

Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan agree to meet again in early 2018



Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian (L) and his counterpart from Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov sit together at a session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Moscow, April 8, 2016

Edward Nalbandian and Elmar Mammadyarov met in Vienna in a bid to build on progress that was reportedly made at a recent Armenian-Azerbaijani summit. The meeting apparently lasted for several hours.

According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, the two men began the talks in the presence of the U.S., Russian and French mediators and then spoke in a tete-a-tete format. A ministry statement said they discussed ways of implementing agreements reached by the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents at their last three meetings.

“Yesterday’s meeting with my Azerbaijani counterpart took place in a generally positive mood,” Nalbandian told on December 7 an annual session of the OSCE’s Ministerial Council also held in the Austrian capital. “Let’s see what developments will follow it.”

An Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesman said, for his part, that Mammadyarov and Nalbandian engaged in “intensive and concrete discussions on existing proposals” to resolve the Karabakh conflict. “Elmar Mammadyarov said that the meeting was positive and constructive,” the official, Hikmet Hajiyevev, was quoted by Azerbaijani news agencies as saying.

Hajiyevev also said that Mammadyarov and Nalbandian agreed to meet again “in the second half of January 2018.” The Armenian Foreign Ministry likewise reported that their next talks will take place early next year.

Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev most recently met in Geneva on October 16. They pledged to intensify the Karabakh peace process and bolster the ceasefire regime in the conflict zone.

Armenia closely follows developments around Jerusalem – FM

Armenia closely follows the developments around Jerusalem, the Foreign Minister has said.

“The status of Jerusalem is one of the most important issues on the international agenda and it could be solved through the negotiations within the context of the acceptable solution for the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said.

According to him, this can pave the way for the establishment of a lasting peace and security.

“Jerusalem has a centuries old Armenian presence, a rich Armenian historical and cultural heritage. Armenian Apostolic Church is one of the major guardians of the Christian Holy Places. Therefore, we attentively follow all developments with regard to Jerusalem,” Armenia’s top diplomat added.

The comments come after US President Donald Trump on December 6 formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, reversing nearly seven decades of American foreign policy and setting in motion a plan to move the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to the Holy City.



Yerevan hosts 63rd International Pugwash Conference of Science and World Affairs

On the initiative of the National Defense Research University, MOD, RA, from December 9 to 12, Prof. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, Secretary General of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs international movement—an international network of scientists concerned about peace and international security, and Prof. Alexander Nikitin, Doctor of Political Science, Elected Member of Pugwash Council, Director of the MGIMO Center for Euro-Atlantic Security, MFA, RF, President Emeritus of the Russian Political Science Association (RPSA), made a visit to Armenia.

Members of Pugwash international

movement are renowned scientists, who are advocates for peace, disarmament and international security, prevention of nuclear war, and scientific cooperation, whose estimations are significantly underlined by different state leaders and international organizations. This Movement was initiated back in 1955 by 11 world famous scientists, among who was Albert Einstein. For its efforts made in the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons the Movement was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.

On December 11, the guests paid a visit to the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex, where the Secretary General

of Pugwash Movement Paolo Cotta-Ramusino laid a wreath at the Genocide monument.

The same day they were received by the RA President Serzh Sargsyan. They were accompanied by Lieutenant General Hayk Kotanjian, Head, NDRU, Doctor of Political Science, Professor. The Pugwash Conferences Secretary General Paolo Cotta-Ramusino asked for the President Serzh Sargsyan’s consent and support to hold the 2019 Pugwash International Conference in Yerevan. The President of the state welcomed the idea of hosting the conference in Yerevan, and noted that Armenia was eager to support in organizing and holding the event at a high level.

In the frameworks of their visit to Armenia the guests also took a trip to Garni and Geghard where they came to know the Armenian spiritual, historical and cultural heritage.

To wind up their visit, the guests visited the National Defense Research University. They were hosted by Lieutenant General Hayk Kotanjian, Head, NDRU. The meeting was also attended by Benyamin Poghosyan, Deputy-Head for Research—Head, Institute for National Strategic Studies, NDRU, PhD in History. In the course of the meeting the attendees discussed the issues regarding the holding of the 2019 Pugwash reporting-elective conference in Yerevan.



Armenian Parliament passes bill against domestic violence



Following a heated debate, the Armenian parliament passed on December 8 a government bill which is meant to combat domestic violence in the country.

The government pushed the bill through the National Assembly despite continuing resistance from some deputies representing the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK). But it won over other, more senior HHK figures who openly criticized the initial version of the legislation circulated in September.

The latter joined conservative fringe groups in claiming that some of the proposed legal provisions would undermine traditional “Armenian family values.” The Armenian Justice Ministry responded by amending the bill drafted by it. In particular, the ministry expanded the title of the bill to emphasize that it is aimed at not only preventing domestic violence and protecting its victims but also “restoring solidarity within families.”

Women’s groups have criticized this phrase, saying that “solidarity” is not a legal term and could be open to different interpretations by relevant authorities.

The final version of the bill retained other significant provisions. The Armenian police will now be required to stop violence within families threatening the lives or health of their members. What is more, the police could force a violent husband to leave his victim’s home and stay away from it for up to 20 days. Armenian courts will be allowed to extend such bans to between 6 and 18 months.

