

## 9 Parties, Blocs Enter Armenian Parliamentary Race



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## President Sargsyan attends 11th Convention of the Homeland Defenders Voluntary Union



On February 18, President Serzh Sargsyan participated at the 11th Convention of the Homeland Defenders Voluntary Union (HDVU) which took place at the Karen Demirjian Sport and Concert Hall. At the Convention, President Sargsyan made welcoming remarks addressed to the participants and the guests.

### Statement of President Serzh Sargsyan at the 11th Convention of the Homeland Defenders Voluntary Union

Holy Fathers,  
Dear Combat Friends,  
Dear Brothers in Arms,

I salute the participants and guests of the 11th Convention of the Homeland Defenders Voluntary Union.

Homeland Defenders movement formed along with the development of our modern statehood and had an outstanding role in the defense of Artsakh and Armenia.

From that time on, the very name Homeland Defenders is used in singular as well as in plural and means a strong individual and a union of bright individuals.

The HDVU has formed traditions and principles at the origins of which was the founder and irreplaceable leader of the Union Vazgen Sarkissian. These traditions and principles are maintained and developed in step with the millennia-long march of our country and our society.

In our society, Homeland Defenders represent an entire stratum. It's a unique stratum in which the biography of its each member is intertwined with the biography of our coun-

try. It is intertwined with the history of liberating, defending and strengthening of our own country. In the end of the day, stories of the people present in this hall represent the collective history of our struggle and our victories.

When the country was in danger, farmers, intellectuals and workers had become the homeland defenders. You carried out your mission with honor. Today, from the decades' perspective we can confidently call your deeds a "historic mission". You came back to your peaceful work at the moment it became possible.

You came back with the pain of loss of your combat friends in your hearts but also with the understanding that the ceasefire, which the enemy was forced to accept, was not an ultimate peace yet. You came back with the understanding that there were still many things to do until the ultimate peace was established in our land and serenity reigned on our borders.

Dear Homeland Defenders,

This structure has been carrying out an important job and today too is working actively. You know the details better than I do, but I would like to stress particularly the important role which you have had in the military and patriotic education of our young people.

The bright youth we have today in Armenia is the product of the efforts made by our state and the entire society. The product created by the families but also by the participants of the Artsakh Liberation War, which means your personal example and that of your brothers in arms.

Any tree is judged against its fruits. Let all

disbelievers look and see, let them lay to rest their doubts. Our youth, the freedom loving and defiant generation of our independence, reasserts that our tree of life is healthy, strong, and abundant.

The Homeland Defenders have been living for decades under the motto "If necessary, we will go again to defend the Fatherland." It became necessary last year, in April. And you went again. Many of you now have grey hair, but you went and stood next to our young lion cubs. You went to share their burden but also to give a new spirit and resolve to the new but not less valiant defenders of our land.

For them at that time you already were "uncles". It never occurred to us during the Artsakh Liberation War. Now, I will address you just like our young soldiers address you.

Uncles,

Let no one doubt that we are devoted unconditionally to the task of defending our homeland, we are ready at any moment to stand at the frontline, in trenches together with our young soldiers, our regular army to defend our Fatherland, we are true to our pledge, and we are loyal to the bright memory of our fallen brothers in arms.

The Homeland Defenders Voluntary Union as a non-governmental organization has a unique status within our society. This fact speaks of your power, speaks of your organizational strength, unity, and a great reputation within the society.

Today Armenia stands at the threshold of a serious reformation and transformation. We are making a transition to the parliamentary model of governance and we have to make the transition painless. In the process, we also have to ensure stability and the rule of law.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to say that the Republican Party of Armenia at the elections will appear as a strong team, with the figures who, in the case they receive the vote of the people, are ready to speak from the podiums in Moscow, Brussels, Washington, through the leading mass media outlets and make the voice of the Republic of Armenia audible from every possible and impossible platform. They will be ready through the daily work to make the Constitution a reality and in any dispute to promote their credo through eloquence and willpower alone. They will not lie to people, will not say that one year from now Armenia will become a paradise, will not lie, will not tell that if they get your vote, they will give free gas and electrical power to our people, will not say



that young people will not be drafted to the Army. They will say things they can deliver. They will say that every day our country will make a step forward. We will participate in these elections with well-known individuals but actually a new team and its voice will be strong. By my directive and certainly by his own consent, we have included on that team also our esteemed general Manvel Grigorian. Besides his experience and personal qualities, he is also a prominent symbol for those who will tomorrow be elected to the National Assembly: each initiative, each statement and each voting, even a short remark will be done under the general's gaze which is an amalgam of the fight for freedom and commitment of our future victories.

Today some in Azerbaijan live under the illusion that Armenia preoccupied with the elections will be distracted and as a result – vulnerable. That hollow dreams may tempt the foe to make certain provocations.

