to a speech he made at the Politics Academy of the now-defunct pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). He was arrested in October 2011 and released pending trial in April 2012.

The decision for an Interpol Red Notice and extradition request was made by a high criminal court in Istanbul six years after Zarakolu's release from prison, Evrensel report-



ed.

In a letter sent to the daily, Zarakolu said the Turkish court's extradition request was an attempt to harass him.

"It is obvious that my continued defense of human rights, minority rights, free speech, and peace as well as expressing my views and my articles have disturbed some. They can

be disturbed. I will move forward," the publisher said in his letter.

He also called on the public to wage a campaign for the cancellation of the court's decision before the next hearing on Sept. 28.

Zarakolu is a well-known political activist who has been fighting for freedom of expression in Turkey for over 30 years, publishing books on issues such as minority and human rights. Belge publishing house is known for publishing books by Armenian, Greek and Kurdish authors in Turkish editions, which have been subject to publishing restrictions in various occasions.

Zarakolu has been writing and publishing about the Armenian Genocide since the early 1990's. Belge has published over ten volumes on the Armenian Genocide, for which he and his family have been consistently persecuted and jailed by Turkish authorities.

Emirates' The National: Orbelian Revitalised the 85-year-old Historic Opera House

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Yes, so that Moscow would see our amazing dancers Ruben Muradyan, Suzy Pirumyan ... They danced in a fantastic way! When we were watching the rehearsal of the performance together with the Armenian Ambassador (Vartan Toghanian), we had, (without exaggeration) tears in our eyes: it was a real miracle - it's great Minas Avetisyan with his wonderful scenery, it's the genius Khachaturian, this is Armenia, we are in this great The Bolshoi Theater! "Gayane" was staged by the Bolshoi about 60 years ago, but the Armenian ballet NEVER danced on its illustrious stage! "

...After all this imagine a situation for just a minute: Artistic Director Orbelian invests his own (huge) money in staging and tours, and another person – "director", manage the money...- ???!

So Asbarez...

"Armenian National Opera to Perform 'Carmen' in Dubai"

DUBAI—The Dubai Opera announced that The Armenian National Academic Theatre Opera and Orchestra is set to bring two opera favorites, Carmen and The Magic Flute, to the Dubai Opera stage in September 2018.

The first of the productions, Carmen, directed by Naire Stepanyan, will be performed over three consecutive nights on September 6-8, 2018. Carmen tells the tragic tale of Don José, who falls hopelessly in love with femme fatale, Carmen. José loses Carmen's love to the matador, Escamillo, only to end in José killing her in a jealous rage. The Opening night Star studded cast includes Karine Babadjanian as Carmen and Hovanes Ayvazyan as Don Jose, Meri Movsessyan as Michaela and Gevork Hagopyan as the strapping Toreodor, Escamillo, along with other great soloists and the renowned chorus of the Armenian National Opera House.

Written by French composer Georges Bizet, Carmen premiered in Paris in 1875 after suffering negative reviews. Disconsolately, Bizet died during the preliminary performances, never to come to know that Carmen would rightly become one of the most renowned and popular operas of all time.

Audiences at Dubai Opera can expect spec-

tacular costumes designed by Cristine Avetisian and awe-inspiring set designs by Avetis Barseghian to augment the truly brilliant performance of Carmen, which will be performed in French with English surtitles. Carmen will be conducted by American conductor Christopher Ocasek.

The second production, The Magic Flute, by one of the most celebrated composers of all time, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, will debut the following week, also for three consecutive nights on September 13-15, 2018.

The Magic Flute is a tale which illustrates the resplendent power of love, art and music, transporting audiences into a wonderful fantastical

member of the Yerevan Opera House, and I feel so very honored for the privilege of leading such an iconic institution," Maestro Orbelian continued. "Finally, I would like to convey my very special thanks and gratitude to Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Culture, Youth, and Social Development of the UAE, for his invaluable support in helping organize and facilitate our concerts in Dubai. It will be our distinct joy to present the artistry of Armenian opera to the appreciative audiences of this great city."

Audiences will be thrilled by the beautiful, intricately detailed costumes designed by world famous designer Alberto Spazzi, and

magnificent set design by internationally renowned Italian opera Director Paolo Micciché, who also serves as the director of The Armenian National Academic Theatre Opera and Orchestra's rendition of The Magic Flute. The superb cast will include award winning tenor Liparit Avetisyan, International prize winner Julietta Aleksanyan, soprano Alina Pekhivianian along with soloists of the Armenian opera company.

Tickets for Carmen and The Magic Flute are available at dubaiopera.com with prices starting from AED 350, and for

opera lovers, there is the chance to save even more and see both operas with a buy four tickets for the price of three package.