The law stipulates that domestic violence can be not only physical but also sexual, psychological and even economic. It makes clear that a “substantiated presumption” of such instances of violence will be sufficient grounds for police intervention. Deputy Justice Minister Vigen Kocharyan stressed that this would be done by a special police unit trained to deal with such cases.

Hayk Babukhanyan, a controversial lawmaker from the ruling HHK, attacked this provision during Thursday’s parliament debate on the bill. “Can you imagine what it could lead to?” he said, warning of police mistakes.

Gevorg Petrosyan of the Tsarukyan Bloc, the second largest parliamentary force, echoed this concern. Petrosyan claimed that the law would revive what he called a Soviet-era practice of police prosecuting men at the best of their “malicious, freedom-loving wives.” “I regard it as a law on destroying peace and harmony in families,” he said.

Babukhanyan, who publishes a newspaper known for its anti-Western commentaries, also denounced another clause that provides for non-governmental organizations’ involvement in the protection of domestic violence victims.

Samvel Farmanyan, a more mainstream HHK parliamentarian, also spoke out against the bill. “Unfortunately, this law will not help to reduce cases of violence in families. It may actually have opposite effects,” he claimed.

Nevertheless, the HHK-controlled National Assembly backed the landmark law by 73 votes to 12, with 6 abstentions. All of those 12 deputies represent the Tsarukyan Bloc, which claims to be in opposition to the government.

None of the HHK deputies voted against the bill. Babukhanyan and several other Republicans chose to boycott the vote instead.

Gagik Melikyan, the number two figure in the ruling party’s parliamentary faction, defended the legislation, saying that it poses no threat to “traditional families.”

Deputies from the opposition Yelk bloc also voted for the measure. One of them, Mane Tandilyan insisted later on Thursday that domestic violence is a more serious problem in Armenia than it may seem.

The female lawmaker also said that the new powers given to the police will discourage violent conduct.

A senior representative of the Armenian police advocated the passage of the bill when she spoke at parliamentary hearings in October. The police recorded 3,571 cases of domestic violence from 2012-2016.

According to the Yerevan-based Women’s Resource Center, more than 50 Armenian women have been beaten to death and murdered otherwise by their husbands or other relatives in the last five years.

Armenians feel obliged to contribute to genocide prevention – FM

“Armenians feel the moral obligation to contribute to the international efforts for prevention of genocides,” Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said in a statement on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime.

“As we mark today the International Day of Commemoration of the Victims of Genocide we join our voice with all those who strive to ensure that “never again” is a solemn promise that is universally respected and kept,” Minister Nalbandian said.

“As a nation that passed through the horrors of Genocide, Armenians feel the moral obligation to contribute to the international efforts for prevention of genocides, crimes against humanity. In 2015 due to the efforts of Armenia the United Nations Human Rights Council passed a unanimous Resolution on the Genocide Prevention while again on our initiative the UN General Assembly assigned December 9th as an International Day of Commemoration of the Victims of Genocide,” he added.

“Since 2015, 9 December has become a solid platform for manifestation of our collective resolve against the recurrence of this crime. It also bears an important mission of raising awareness and promoting education about the crimes against humanity,” Edward Nalbandian stated.

“On the next December 9th the International Commemoration Day will gain even more significance since it will coincide with the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It will provide an opportunity to once again reaffirm the importance of the Convention,” Minister Nalbandian noted.

“However, 70 years passed the world is not immune from this “odious scourge”. It is imperative to redouble the international efforts aimed at reinvigoration of the prevention agenda,” he added.

Edward Nalbandian voiced hope that the 70th anniversary of the Convention would give a new impetus to the international efforts in this regard

Minsk Group Co-Chair countries reaffirm commitment to mediating Karabakh peace



On the occasion of the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Vienna, we the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries — Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and French Permanent Representative Véronique Roger-Lacan — adopted a joint statement, reaffirming their commitment to mediating a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the basis of the core principles of the Helsinki Final Act, including the non-use of force or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples.

“We reiterate our joint commitment to negotiating a peaceful resolution to this conflict as the only way to bring real reconciliation to the peoples of the region,” the statement reads.

“We welcome the resumption of high-level dialogue between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Geneva on 16 October, as well as the meeting between their Foreign Ministers that took place 6 December in Vienna, under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. We express satisfaction with the intensified negotiations, and appeal to the sides to focus their efforts on finding compromise solutions to the substantive issues of political settlement. Further delays will only complicate the situation and could call into question the commitment of the Parties to reach a lasting agreement,” the Heads of Delegation said.

With reference to the declared commitment of the two Presidents to take additional measures to reduce tension on the line of contact, they urge Baku and Yerevan to accept the expansion of the existing Office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

“Other decisions adopted during the Summits in Vienna and St. Petersburg in 2016 should also be implemented. We welcome the Parties’ consideration of the Co-Chairs’ proposals aimed at restoring people-to-people contacts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and support the International Committee of the Red Cross in its efforts to move forward with the exchange of data on missing persons. We encourage the Parties to avoid the unnecessary politicization of these important humanitarian steps.”