Recently, the official Baku, which adores useless and short-lived PR actions and throws enormous money to the wind to carry them out, declared the Artsakh issue is Azerbaijan's "internal" affair. Unfortunately, peo-

ple have short memory. This kind of reasoning, which has neither legal nor moral base, once resulted in the escalation of the conflict and in the war with numerous unnecessary victims and suffering first of all for the people of Azerbaijan itself.

Many of you remember that at the beginning of 1990s, when in Azerbaijan ministers of defense were replaced every week, every single one of them viewed his duty to make a statement that in a week, or a couple of days later he would be drinking tea in Stepanakert. However, as the history shows, through the efforts of the heroic sons of our nation they didn't drink tea in Stepanakert, instead they lost the opportunity to drink tea in Aghdam, Fisuli, Jabrail, Kubatly, Karvachar, and other places.

We wish Azerbaijan no suffering, honestly, but will allow nobody to dream about causing suffering to our people.

The Artsakh issue is the Armenian people's business, the national cause: the future of Artsakh will be the way the people of Artsakh will decide, while we all – those present here and those outside this hall are standing like a rock behind our sisters and brothers in

Artsakh.

I see it as my duty to declare from the podium of this Conference that every provocation will receive a worthy response. Politics based on illusions have no future and cannot have. Last decades have proven that.

We stand on the premise of a true balance of forces. We are changing the reality making our country freer and more democratic, because we believe that as a result of these changes we will have more efficient governance. More efficient governance will in turn make us more competitive and more capable of defense.

Dear Homeland Defenders,

In conclusion, as always I urge you to keep the gunpowder dry – our struggle is not finished yet. I wish the Convention of the Homeland Defenders Voluntary Union the efficient and productive work.

I am confident that in the course of this Convention, the Homeland Defenders Voluntary Union will manifest state thinking peculiar to its members and sense of responsibility to carry on with honor the mission assumed by its founding chairman Vazgen Sargsyan.

Thank you.

## **9 Parties, Blocs Enter Armenian Parliamentary Race**

Armenia - Election officials test new electronic machines for voter identification at a polling station in Armavir province, 12Feb2017.

Five political parties and four blocs will compete for seats in Armenia's new parliament that will be elected on April 2, the Central Election Commission (CEC) said on February 17.

All of them submitted their lists of election candidates and other registration documents to the CEC just before the expiry of a legal deadline on Thursday evening.

"All submitted documents will be examined and as a result of that, a process of the registration of parties participating in the elections will be completed by February 26," the CEC chairman, Tigran Mukuchyan, told reporters.

With Armenia currently switching to a parliamentary system of government, the vote will determine who will govern the country after President Serzh Sargsyan serves out his second and final term in April 2018. Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) has made clear that it expects to retain control of the parliament.

The four other parties running for the parliament are Sargsyan's junior coalition partner, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), the Armenian Revival party formerly allied to the president, the Ar-

menian Communist Party and the pro-Western Free Democrats.

All of the four electoral alliances were formed recently. Two of them are led by businessman Gagik Tsarukyan, whose Prosperous Armenia Party boasts the second largest faction in the outgoing parliament, and former President Levon Ter-Petrosian. The latter has been in opposition to Sargsyan throughout his nine-year rule.

The HHK will also be challenged by the Yelk alliance of the pro-European Civil Contract, Bright Armenia and Republic parties as well as a bloc led by former Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian and former Foreign Ministers Vartan Oskanian and Raffi Hovannisian.

Under Armenia's Electoral Code enacted last year, the next National Assembly will be elected under a complex system of proportional representation. Armenians will be voting for not only parties and blocs but also individual candidates nominated by them in a dozen constituencies across the country.

According to the CEC, almost 1,200 candidates have been fielded in those constituencies and nearly 350 others will be running for the assembly on a national party-list basis.

The new parliament will have at least 101 seats. The parties and the blocs will have to win at least 5 percent and 7 percent of the

vote respectively in order to be represented in it.

Campaigning for the elections will officially start on March 5.

Virtually all national elections held in Armenia over the past two decades been marred by opposition allegations of serious fraud and criticized as flawed by Western monitors.

Under a landmark deal reached with the parliamentary opposition, the Armenian authorities enacted late last year a set of amendments to the Electoral Code aimed at preventing serious irregularities, notably multiple voting. In particular, they agreed to introduce electronic verification of voters' identity and live online broadcasts of voting in the majority of polling stations.

The United States and the European Union have allocated up to \$10 million for the purchase of relevant equipment. While welcoming the government-opposition deal, they have cautioned that these anti-fraud measures alone cannot guarantee the freedom and fairness of the vote.