Jasper Hope, Chief Executive at Dubai Opera, commented: "In Bizet's Carmen and Mozart's Magic Flute, Dubai audiences can enjoy two of the greatest operas ever written this September. Carmen is synonymous with passion and fiery tempers whilst the Magic Flute offers audiences utterly beautiful music set around a comic fairy tale—two wonderful autumn treats for everyone to enjoy.

And the stagings will be the following:

6th Sept. Carmen –	Performance at 8pm
7th Sept. Carmen –	Performance at 8pm
8th Sept. Carmen –	Performance at 4pm
13th Sept. The Magic Flute –	Performance at 8pm
14th Sept. The Magic Flute –	Performance at 8pm
15th Sept. The Magic Flute –	Performance at 4pm



realm. The Opera tells the story of Tamino, a young hero, sent on a quest by the Queen of Night to rescue her daughter, Pamina, from the wicked wizard, Sarastro. Full of beautiful melodies and enchanting characters, Mozart's beloved and final opera will be performed in German with English surtitles.

"Words are not enough to describe the enthusiasm we all feel as we prepare for our performances of Carmen and The Magic Flute on the prestigious stage of the Dubai Opera," said Constantine Orbelian, Artistic and General Director of the Yerevan Opera House. "Together with our renowned soloists, and our wonderful musicians, chorus, and designers, I am absolutely delighted to be representing my eternal homeland, Armenia, in Dubai, through the universal language of opera. And I am all the more gratified as our performances at the Dubai Opera will be a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of Armenia.

"Today, I am as ever proud of the marvelous talents and professionalism of each and every

The National

The challenge of bringing 'Carmen' from Yerevan to Dubai Constantine Orbelian of the Armenian National Theatre of Opera and Ballet tells us what it takes to perform around the world

By Saeed Saeed

When stage lovers attend the opulent production *Carmen* tonight at Dubai Opera, the lavishness and seamless nature of the set will disguise the painstaking work it took to set up.

The fact that the bustling square in Seville and the mountain backdrop all look clean and detailed is a minor miracle considering that they came out of the back of a truck that travelled from the back lot of Yerevan's Armenian National Theatre of Opera and Ballet to Dubai Opera, an epic six-week trip that included 15 border crossings.

Meeting the load earlier in the week in Dubai was Constantine Orbelian, the company's general and artistic director. With more than three decades of experience performing with and conducting some of the



world's greatest orchestras and ensembles, he is well accustomed to the laborious set-up procedure.

But there is added excitement and nerves this time around, as tonight's performance is momentous. In addition to it being the first-ever staging of *Carmen* in the emirate, the show marks the UAE debut performance of the company from Yerevan, which will also be staging Mozart's *The Magic Flute* from September 13 to 15.

"It is all done in stages," he told *The National* on Tuesday. "Tomorrow, the orchestra and chorus section arrive. On Wednesday, we have two big rehearsals, and on Thursday, we begin with *Carmen*. While all of this seems like there is not enough time, we have been planning this Dubai show for eight months."

It is that equal mixture of energy and careful planning that made Orbelian's stint as the head of the Armenian National Theatre of Opera and Ballet a success.

Ever since Orbelian, 62, was enlisted for the top job last year, he has revitalised the 85-year-old historic opera house. Before his arrival the company produced just eight operas in 17 years, now it has six new productions coming up, in addition to international touring commitments in

Europe and the region.

Orbelian credits the hard work ethos to the jewels at his disposal. "The country has a great music and opera tradition, and Armenian singers are famous around the world," he explains. "They are constantly singing in Russia and Europe and there are a few also playing in San Francisco. The soloists performing in Dubai will then travel to New York to sing at The Metropolitan Opera. These are all high-end and high-class singers who are loved all over the world."

There is also a personal element to his zeal. He was born in the United States to an Armenian father and Russian mother, and was named after his paternal uncle, the great Armenian composer Konstantin Orbelyan. A piano prodigy, he began performing for the San Francisco Symphony at age 11, but he was always aware of his cultural background. In addition to his trailblazing work in Armenia, the head of the Armenian National Theatre of Opera and Ballet displayed that same personal passion when appointed music director of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra in 1991, a shock announcement in what was then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), as he was the first American ever to become music director of Russian music ensemble.

Orbelian is not too fussed with the distinction. He explains that his appointment was down to the political currents of the time. "I was defi-



nately surprised of course," he says. "I played with them as a piano soloist first in December in 1990, and six weeks later their conductor died of a heart attack. The orchestra signed a petition with the ministry of culture of the Soviet Union and asked me to be their conductor. It was the time of [reformist and last Soviet leader] Gorbachev. It was a time of change and by accepting me as the director, it was a sign that the country was really trying to go international."