“Our countries remain ready to work closely with the Sides to reach a lasting and peaceful settlement. We have instructed our Co-Chairs to continue their mediating activities to promote compromises on the working proposals submitted to the Parties, but stress that the primary responsibility to end the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict rests with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan,” the statement concludes.

Top Armenian general forced to quit Army

One of Armenia’s most influential army generals was sacked on December 5 after being publicly rebuked by Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan.

President Serzh Sargsyan relieved Lieutenant-General Haykaz Baghmanyan of his duties as deputy chief of the Armenian army’s General Staff just hours after the extraordinary criticism.

Speaking to reporters, Sargsyan said Baghmanyan has asked to be discharged from the military “at my urging.” He accused the latter of failure to comply with unspecified “working agreements” which is “incompatible with further joint service.” The minister did not elaborate.

Baghmanyan has held the position since 2009. The former Soviet army officer had previously commanded two of Armenia’s army corps.

Baghmanyan has long been under media spotlight because of his reported business interests and lavish lifestyle that raised questions about his integrity. He has also been occasionally dogged by controversy.

Last year, for example, an entrepreneur



from the eastern Armenian town of Martuni alleged that Baghmanyan has gained ownership of one of his businesses by fraudulent means. The general denied the allegation. The business in question, a liquefied gas station, is now run by his 28-year-old son.

Vigen Sargsyan, 42, is widely regarded a protégé and potential successor of Pres-

ident Sargsyan. He was the chief of the presidential staff before being appointed as defense minister just over a year ago.

Meeting senior military officials in late October, Sargsyan pledged to “modernize” Armenia’s army through a seven-year plan of actions which he said will be launched less than three months before he completes his final presidential term in April.

Trump's statement on Jerusalem raises security concerns – Armenian Patriarchate

US President Donald Trump's statement on Jerusalem is fraud with a number of threats, says Head of the press service of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Archimandrite Koryun Baghdasarian told Public Radio of Armenia. He said the Armenian Patriarch and the church are very concerned with Trump's decision.

"The eastern part of Jerusalem is not recognized as part of whole city. From 1967 the UN recognizes it as an 'occupied territory.' Meanwhile, Trump said he recognizes whole Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This means a huge change to the status," Archimandrite Koryun Baghdasarian.

"Whatever the developments, they will immediately affect the Armenian community of Jerusalem, as well as the activity and mission of our church," he said.

The concerns are not related to the church lands. "The concerns are about security. The reports coming from Palestine are worrying. There will be clashes and rise of tensions, but there is no panic among the Armenian community," he added.



29 years after the devastating earthquake in Spitak

December 7 marks the 29th anniversary of the destructive earthquake in Spitak. The earthquake hit 40% of the territory of Armenia, densely populated regions with 1 million people.

The cities of Spitak, Leninakan, Kirovakan and Stepanavan, as well as hundreds of villages were totally or partially destroyed. Twenty-five thousand people were killed, 500 thousand were left without shelter. 17% of the buildings were destroyed, the work of 170 industrial companies was halted.

Immediately after the earthquake Armenians all over the world united and offered comprehensive support to the Motherland. "SOS Armenia," "Aznavor for Armenia" and tens

of other organizations were created. Many Diaspora Armenians rushed to Armenia, bringing food, clothes and medicine.

Many of them – doctors, psychologists, constructors, architects – stayed in Armenia and personally participated in the rescue works.

A number of countries of the world continued to support Armenia years after the earthquake. Italians built a whole dwelling district in Spitak, Norwegians built a hospital, which was named after great humanist F. Nansen. A school built by an Englishman was opened in Gyumri. Prime Minister of Great Britain Margaret Thatcher participated in the opening ceremony.



Garó Paylan brings the issue of Armenian Patriarch's election to Turkish Parliament

Member of the Turkish Parliament, ethnic Armenian Garó Paylan raised the issue of Armenian patriarchal elections in the Turkish parliament, Ermenihaber.am reports.

In a written note to Süleyman Soylu, Paylan asked about the reasons of the Turkish government's intervention in the elections of the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul.

"Armenian Patriarch Mesrop Mutafyan has not been able to perform his duties for nine years because of illness. To start the process of election of a new Patriarch, clergymen of the Armenian Patriarchate elected Karekin Bekchyan as Locum Tenens," Paylan noted.

He reminded that the Patriarchate then sent a notice to the Ministry of Interior through the Istanbul Governor's Office. "No response has been received, although the two-round elections were planned to be held on December 10 and 13," he added.

The lawmaker cited media reports claiming that Istanbul Governor Vasip Sahin does not recognize Karekin Bekchyan as Locum Tenens and offers to choose between the two other Archbishops of Istanbul.

Garó Paylan then voiced the concern of the Armenian community connected with the dragging out of the process and the government's intervention "in the organization of the election, which the Armenian community has the right to."

Paylan then asks to clarify the grounds of the government's intervention in the process, explain the reasons of the delay and demands clarification on when the "government will stop creating obstacles in the organization of the Patriarchal election."