"The elections will be free and fair only if the government demonstrates the political will to make them so, and if the political opposition and civil society act responsibly to safeguard the process," Richard Mills, the U.S. ambassador to Armenia, said on February 1.

## Minsk Group Co-Chairs: No alternative to a peaceful solution of the Karabakh conflict

The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Ambassadors Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, Stephane Visconti of France and Richard Hoagland of the United States of America) met on February 16 with the Foreign Minister of Armenia Edward Nalbandian and the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov, separately and then jointly. The Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, also participated in the meetings.

The Co-Chairs discussed with the Ministers the current situation along the Line of Contact and the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. The Co-Chairs reiterated that there is no alternative to a peaceful solution to the conflict and that war is not an option, and called upon the sides to exercise restraint on the terrain as well as in their public communications and to prepare their population for peace and not for war. The Co-Chairs also urged the Sides to adhere strictly to the 1994/95 ceasefire agreements that constitute the foundation of the cessation of hostilities. The Co-Chairs recalled the May 2011 joint statements of their Presidents in Deauville emphasizing that the use of force would only bring more suffering and devastation and would be condemned by the international community. The Co-Chairs shared their views with the Sides on the steps which should be taken toward implementing decisions from the 2016 Summits in Vienna and St. Petersburg aimed at stabilizing the situation in the conflict zone.

The Co-Chairs stressed to the Ministers the need to demonstrate greater flexibility and to resume comprehensive negotiations on reaching a lasting settlement as soon as possible.

The Co-Chairs recognized that the Armenian authorities' recent decision to return the body of an Azerbaijani serviceman was a helpful



humanitarian gesture. The two Ministers reiterated their commitment to strictly observe their international humanitarian obligations including those of the Astrakhan Declaration of October 2010 issued by the Presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation.

The Co-Chairs are aware that a so-called constitutional referendum is scheduled to take place in Nagorno-Karabakh on February 20, 2017. Although the Co-Chairs note that the de-facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities view the use of such a procedure as an effort to organize the public life of their population, they underscore again that no countries, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent and sovereign state. Accordingly, the Co-Chairs do not accept the results of the referendum on February 20 as affecting the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The Co-Chairs also stress that the results in no way prejudice the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh or the outcome of the ongoing negotiations to bring a lasting and peaceful settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Co-Chairs plan to travel to the region in March.

## Armenia and the European Union (UN) will sign framework agreement. The French Ambassador

Soon Armenia and the European Union (UN) will sign framework agreement which will meet both Armenia's and EU's requirements. On February 14, this was announced by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to Armenia Mr. Jean-Francois Charpentier during the meeting with journalists.

According to the Ambassador, there are still some points of disagreement around which the negotiations are taking place. In his words, within the framework of the EU-Armenia agreement, the issue of geographical indications, especially in the connection with the distribution of cognac and champagne in the European market, is not resolved yet.

"Naturally, this is very sensitive issue both for Armenia and France because it has important economic role, particularly in France the turnover of brandy annually consists of 3 billion euros, which is a very significant



number and cannot be ignored", - said Jean-Francois Charpentier, stressing that France has a principled position in the protection of its trademark, which except alcoholic beverages also extends to other products.

According to the Ambassador, last week in France, in connection with this issue a meeting between Armenian and French experts has taken place which will be followed

another meeting, this time at the level of European Union. The Ambassador expressed hope that at the result of these meetings the sides will reach to a common agreement.

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to Armenia also mentioned, that he pays close attention to the development of economic policy adopted by the Government of Armenia as the French side shows great interest in economic sphere.

"It is important to note, that in 2016 France gives Armenia assistance of \$ 20 million, that is the given assistance has increased 5 times and nowadays France considers to be the third country which gives assistance to Armenia after Germany and USA", - noted Jean-Francois Charpentier.

Referring to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the latter stressed, that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs do their best to create bases for dialogue on the Karabakh conflict again,



since there is no another solution except peaceful one.

However, the Ambassador believes that the solution of the Karabakh conflict is not in the hands of the OSCE Minsk Group, but de-

pends on political will of conflicting parties.

According to him, regularly recorded human losses on the contact line are not acceptable for both sides, so the situation can no longer continue in this way. Jean-François

Sharpantier added that France is willing to accept conflicting sides and contribute to the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

*Eliza Zakharyan, Noyan Tapan  
Translated by Sarah Melkonyan*

## **The Citizens should Vote for the Exit Alliance in Order to Change Country's current status quo. Edmon Marukyan**

The citizens should vote for Exit Alliance if they want to change the current status quo in the country. On February 16, this was announced by the leaders of Exit Alliance during the meeting with journalists. According to the President of the Lusavor Hayastan Party, Member of Parliament Edmon Marukyan, today's status quo is the accumulated problems of the last 25 years of independence.