While the Armenian National Theatre of Opera and Ballet is an established presence in its home country and Dubai Opera has only just celebrated its second anniversary, Orbelian draws a similarity with the two intuitions in that they are united in their goal to inspire a new generation with a love of the arts. He says a future step for both companies is to develop child-friendly productions. "We are currently working on children's ballets of stories like *Sinbad* and *The Wizard of Oz*. This is something the former Soviet Union did well in that each major city had its own children's theatre," Orbelian says.

"That's a great thing, in that we can help build a new generation that is comfortable and not scared of the theatre."

Pictures courtesy The National

Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator: Nice Novelties...

Buy a smartphone and get a chance to win a "KIA Rio X-Line" cars or an "Honor 9 Lite" smartphone

VivaCell-MTS informs that from August 17 till September 30, 2018, when buying a smartphone for AMD 30 900 or more, one gets a chance to participate in a prize draw of 3 "KIA Rio X-Line" cars and 15 "Honor 9 Lite" smartphones.

To participate in the draw, one needs to obtain a smartphone from VivaCell-MTS service centers, either in cash or by installment. Upon the completion of the purchase, one needs to keep the purchased smartphone and the cash receipt.

On October 23, 2018 at 15:30 the software, specially designed for the draw by "MTS Armenia" CJSC, will randomly select the winner of the draw.

One can follow the process of the draw and the announcement of its result in live mode, on October 23, 2018 at 15:30 on VivaCell-MTS' FB page.

Notes

The winner of the draw should approach "MTS Armenia" CJSC headquarters on 4/1 Argishti St., Yerevan, from October 24 till October 30, 2018 (included). The winner should present his/her passport or ID card, the smartphone with the winning IMEI code, and the corresponding cash receipt.

VivaCell-MTS wishes all participants of the draw good luck!



"Samsung Galaxy Note 9" 128 GB smartphone is already available at VivaCell-MTS service centers

VivaCell-MTS informs that "Samsung Galaxy Note 9" 128 GB smartphone is already available at its service centers.

The smartphone costs AMD 524 900. by installment.

When buying a smartphone for AMD 30 900 or more by September 30, 2018, one gets a chance to participate in a prize draw of 3 "KIA

Rio X-Line" cars and 15 "Honor 9 Lite" smartphones.

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The Pieta

Christopher Okemwa

Just Lie There

When you die, my dear friend
Do not try to petition
Do not ask why you can't live longer
Or why you and not someone else
Died
Just accept and pass on

When they stash you in the casket
Dear friend
Do not grumble
Do not mumble
Or try to peep through the wooden box
Desiring to live on
Just lie there
For you will be in a different space
A different wavelength
A different existence

When they scream around the casket
Dear friend
Do not shed tears with them
Do not sympathize with them
Just look on and lie still
Let your mouth gape
Let your eyes stare
Your cheeks sink into your mouth
Your teeth stick out of your lips
Like a warthog
Remain frozen
Remain withered
Just lie there

If you hear them lowering your body to the soil
Dear friend
Do not grumble
Do not mumble
Or try to break open the casket
To protest the cold abode
The soil-made walls
Just lie there
For you will be in a different world
A different space
A different time-line

When you start to rot and decompose
Dear friend
Do not pinch your nose
Do not throw up either
Stench is part of the new design
Maggots your companion
Worms your new kith and kin
Silence the ambience of the new home
Loneliness the ultimate destiny
Just lie there

PurgatoriusIgnis

Hanging in this burning emptiness of retribution, between
Death and the final dwelling--in this condition of existence--
I move stealthily like a cat, perpetually on the balls of his
Feet; with the cat's impression, indifferent aloofness,
My face drooped; in my eyes no light at all. I cry,

"I want affliction and fire!"

The soiled hamlet from whence I have come, voices rise
To cry for the pain and torture that my soul bore here
Aware that my spirit is not fully independent of the stains of
Mundane effects of wrong-doing, its consequences; neither
Sufficiently evil to be fated for abyss; but keeps on strengthening
Itself in sanctity here

Having no purifications--neither sacrament of baptism, nor
of penance--my venial sins weigh heavy on my soul
I cry for pain, fire, to suffer for the rewards of the divine abode--
A Garden of delights. I ask to be relieved of my
Earthly baggage; for the pain of joy to be completed, to feel
blissful mystery of Him

I find myself in that condition of mind and feelings
When reality gives place to reverie and merges with
The shadowy visions of the first stages of purgatories ignis
I've carried, on clammy hands, venial sins, to be purged
Of them, being only momentary pain, then soon be on my
Way to Olympus

Here it comes, like a clap of thunder, or like a magic spell
Light one moment and darkness the next--a big fire!
Burning brightly, spreading everywhere. I scream, "burn me!"
I hear those assembled in the hamlet from whence I have
Come, singing, raising their sacrifices up for my sake--
To be purified.