Armenian Budget for 2018 Approved By Parliament



The National Assembly approved on December 8 Armenia's state budget for next year which will increase government spending by more than 7 percent but keep public sector salaries, pensions and other social benefits unchanged.

The budget drafted by the Finance Ministry in late September calls for over 1.46 trillion drams (\$3 billion) in total expenditure, up by around 100 billion drams from the government's 2017 spending target. It commits the government to ensuring a sharper rise in tax revenue that would reduce the budget, projected at 158 billion drams, to 2.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product.

Most of the extra spending planned by the

government will be channeled into various infrastructure projects. The remainder will mainly be spent on national defense. Armenia's defense spending is to rise by 18 percent to 248 billion drams (\$514 million).

The spending bill was backed 64 members of the 105-seat parliament representing the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) and its junior coalition partner, Dashnaksutyun. Thirty-five other deputies affiliated with the opposition Tsarukyan Bloc and Yelk alliance voted against it.

The opposition minority strongly criticized the caps on social spending during parliamentary debates that preceded the vote. They said that will only increase poverty in

the country in 2018.

"The groundwork is not laid not only for economic growth but also economic development," said the Tsarukyan Bloc's Mikael Melkumyan. "Furthermore, spending on social programs, education and science is juxtaposed against capital spending."

Government ministers and HHK lawmakers insisted, however, that increased spending on capital projects is a more efficient way to ease socioeconomic hardship as it would stimulate economic activity in the country.

"We have promised one thing in our program: we have said that if we have economic growth we will adequately solve economic problems of our people," said Finance Minister Vartan Aramyan. He indicated that the government may well raise pensions and salaries in 2019.

The budgetary targets are based on government projections that economic growth in Armenia will reach 4.5 percent in 2018. The government has forecast a 4.3 percent growth rate for this year.

"The growth forecast is too optimistic," said Mane Tandilyan, a deputy from Yelk. "I think it will not materialize."

In its latest World Economic Outlook released in October, the International Monetary Fund forecast more modest growth rates for Armenia: 3.5 percent in 2017 and 2.9 percent in 2018. The IMF had anticipated slower growth earlier.

Karen Karapetyan denies economic monopolies in Armenia

Prime Minister Karapetyan insisted on December 6 that his government is successfully liberalizing lucrative sectors of the Armenian economy that have long been dominated by a handful of wealthy entrepreneurs.

"We have no classic monopolies as such. What we have is markets with dominant players," he told an opposition lawmaker during the government's question-and-answer session in the National Assembly.

Karapetyan said that the State Revenue Committee (SRC) can certify that in those markets "the number of players and the volumes" of their business operations have increased in the past year. "Work in that direction is firmly on track," he said.

"The dominant player in a market has better starting conditions and their, let's say, 70 percent share in the market cannot shrink to 20 percent within a year. But you will see a positive dynamic there," added Karapetyan.

The lawmaker, Sergey Bagratyan of the Tsarukyan Bloc, remained unconvinced, speaking of "state structures sponsoring those who have dominant positions." "We have young people that would wipe out those dominant positions within a year if there was free competition," he said.

"Do you know of a single case where we barred somebody from entering a market?" countered the premier. "If you do, tell us. No-



body is stopped at the border and told that 'you can import this but not that.'"

Karapetyan pledged to improve the domestic business environment and open up all sectors to greater competition shortly after he was appointed as prime minister in September 2016. Opposition politicians remain skeptical about reforms promised by him.

The lack of competition has been particularly acute in lucrative imports of some essential products to Armenia. Samvel Aleksanyan, a government-linked tycoon, has long enjoyed a de facto monopoly on imports of sugar, wheat, other basic foodstuffs as

well as some medicines.

Critics have accused Aleksanyan of using his government connections to ward off competition and evade taxes. He has always denied that.

The SRC nearly doubled the total amount of taxes collected from Aleksanyan's companies in the first half of this year. The tax agency is now headed by a figure close to Karapetyan.

Karapetyan on Wednesday also claimed to have markedly improved the macroeco-

nomic situation in Armenia which he said is "manageable" now. He argued that economic growth in the country is on course to exceed this year a 3.2 percent rate that was forecast by his cabinet in late 2016.

Another Tsarukyan Bloc deputy, Gevorg Petrosyan, recalled a 2013 statement by President Serzh Sargsyan that an Armenian government failing to achieve a growth rate of at least 7 percent must step down. He wondered whether Karapetyan's cabinet will "fulfill" that directive.

Answering the question, Deputy Prime Minister Vache Gabrielyan said the current government is guided by its five-year policy program that was approved by the parliament in June. The 120-page document commits the government to ensuring that the Armenian economy expands by around 5 percent annually.

"Thank you for not answering my question," Petrosyan responded to Gabrielyan.

By Karlen Aslanyan

Japan interested in Armenian wines, honey and dried fruits – Ambassador



Armenia and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1991, but the cooperation between the two countries started earlier. In 1988 Japan sent the first group of rescuers to help Armenia after the devastating earthquake that killed more than 25,000.

Speaking to reporters in Yerevan on December 11 Japan's Ambassador to Armenia Eiji Taguchi said "the development of economic relations is not enough." He said there are a number of

other spheres they would like to develop cooperation in.