"By saying to change the status quo I understand to change the corruption, sick political system, the uneven development of the country, the problems related to the rule of law, we have judicial system but do not have judicial authority, we have executive authority whose attaches become judicial and legislative authorities, mass violations of human rights, that is we come to change this situation", - he said.

E. Marukyan claims that he and MP Nikol Pashinyan have had one mandate in the Parliament but unlike many deputies, they were active

and used their power effectively.

According to him, his and Nikom Pashinyan's activity has never been created artificially. "On behalf of myself I can present the facts whom I have helped. People mainly referred to me for legal matters, I have been protected the rights of hundreds of people, so I have used my mandate as efficiently as possible."

The member of Civil Contract Party, MP Nikol Pashinyan's opinion the citizens who believe that Armenia can become safe and prosperous country should vote for the Exit Alliance.

Moreover, the leaders of the Exit Alliance see Armenia as an industrial country in the future.

*Eliza Zakharyan, Noyan Tapan  
Translated by Sarah Melkonyan*

## **Shahin Mirzoyev: I fled Azerbaijan to escape death**

Talysh journalist Shahin Mirzoyev has participated in a conference in Yerevan titled "Breaking the Siege of Stepanakert: 25 years later."

Mirzoyev, a correspondent of the "Talysh Sado" newspaper, fled Azerbaijan to Armenia a few days ago due to persecutions against religious and ethnic minorities.

"There are about 2 mln Talysh people living in Azerbaijan, and they are actually seen as enemies of the state. They are deprived of the opportunity to raise their issues on mass media," Mirzoyev said, addressing the conference.

According to him, about 300 thousand Talyshis have fled to Russia and then moved to other countries over the past years.

"Talyshs are being arrested and persecuted in Azerbaijan. I've just fled Azerbaijan with my family to escape death. I think I was not mistaken to come to Armenia," Mirzoyev said.

## **NATO Defense Education Enhancement Program Expert Group visits Armenia**

On February 15, the expert group from the NATO Defense Education Enhancement Program (DEEP) visited the National Defense Research University (NDRU), MoD, RA. President of the NDRU, Doctor of Political Science, Professor, Lieutenant-General Hayk Kotanjian welcomed the guests. He highlighted the support provided by the NATO expert group for the defense education reforms underway in Armenia.

Professor Hayk Kotanjian noted that the target of the Second Strategic Defense Review (SDR) of the RA, launched in 2014, is the review of the National Security Strategy (NSS) of the RA. This work will be implemented through the adoption of the National Cybersecurity Strategy (NCS) of the RA based on the Draft NCS, which was developed at the NDRU and reviewed by the experts of the U.S. National Defense University (NDU) and the NATO PfP Consortium's Working Group on Cyber Security Reference Curriculum Writing.

NDRU's Vice President for Research, Head of the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) of the NDRU, PhD in History, Beniamin Poghosyan presented the

University's main activities and work done after the visit of the expert group in March, 2016. Head of the Center for National Security Policy and Information-Communication Technologies of the NDRU Arman Grigoryan presented the main results of the Center's activities.

The coordinator-consultant of the NDRU's educational activities, Doctor of Political Science, Professor Arthur Atanesyan presented the work done aimed at launching the Interagency Executive Education Certificate and Master Programs. The steps taken towards the organization of strategic-operational-level military education in the NDRU, suggested by the NATO DEEP experts in March 2016, were also touched upon. The Head of the Academic-Educational Center of the NDRU's National Institute for Strategic Defence Security Education Anna Gevorgyan presented the main activities of the Center.

The presentations were followed by Q&A session and a professional discussion ensued. At the end, the NATO DEEP expert group expressed satisfaction with the visit.

## Armenia placed 33<sup>rd</sup> in 2017 Index of Economic Freedom

Armenia is placed 33rd among 186 countries and is ranked as a “mostly free” country in the 2017 Index of Economic Freedom, an annual guide published by The Heritage Foundation. The Index covers 10 freedoms – from property rights to entrepreneurship.

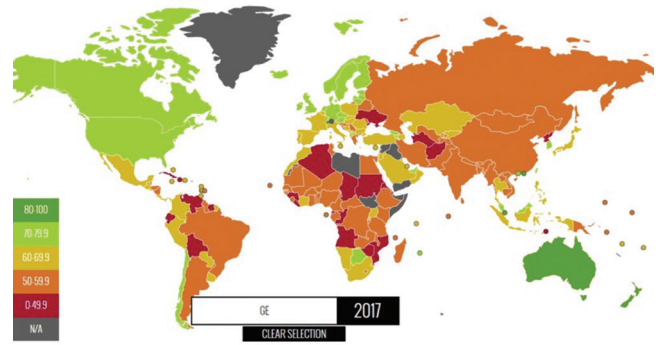
Other countries in the region are placed as follows: Georgia 13th, Turkey – 60th, Azerbaijan 68th, Iran – 155th.