The Mortal Soul

(Is there need to invest in permanent things in this world?)

I wonder what for to build a permanent house
when you know you won't be forever in this world,
a world where life is ephemeral, with a future that is dark,
uncertain and wild

The long merciless hand when it takes you away
You will part with your house, car, all that you own
All that you have sweated for, gathered day by day
Will now be possessed by relatives once you are gone

You will take nothing with you, not a jewel not a penny
Better then to learn to live without the good things you own
For the soil in its selfish mode won't provide you any
But will let you lie there, empty, naked as you were born

Or, better still, you can try and be dead in Ghana
Where for example if you are a well-known farmer
You can be buried in a casket the shape of a banana
A driver in a bus, a carpenter in a mallet or a hammer

At least that will make you feel a little worthwhile
You won't regret a bit for having worked so hard
And lost everything at once; your enormous verse file
Will be there, open round you, in case you were a bard

But even those West Africans don't have any luck
For when in the soil you won't identify the colours
The holy white, the rich green or the dark black
The mortal soul knows only the red on the flowers.

Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

Mars, your planetary avatar, is now in direct motion. There are still impediments and challenges left over from the summer that slow you down. It will take a few weeks to work out the kinks, but it will happen. Slowly and steadily.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

Give attention to the lead paragraph because Venus is your ally in the solar system. What she does often represents what is going on with you. After she squares Mars she moves into different territory in the sign of Scorpio. There she brings improvements in clientele, social life, and partnerships. This is a good time to ask for a professional consultation if you need it. You are especially able to balance with others during this period in order to gain win-win solutions.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Your focus shifts to matters of home, hearth, and family. Things of the past may float up in your mind for reflection. If this occurs, ask yourself what you learned from the former experience. It probably would help you now. Family and property concerns may occupy your attention. It is a good time to open important discussions with those closest to you.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

You may feel out of sorts this week. Your feelings are in conflict with your ideal self and your values. You want to put your best foot forward, but circumstances do not feel quite right. If the conflict is deep, it is usually best to wait and not yield to whatever pressure is around you. You will soon sort it all out.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

This is a time in which you must take a look at reality. The facts are being exposed related to a financial or sexual matter. Maybe you are just becoming aware of the truth concerning your partner's resources. Or possibly the culprit is yourself as you have avoided clear knowledge of your financial picture. Being conscious brings the power to resolve issues.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

Your planetary ruler, Mercury, changes signs this week and will offer a refreshing change of pace. You will realize that you have a stronger sense of self and your direction than you have had for the last couple of months. Now that it is in direct motion, you feel more capable of making decisions and moving forward. You'll be cautious at first, but your actions will pick up steam soon.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

Your property and family gives you a solid foundation now, along with the strength to move forward if needed. You have created a sense of stability at your base. Using your resources in practical ways increases this strength.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

Now that Mars is direct, it feels as though you should be moving ahead. Unfortunately, there is still debris in your path before you can access the free and clear road to the future. Take it easy and breathe deeply. You will get there. It was a hard summer. Your feminine side will be helpful.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Your mood is expansive and optimistic this week. It is one of those "good luck" times that occasionally happen to the Archers. You have a grasp of the big picture and could use this energy to promote your projects and gain support. Or you could simply kick back and enjoy the good feelings.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

The "Powers That Be" are looking favorably upon you. It appears you have put together something of concrete value that will withstand the test of time. Others recognize your work and are open to whatever suggestions you may offer.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

This is an opportune week. If money is owed to you, it should be on its way. That includes gifts, debts, and insurance claims. This is not about income from a salary, but it may be about payment for commissions. People who owe you favors may turn up to repay them now.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

There are vampires loose in the world and the Fish tends to attract them. If you have aged a bit, you probably have begun to smell them when they enter your vicinity. Those who have not will be learning soon. It's a required lesson for this sign. Take care of yourself first when someone approaches you with a sad story.

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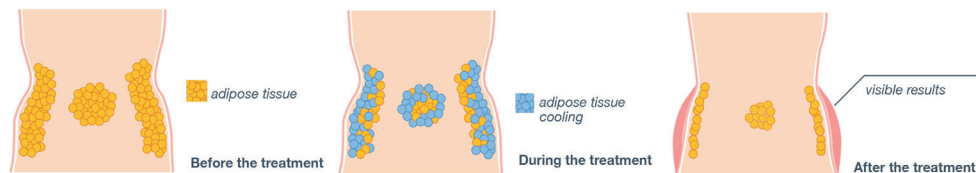
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