Armenia imports Japanese cars, equipment and heavy industrial machinery. The Ambassador said he would like the imports to include medical equipment, new types of materials in the future.

Ambassador Taguchi said his country is interested in Armenian wines, honey and dried fruits. Investors are more interested in innovative technologies, a field which is very developed in Armenia. Tourism and agriculture are also attractive to Japan, he said.

Eiji Taguchi informed that Armenia and Japan will sign an investment agreement in the near future, which, he said, will boost the volume of investments.

The agreement will be more of a guideline for the two countries, which will outline the rights and responsibilities of the parties.

The Ambassador noted the Armenia is the first country to sign an agreement with the EU, while being a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. He said it is a privilege that will attract investors worldwide, who will be interested in creating organizations or launching production in Armenia.

"This is one of the reasons that incites interest among Japanese investors, as well," Eiji Taguchi concluded.

Armenia ranked 34th in Digital Diplomacy Review 2017



Digital Diplomacy Review 2017

Armenia is ranked 34th (up from 52nd last year) in Digital Diplomacy Review 2017 (#DDR17).

#DDR17 identifies 5 major digital diplomacy needs, depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. They also represent the stages of progress from a beginner to advanced degree of digital diplomacy practice at corporate level: Presence, Customization,

Up-to-dateness, Engagement, Diplomacy 4.0.

Each level is characterized by designated variables/indicators among 166 criteria selected to measure performance of digital diplomacy assets. In turn these 5 major levels of digital diplomacy performance is double-checked with additional qualitative signifiers such as creativity and authenticity, transparency, content-management, security, openness, influence, type of audience, professionalism, disruptive/innovative campaigns.

First, #DDR17 team collected digital assets used by MFAs from the beginning of 2017 to end of November 2017. Then, all these digital assets were analyzed in depth in the light of data withdrawn from API-based resources.

In the absence of API-based resources, data was compiled manually. The score of each MFA was measured on a 0 to 100 scale and its equivalent of a letter from AAA ++ to E -- is also accordingly assigned.

“Days of Artsakh” under way in France

The “Days of Artsakh in France” Festival, which took off on November 21 with a solemn event held in the city of Villeurbanne, with the participation of President of the Republic of Artsakh Bako Sahakyan, is underway.

Recently, the cities of Valence and Bourg-lès-Valence of Drome Department have hosted the Festival, where numerous events presenting the culture and way of life of Artsakh are held.

In early December, the documentary “We are Our Mountains” by French-Armenian film director Arnaud Khayadjanian was shown in Valence as well as the ceremonial opening of French photographer Yvan Travert’s “Artsakh: the Spirit of the Land” exhibition took place. Within the 15-day exhibition, visitors will also see the animated film “Artsakh in 180 Seconds” by Hulé Kéchichian. It is noteworthy that the exhibition was included in the school program of Valence, thanks to which the schoolchildren of Valence had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Artsakh.

At the New Year Fair in the town of Bourg-lès-Valence, the Artsakh pavilion was also presented, where brochures with information about Artsakh, tourist guides and Artsakh products were exhibited. In his speech at the ceremonial opening of the fair, Mayor Marlène Mourier reaffirmed her support for Artsakh, in particular, stating, “Since the signing of the Declaration of Friendship with Shushi in 2014, Bourg-lès-Valence has been standing by the people of Artsakh”.

The 10-day “Pilgrimage to Artsakh” exhibition of works by famous French graphic artist Sylvain Savoia has started in the Drome Department Council building.



UN observes the International Day of Commemoration of Genocide Victims



For the third time since 2015 a special event in observance of the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime was held at the United Nations in New York on 8 December. The observance of the International Day commenced with a minute of silence in honour of the memory of the victims of Genocide.

Mr Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, representing the Secretary-General delivered opening remarks. Mr Adama Dieng, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide delivered a keynote speech and launched a one year appeal for the universal ratification of the Genocide Convention.

The panel featured Mr Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Armenia to the UN, Mr Jean-Claude Félix do Rego, Ambassador Permanent Representative of Benin to the UN, and Mr Martin Fode Seck, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the UN. Ms Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi, President of the International Criminal Court made remarks on the drafting of the Genocide Convention and its present challenges.

In his remarks Ambassador Zohrab Mnatsakanyan noted that ‘there is a strong symbolism in determining 9 December as the International Day. Reaffirming the significance of the Convention as an effective international instrument for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, UN General Assembly Resolution 69/323 linked the International Day to the date of the adoption of the Convention.

Ambassador Zohrab Mnatsakanyan further noted that “intolerance, xenophobia, racial and ethnic profiling,

glorification of hate crimes, especially lead and encouraged by the political leaders within a state should be a concern to the entire international community and serve a clear early warning sign of potential conflict and atrocity crimes”.

Stressing the importance of achieving universalization of the Genocide Convention, Ambassador Zohrab Mnatsakanyan recalled that Armenia had proposed to launch a global campaign for raising the awareness of the Convention and calling upon those states that have not acceded to the Convention to do so by its 70th anniversary. He added that Armenia endorses, fully supports and commits to work together with the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in launching a one year appeal for the universal ratification of the Convention by the end of 2018.