Armenia’s partners in the Eurasian Economic Union Russia and Kazakhstan are ranked 114th and 42nd respectively, Belarus is 104th, Kyrgyzstan is 89th.

Hong Kong tops the list, followed by Singapore and New Zealand.

“Considerable diversification of Armenia’s economic base has increased economic dynamism, and a decade of strong economic growth has reduced poverty and unemployment rates. Broad simplification of business procedures has facilitated regulatory efficiency. After years of expansionary fiscal policies, efforts have been made to limit the cost of government through more prudent management of public finance,” the report reads.

“Armenia performs relatively well in many categories of economic



freedom, but more reforms are needed to enhance judicial independence and government transparency. Despite progress in tackling corruption, particularly in the tax and customs administrations, close relationships within political and business circles raise concerns about cronyism and undue influence,” The Heritage Foundation said.

## Swiss Companies Consider Armenia as a Good Opportunity for Making Investments

Armenia continues to remain in the centre of attention of Swiss companies as a good opportunity for making investments. This was mentioned by the Ambassador of Switzerland to the Republic of Armenia Lukas Gasser during his press conference on February 10.

According to the Ambassador, the last two-year statistical data shows that Switzerland is in the first place among the row of foreign investors in Armenia. “The investments of Swiss private companies in Armenia are quite significant. Very often, when it comes to economic cooperation, its integral part also consists of development-oriented cooperation with Armenia, and in this term Switzerland is one of the most important partners of Armenia,”- said Lukas Gasser.

According to Lukas Gasser, Switzerland has become an important centre due to its long-term stability which is an important condition in terms of economic development. Lukas Gasser also noticed that during the last 25 years Armenia has also reached to a reasonable level of stability but it is not well recognizable and visible from this point of view and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a serious challenge.

According to the Ambassador, Switzerland exports ten times more goods to Armenia than Armenia does to Switzerland, whereas there are a number of Armenian



products that Lukas Gasser would like to buy from the Swiss stores. Specifically, he mentioned a few of them: “I would like to enjoy Armenian honey, Sevan trout, tomatoes, apricots and other products in Switzerland. Let’s work towards this.”

Referring to the cooperation results between the two countries, Lukas Gasser recalled that in 2016 Switzerland concluded visa facilitation contract and a number of questions related to investments, as well as further economic and political cooperation have been discussed during his meeting with the prime-minister Karen Karapetyan that took place the week before.

In the context of political cooperation, the Ambassador highlighted Switzerland’s

commitment to the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to the maintenance of the ceasefire agreement signed in 1994.

“We offer our services which have traditionally been one of the priorities of Swiss foreign policy. In 1996 and 2014, when Switzerland was chaired by the OSCE, we were intensively involved in the process of normalization of the relations between Armenia and its neighbors,”- said the Ambassador, adding that the stable and permanent solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict stems from Armenia’s economic and political interests.

*Eliza Zakharyan, Noyan Tapan  
Translated by Sarah Melkonyan*



## Armenia sends 40 tons of humanitarian aid to Syria

Armenia has sent 40 tons of humanitarian aid to Syria.

“This is the second time Armenia is sending aid to the friendly people of Syria upon the instruction of President Serzh Sargsyan,”

Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan told reporters at the airport.

The cargo will be delivered in cooperation with Russia, the Minister said. “There was an offer from our Russian partners to combine

efforts within the framework of the CSTO. Armenia responded to the proposal and initiated the delivery of this humanitarian aid,” Minister Sargsyan said.

He said the cargo includes consumer goods and food. He thanked the Russian side for providing cargo planes to transport the aid.

“This is important to us, as Armenia has felt the significance of international humanitarian aid on many occasions. This is especially important in case of the friendly people of Syria, considering that Syria opened its doors to Armenians, who fled the genocide in the Ottoman Empire a century ago,” Vigen Sargsyan said.

He voiced hope that peace would be re-established in Syria as soon as possible. “Before that will try to support the people of Syria to the best of our abilities,” the Minister said.

The Minister added the aid would be equally distributed among all in need irrespective of nationality.

The plane has already landed in Syria.



## Karapetyan vows large-scale investments In 2017



Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan reiterated on February 15 his government's pledges to help to inject hundreds of millions of dollars into Armenia's economy and public infrastructure this year.

Karapetyan said the recently reshuffled government has received 471 investment proposals from private firms, various government ministries and local communities across the country. The government considers 345 of those projects worth a combined \$3.2 billion to be “realistic” and thinks that at least \$830 million of the required sum can be invested in 2017, he said.

“Those programs have sources of funding and partners,” Karapetyan told students at Yerevan State University. “They will be financed from different sources, including the Armenian state budget, community budgets and the private sector.”