Representatives of UN member states, academic institutions, civil society organizations and media, as well as representatives of the Armenian-American community and school children attended the observance of the International Day.

The event was widely publicized in the UN. Background: Upon the initiative of Armenia, in September 2015, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 69/323 proclaiming 9 December as an International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. This landmark resolution followed up on resolution 28/34 of the UN Human Rights Council initiated by Armenia. The resolutions, which have led to the establishment of the Day, as well as the events held in its observance add to the continued efforts of Armenia to promote consolidated international action against the crime of genocide.



Lori-Berd: a Long Suffered Capital of Medieval Armenia



By
**Gourgen
Khazhakian**

**Chief
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In the village of Lori-Berd that is near town of Stepanavan, Armenia, within wonderful mountain landscapes, ruins of one of feudal Armenia's capitals - Lori-Berd ("fortress") can be found.

David Anhoghin of Kyurikian branch of Ani's **Bagratuni** Royal dynasty founded Lori-Berd as an inaccessible fortress town in the Gugark region of northern Armenia in 989-1048, and moved the Tashir-Dzoragetian Kingdom capital here from Samshvilde (Georgia).

the Bagratid's Kingdom.

The town stretched on a mountain plateau bordered by deep ravines of Miskhan and Dzoraget Rivers.

On this naturally inaccessible cape the town-shahastan (where the ruling Princes were residing) and the uptown were situated, and the suburbs were on mountain plateaus of Amrakits and Kendagegh.

The links between them were established by the bridge-roads crossing over Dzoraget and Mooshkana Rivers (from the first one the foundations are preserved on the left bank, the second one is completely preserved and was restored recently).

The uptown was situated in the pointed part of the cape and occupied a territory of 9 ha. It was reliably protected by the strong

West wall along which, from the outside, there had been a ditch which filled up with water through the underground channel. For protective purposes a secret water passage was also used. While coming down from the East-West edge of the uptown to the ravines of Miskhana River, in the final part it went through a steep tunnel and entered a round tower erected around the spring welling out from here.

In the territory of uptown ruins of several buildings could be seen. Among them there are two bath-houses. Shahastan with 25 ha territory stretched between the defensive walls of the uptown and the urban wall which stood 700m from the latter (signs of it preserved).

Besides those two main defensive walls, several additional walls existed in sur-



The investigations of extensive remains in the territory of the town showed that the choice of the place for foundation and the dislocation of its compound parts were similar to those of Ani, the capital of

and quite tall defensive wall - 21.4m high, stretching from one ravine to another and fastened more than once (in some places its width came up to 20m). The vaulted gates of uptown were situated in the East-

rounding ravines, mostly in some places that could be accessible to invaders.

In those very distant times the town of Lori-Berd had reputation of inaccessible fortress.

After having significant, if not tremendous losses, the hordes of Seljuk Turks led by **Emir Kizil** captured the town in 1105. During the rule of the famous Georgian King **David** the Builder, Lori became the part of Georgia (where the legendary (of the Armenian origin) **Orbelyan** Princely Family started).

During the reign of Georgian King Giorgi the III and after him - his daughter (famous) Queen **Tamara** Lori was transferred to the property of Armenian Prince **Sarkis Zakaryan**, accordingly, for his great merits before the court, and then it was inherited by his son – Amirspasalar (Commander-in-Chief) **Zakareh Za-**

terwhat it was under Russians).

Under Zakaryans active building was done there - the defensive walls were fastened bridges and other buildings were constructed.

The great importance of the Town during this time is evidenced by the convocation of all Armenian Churches in Lori, in which took part such outstanding personalities of Armenian Church as were **Mkhitar Gosh**, **Hovhannes Sana-hintsi** and others.

Unfortunately, the hordes of shah **Jalal-Eddin** in 1228 sieged the Fortress, and capturing the suburbs, destroyed them. But the invaders couldn't break the

the Town.

In the next centuries the inhabitants of Lori-Berd abandoned the Town. The last of them, because of problems with water supply and others, in 1925-1931 moved the Lori-Berd village (the smallest one already, - having a couple of hundreds residents by 2000s) to the west (about 20 km).

In the territory of the Town and in nearby area archeological excavations were made during 1966-67 and 1969-1973, with pieces from the Bronze and Early Iron Ages, also medieval times as an outcome. And the archeological research has been going on up to today.



karyan and his brother Ivaneh. When the Mongol hordes sieged the Fortress, Lori Berd was the capital of **Shahنشah**, **Zakareh's** son.

A rectangular roofed structure with various medieval tombstones and a couple of flanking khachkars (cross stones), has a shallow niche in the southern wall facing Mecca, a reminder of Muslim occupation of the Fortress till the 18th century. (Af-

terwhat it was under Russians).

Alas, in 1238 the Town was sieged again, - this time by hordes of Mongol khan **Jagat**. Capturing the town, they exposed it to merciless destruction.

Later on within some two centuries, Lori was transferred from one invader to another, including Georgians.

In 1430 foreign invaders again captured

Taking into consideration the historical and cultural role and significance and the necessity of further research and preservation of Lori-Berd, in 2010 the Armenian Govt. gave "Historical and Cultural Preservation of Lori-Berd" status to this area.

Materials from armeniapedia.org were used when preparing this publication

Elevating to Be Elevated

How India Promotes South-South Cooperation

By Ashot Gareginyan

Over 1 billion of people live today in India. Each of them has his own destiny, his responsibilities and his duty, which together is called 'Dharma', a term, the essence of which is so hard to understand for Europeans. People that live from Kashmir to Tamilnadu, from Bengal to Rajasthan are quite not similar to each other nor by the issue of ethnicity, nor religion, nor way of life, and nor even by manner of dressing. There are Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, Jains, Parses, Buddhists, many followers of various movements and sects, filling the whole of India. However, there is something in these people, without which none of them would be able to call India their home; something that is beyond personality, and is able to unite millions and millions of different people. This factor is the ability of individuals' self-consciousness as a whole nation with its ancient and rich culture.

Despite economic and political difficulties, shaking the world, India has succeeded in keeping internal unity, in overcoming intolerance and even hatred to each other, what we are witnessing today in various parts of the world. Many-sided partnership, developed in the framework of the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC), has been recognized as one of the most effective tools to achieve these goals.

Although the ITEC Day is not in the list of Indian state and national holidays, however, it is celebrated every year in the period from November to December, both in India and abroad. With some time, Armenia has not been an exception, too.

A colorful ceremony, including ITEC Day celebration and ITEC presentation, took place recently in Yerevan, by initiative of the Embassy of India in Armenia.

"ITEC was founded in September, 1964, as a bilateral cooperation programme. Since then, technical and economic cooperation has been considered to be one of the essential functions of an integrated and imaginative foreign policy. It helps to develop partnership,

aimed on mutual benefits, with a big number of developing countries", mentioned Yogeshwar Sangwan, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of India in RA.

According to him, already 161 partner countries in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Caribbean basin, as well as Pacific and Small Island countries are invited to share in the Indian developmental experience acquired over six decades of India's existence as a free nation. The ITEC Programme, fully funded by the Government of India, has evolved and grown over the years. As a result of different

activities under this programme, there is now a visible and growing awareness among other countries about the competence of India as a provider of technical know-how and expertise as well as training opportunities, consultancy services and feasibility studies. These programmes have generated immense goodwill and substantive cooperation among the developing countries. At present, more than 12,000 scholarships in different areas are offered annually.

Over 300 training courses were offered

during 2017 in about 70 different institutions, and over 1,500 civilian scholarships are designed to be offered within the framework of ITEC programs for 2017-2018 educational year. ITEC courses cover various spheres, such as public administration, election management, small and medium entrepreneurship, rural development, archaeology, intellectual property management, mid-career training civil service, etc.

As Yogeshwar Sangwan noted, ITEC courses not just equip involved participants with professional skills, but also prepare them for a rapidly globalizing world. "ITEC is a flagship programme for the capacity building efforts. It is a visible symbol of a weighty contribution to South-South cooperation", he added.

"Mr. Ambassador, how long the cooperation with Armenia within the framework of ITEC is going on?"



"It has been promoted already fifteen years. During this period, over 280 Armenians were already involved in the ITEC teaching programmes. Every year we now have 25 new scholars from your country on average, both from Yerevan and other regions".

"So, it could be said that India and Armenia are becoming close partners through ITEC?"

"Yes, sure. We keep feedback with the ITEC Armenian alumni, and we are pleased to note that after return they become specialists in demand, making a worthy contribution to the economic and social development of their motherland"

"Are there any restrictions for applicants?"

"Only one restriction: they must be from 25 to 45 years old"

"Thank you, India!"

As for the Armenian alumni, they unanimously express their joy for the opportunity to be involved in the ITEC curricula. Thus, Sophie Mosinyan, who was ITEC scholar in 2013, still terribly misses India. "I spent my training in the city of Ahmadabad", she tells, "and I cannot forget how our teachers were taking care of us every time. Thank for this programme, I got not only knowledge, but also a lot of friends - from Africa, South America, Vietnam". At present, Sophie works in the Coca Cola Bottlers Armenia Company as a procurement specialist. "What I studied in India, that is experience in statistical data collection, recording, and working with them, helps me a lot in my current work," Sophie says. "And if to speak about personal impressions, it occurred just in India that I have felt myself, not afraid of big words, an inhabitant of the Universe. Particularly, Taj Mahal simply shocked, it is something incredible, really. You can watch this mausoleum complex for hours, and every moment it is changing, like a sea".

Vardan Vardanian, employee of the Hayastan All-Armenian Foundation, says that ITEC training program helped him very much – and

continues to help – regarding creation of dialogue with state government bodies and local self-government bodies. The key rule is: you should elevate someone to become able elevated yourself. At the same time, it was a good chance to observe the inner life of such a huge country, as India is. "I was in Delhi", Vardanian tells, "a giant megalopolis, perhaps, like ten Armenias by population, if no more. Whole India is a huge fusion of cultures, languages (hundreds of languages with dialects!), religions, traditions. However, with all domestic differences, people

succeed in acting together, building democratic society. Perhaps, this is one of India's biggest lessons for the entire world".