He did not specify those sources or single out major beneficiaries of the planned investments.

“I also want to inform you that apart from those [projects worth]

\$3.2 billion the government is now considering 79 other projects worth \$5.3 billion,” added the premier. “We are paying special attention to this issue because there is an impression that it is impossible to invest, make money, seek profits in Armenia.”

With Armenia's entire state budget for 2017 equivalent to less than \$3 billion, the bulk of the large-scale investments repeatedly promised by Karapetyan in recent weeks would clearly come from private and foreign sources.

The issue was apparently high on the agenda of his January 25 talks in Moscow with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. Karapetyan said after the talks that Medvedev backed his proposal to create a Russian-Armenian “investment fund” that would finance business projects in Armenia.

Karapetyan, 53, lived and worked in Russia from 2011-2016, holding senior positions in Russian subsidiaries of the Gazprom state-run energy giant. He had previously managed Armenia's gas distribution network owned by Gazprom.

During his visit to Moscow, Karapetyan also met with more than three dozen Russian businesspeople of Armenian descent. In an ensuing joint statement, the entrepreneurs expressed readiness to “participate in joint initiatives and business projects with the Armenian government.” They also voiced “full support” for “profound reforms” planned by Karapetyan's cabinet.

The signatories included the Armenian-born billionaire Samvel Karapetyan (no relation to the prime minister) who already has extensive business interests in Armenia.

Foreign direct investment in Armenia has rapidly declined in the last few years. According to the National Statistical Service, it shrunk by almost half in January-September 2016, to \$93 million.

*By Emil Danielyan*

## President Sargsyan Meets with the Leadership of the Armed Forces

The President of Armenia, Commander-in-Chief of the RA Armed Forces Serzh Sargsyan on Monday 20 February at the RA Ministry of Defense met with the participants of the operative meeting of the leadership of the RA Armed Forces. The purpose of the meeting was through the meetings and lectures to familiarize the officials of the Republic with the priorities of Armenia's domestic and foreign policy, tendencies of development within the Army, to discuss issues related to the cooperation between the Ministry of Defense and RA law enforcement structures, to exchange experience as well as through the specialized seminars to enhance knowledge and skills of the generals, officers, and special civil servants in the areas of tactics, operative expertise, army management, and functional duties, to form a collective perspective and viewpoints among the officials related to the combat readiness of the Army and continued enhancement of the state defense capabilities.

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### President Serzh Sargsyan's remarks at the operative meeting of the leadership of the RA Armed Forces (Essential extracts)

...I would like to talk about the issues related to the public and national security agenda. These issues are necessary to organize properly the national defense of the Republic of Armenia. Issues related to the public security in the Republic of Armenia do not belong directly to the realm of responsibilities of the leadership of the Armed Forces. However, you all are citizens of the Republic of Armenia and from that very

point of view, I see as important clarification of that issues with you.

Our immediate external milieu is complex, intricate, often very contentious and inexplicable. However, it doesn't mean that we have simply to adjust to all that and sit on our hands, wait and see what surprises are coming our way.

I've said it before and I repeat it now: the mindset that we are doomed to failure as long as the Karabakh issue remains unresolved and the blockade imposed by Turkey is not lifted, is unacceptable.

*Our internal failings are not creat-*

enter fully into law, that position will be reserved for the wartime period only.

...After long deliberations, we came to the conclusion that for us to form such a "cohabitation" would be a rather lengthy process, and I am sorry to say, but unfortunately, is still unattainable. You all know that semi-solutions are usually imposed and the worst possible solutions, thus it was necessary to find and present a comprehensive solution.

In accordance with the new Constitution, our country makes a transition to the parliamentary model of governance. The authorities and capabilities

of the prime minister with regard to national security and defense will become much broader than those assigned to the current president – Commander-in-Chief by the current semi-presidential system. The objective is this: to concentrate in one place responsibilities and the authority... Thus, we have eliminated the possibility of an unhealthy



*ed by the Turks of Azeris.* They have nothing to do with the flaws in our state governance and they are not their faults.

The organization of our public life and good governance are issues of national security. Flawed governance has a direct impact on the national security and defense capability of the country.

For that very reason, we initiated the process of **constitutional reforms**. With that, our country has entered a stage of critical changes which should become immediately discernable for you and your families. I know that many of you are concerned with the fact that as a result of the changes to the Constitution, in the absence of the state of martial law, there will be no Commander-in-Chief. Yes, starting from 2018, when the new Constitution will

competition between the president and prime minister created by the "cohabitation". I believe this is extremely important.

These changes will not impact your work in any way, even if they do, only positively. With this regard you will feel no negative changes...

...From the view point of the organization of the national defense and governance this change, as I have already said, will have only a positive impact. ***The Armenian state will continue to cherish and relish its indispensable and beloved child – the Armenian Army.***

...Now, about the upcoming events for the next two to three months. We have entered the phase of the National Assembly elections. Yes, there will be



heated discussions in our country in the pre-election period, sometimes there can be even exaggerated and inflated speeches... I am sure many of you know and heard the well-known saying that people never lie so much as after a hunt, or before an election. ...The important thing is that we know from the experience of previous years that in times such as these Azerbaijan intensifies its anti-Armenian handlings in the international organizations, and even tries to make provocations at the frontline. Some indications of such attitude on their behalf become visible already.

...I would like to stress that *the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia are non-partisan and apolitical*. It is true that the Minister of Defense **Vigen Sargsian** heads the electoral roll of the Republican Party but there will be no overlap of his official duties and pre-election campaign.

...We, as a state, are able to self-organize and conduct elections which will have the trust of our public and our people.

...Some in Azerbaijan live under the illusion that Armenia preoccupied with the elections will be very busy and in their wretched minds – vulnerable. For that very reason, in this period of time I require you to be exceptionally alert.

I am confident that our troops..., in the period of the upcoming elections will be alert and watchful, ready to thwart any of treacherous designs of the foe.

## ...Regional problems:

At this moment, I see no reason to believe that there can be a breakthrough in the negotiations aimed at the peaceful resolution of the **Nagorno Karabakh** issue. Under such circumstances, the military balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the only way to maintain stability and fragile peace.

The official Baku is trying incessantly to accuse us of trying to prolong the established status-quo. It is not true. I would like to assure you all, that we really want the problem to be solved however the reality is like this: the Azeris propose solutions which are unacceptable for us, that's the reason the issue is not solved. When they finally

understand what kind of solution can become a reality, that very moment the problem will be solved. That's the reason Azerbaijan every now and then resorts to minor and major provocations, escalating the situation at the frontline, to remind us and the international community of their existence.

Such propaganda devices are useless and are doomed to failure. Our position is the following: the existing ceasefire cannot be substituted with a ceasefire which will have worse conditions. We need to negotiate and create a solid base for the normal contacts between our two peoples and for peace.

Yes, the parties to the conflict should negotiate over a durable, reliable peace based on the checkable mechanisms. The first true step in that direction might be a diligent implementation of the **agreements reached during the Vienna and Saint Petersburg meetings** last year. But unfortunately, the leadership of Azerbaijan is not averse to assuming responsibilities at the highest level and rejecting them on the next day.

It is necessary to transform the ceasefire into peace but it will never take place as a result of unilateral concessions. We assess the situation realistically and do not expect unilateral concessions from Azerbaijan. We demand in return that the leadership of Azerbaijan understands that simple, rather to say very primitive issue.

Thus, we will spare no effort to maintain the balance of forces; we have no reason to enter into an arms race with Azerbaijan. Let Azerbaijan compete with its own ambitions. However, we will continue to build capabilities which will allow the efficient organization of defense as well as a pronounced response to the foe's possible aggression.

For the vital activities of the two peoples, under the existing conditions the military balance is simply indispensable. Based on this balance, it is possible to negotiate over the peace. Attempts to tip the scales is simply pregnant with the danger of provoking new military actions.

...I am filled with pride when I meet with my foreign colleagues as well as ministers of foreign affairs and de-

fense who commend the **Armenian peace-keepers**. I am thankful to the Armenian servicemen...

**The military alliance of Armenia and Russia** is one of the most important elements of Armenia's security. It has a very rich history and traditions because the Armenian and Russian soldiers never stood against each other in the trenches.

Nevertheless, no military alliance can be based on the emotions only. This alliance is based on the mutually realized common interests and necessity.

It is indispensable for maintaining stability in this region. Armenia will continue to carry out diligently all her responsibilities with regard to the Armenian-Russian alliance as well as in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

I want you all to understand clearly that yes, there take place developments in the framework of the **CSTO**, activities, statements which are not to our liking, but actions of this or that leader or representative of the CSTO member state or statements or their demeanor in general can never become a reason for us to say that Armenia's membership to the CSTO has lost its necessity. It is simply unacceptable.

At the same time, we will continue to form a vibrant positive agenda with the **NATO** and its member states aimed at the strengthening of the international peace and security. These are all important factors to thwart the unfriendly, not to say hostile policy of our another neighbor – **Turkey** towards Armenia.

Among recent good news has been the agreement reached over **Iran's** nuclear program. We need to follow developments on this direction with the utmost attention. Without overestimating our capabilities, we need to consistently encourage the parties of this agreement to implement truthfully their responsibilities.

Within her abilities, Armenia should bring her contribution to the strengthening of the regime of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. With this regard, I believe we are all concerned with the developments going on at the **Korean** peninsula.