Well, if such a multi-national and multi-religious country is able to strengthen its inner unity and go ahead, why mono-ethnic and mono-religious Armenia permanently faces problems? As they say, the question is quite not rhetorical...

ITEC another alumnus, Lilit Simonyan, interpreter and assistant of the India's Ambassador in Yerevan, commends the ability of Indian people of different nationality and confession to communicate easily with each other, to respect each other. "There I first saw Christians or Hindus, who took part, without any formality, in the ceremonies of other religions," Lilit says. "In this ocean of worldviews people are able to preserve the community, to be united in a single country. Truly, it is a priceless experience."

According to Lilit Simonyan, India has a special aura: if you are able to feel it, and India will admit you, then you will come back from there as a completely other person – filled with a powerful energy of good. "I still feel it," she confesses.

"So, India admitted you?"

"Yes, of course. So much admitted that I've got married there!"



Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

This is a time in which you may be studying something. It could be a new skill, a language (use the word broadly), or instead you may become the teacher or mentor for someone else. You need to let go and shift your attention to the arena of finances, particularly those you share with others.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

It is possible you will feel a sense of fatigue this week. Maybe something has caused you to be disappointed with yourself. Don't take the blues seriously or worry about yourself. In a few days you will feel much better. It is a temporary mood swing. Get some extra rest. Stay in touch with good friends.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Study the lead paragraph carefully, Twins. Mercury is your ruling planet and it is traversing your 7th house of partnership(s). This may be a time of misunderstandings and accusations. If you are wrong, don't attempt escape via lies. Given that Mercury is retrograde, you likely will confuse yourself.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

You have cause to feel proud of an accomplishment this week. Authority figures or others will be singing your praises. This is a good time to request favors of those who have a certain amount of power. The work environment is especially favorable now.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

This is a favorable week in general. There are positive aspects concerning any of the following: children, grandchildren, romance, creative works, travel, education, publishing, teaching, the church, the law, and the internet. That is a list to enjoy!



Virgo

(August 22–September 22)

Give attention to the lead paragraph because Mercury is your ruling planet. Your power of concentration is deep. It is important that you use it for the good in your life rather than in self-criticism and obstructive thinking. If you cannot stop the negative self-talk, then focus on something else that is totally neutral. Walk the dog. Wash dishes. Move your body to shift away from a debilitating thought.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

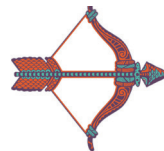
Speak and act with conscious intention around coworkers or with partners. It is possible that communications could go awry. Don't allow a misperception to ruin a week, or even a day. Discuss the misunderstanding immediately, if possible. The probability is that one of you does not have all the facts.



Scorpio

(October 23–November 21)

Mars, the warrior, enters your sign this week and will be traveling with you for seven weeks. This energy is especially helpful in defining our boundaries. Periodically we need to examine who we are as well as who we are not. Often something is eliminated. In general, it increases your courage and physical strength.



Sagittarius

(November 22–December 20)

You may be tempted to tell a fib to escape the wrath of someone who is stern and critical. Beg some time so you can think. It's easy to tell the fib, but Mercury is retrograding in your sign and you are likely to be caught at some point in the near future. Tell the truth with charm and apologies.



Capricorn

(December 21–January 19)

This is a good week to concentrate on a challenging mental project. It will work better for you if you are revising, editing, or itemizing details. If you are producing a creative work, you are likely to be overly critical of the outcome. The Critic may advise, but it should not be allowed to condemn your efforts.



Aquarius

(January 20–February 17)

This is a week loaded with conversations, and multiple contacts with others. It is possible that you are tracking down information that is a challenge to access. That which you seek is close at hand. Talk with a sibling or a neighbor who may know about it. Check your car for clues.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Protect your reputation at all costs. It is the most important resource that you have. It is possible that someone of minor power is piqued with a previous action or statement you made and is looking for revenge. It may not be warranted, but it is shrouded in secrecy. Be especially careful about your statements and maintain a squeaky clean attitude.

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Armenian Kochari dance inscribed in UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Armenian Kochari dance has been inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Kochari is a traditional dance that is widely performed throughout Armenia during holidays, festive celebrations, family ceremonies and other social events. It is open to all participants, irrespective of age, gender or social status.

Kochari provides a sense of shared identity and solidarity, contributes to the continuity of historical, cultural and ethnic memory, and fosters mutual respect among community members of all ages. It is transmitted through both non-formal and formal means, and is one of the rare traditional dances whose chain of transmission has never been interrupted.

Formal means of transmission include the inclusion of a 'folk song and dance' course in the curricula of comprehensive schools in Armenia since 2004, educational programmes in youth arts centres, increased visibility of the el-



ement through the internet and other media outlets, and institutional initiatives. Folk dance groups have also been active in various communities since the 1960s, and non-governmental organizations regularly hold dance classes.

Non-formal transmission occurs within families and through spontaneously

formed dance groups. Communities, groups and individuals are actively involved in ensuring the viability of the element, notably through the 'Our dances and we' initiative, which has been carried out since 2008, with experienced practitioners playing a key role in safeguarding efforts.

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