## Bill on criminalization of genocide denial submitted to Argentine Parliament

*Agencia Prensa Armenia* – Deputy Nilda Garre submitted a bill to criminalize denialism in Argentina this week, a project that would include the Armenian Genocide denial. Garre confirmed the news in an interview with Prensa Armenia.

The project, which is based on the legislation of a number of European countries, plans to include in the Criminal Code the criminalization to anyone who “publicly denied, minimized, justified and/or approved any form of genocide or crimes against humanity.”

The proposal claims to be compatible with freedom of expression “when justified in protecting the rights of victims, in maintaining public order or national security, or to prohibit the apology of hatred and violence.”

Nilda Garre is a Deputy of the Front for Victory party. She was Minister of Defense during the term of late President Nestor Kirchner and was later appointed Minister of Security under the mandate of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. Garre is currently the Argentine Representative for the Organization of American States.

The project arose in the context of statements of two officials of the current government, who issued denial statements about the genocide committed by the last Argentine military dictatorship, and that the country’s judiciary has already determined that those were crimes against humanity.

“The National Congress passed Law 26,199 in 2006 recognizing



the genocide of which the Armenian people were victims. Consequently it is clear that this is included in the project we propose,” said Nilda Garre in an interview with Prensa Armenia.

When asked about the recent visit of Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to Argentina, she said that “I am not clear how Turkey could react. What I do know is that the Argentine Republic is a sovereign nation and the National Congress is the representation of one of its powers.

## Who did this? The truth behind Azerbaijani lies about Khojalu

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Khojalu events. In the course of the 25 years Azerbaijan has been distorting the events of February 26-28, 1992, using them for its propaganda purposes.

A new video uploaded on YouTube on February 12 comes to shed light on and disprove the Azeri lies.

It is noted in the video that Commission of the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan completed the investigation into the events in Khojalu, but failed to reveal anything. It says all witnesses died under different circumstances, “but the accusations of military journalist Chingiz Mustafayev are still there.”

“As we know, Mustafayev has blamed and will continue to blame certain people for the tragedy,” the narrator says in the film.

Chingiz Mustafayev also features in the video. “I have one goal – to do my best to have this program reach the public. I have to tell the truth about Khojalu,” he says.

The reporter recalls the shootings at the site of the tragedy. Mustafayev was banned from the site under the excuse that the territory was under Armenian fire. However, he managed to reach there in a helicopter meant to transport the bodies.

Mustafayev filmed the scene twice. When he arrived at the place for the first time, he

saw corpses on the ground, with armed people freely walking between the bodies and lugging them. They escaped, when they saw the camera.

“Definitely, they were not Armenian. Where were they taking the corpses?” the reporter asks.

When shooting the scene a day later, Mustafayev saw the corpses were mutilated. “Who has done all this in one day? I shot the scene yesterday, there was nothing of a kind here,” the journalist is heard saying in the film.

“As you see the corpses were initially not mutilated, but the second shooting was organized for the “international community.” Look what has happened to the bodies,” one can hear in a voiceover commentary. The narrator comments on the pictures of the corpses, where the same people are pictured twice; the corpses are seen mutilated in the second ones).

“Question: who did this in one day? There are many questions, but the time is short,” the narrator concludes.

Commenting on the video, Spokesman for the NKR President David Babayan said “Chingiz Mustafayev was one of the first to visit the site.

“He actually proved that the massacre had been organized by representatives of the Azerbaijani authorities, the so-called Pop-

ular Front, representatives of the Azerbaijani army who supported the Popular Front against the then President Araz Mutalibov,” David Babayan told Public Radio of Armenia.

Military journalist Chingiz Mustafayev died under unknown circumstances on June 15, 1992. According to the official Azerbaijani version, he was felled by mortar fire while filming an exchange of fire between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces near the village of Nakhichevanik.

It’s clear, however, that the new authorities of Azerbaijan silenced this source of true information about the crimes against their own people. “Naturally, the Azerbaijani authorities had their plans concerning such people. Mustafayev exclusively filmed the scene a few hours after the tragedy and a few days later. The differences between the two shootings are obvious,” he said.

David Babayan reminds that Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov also confessed that the massacre had been organized by Azerbaijan within the framework of domestic political struggle. According to the Spokesman, the video should supplement the large package of documentary materials on Khojalu events “in order to reveal the Azeri lies and prevent similar inhumane crimes in the future.”



## Azerbaijan unhappy with Francois Hollande's statement on self-determination for Karabakh



An Azerbaijani lawmaker blames France for pro-Armenian position and urges to send a note to Paris over President Francois Hollande's recent statement on Nagorno Karabakh.

MP Azay Guliyev on Tuesday criticized French President Hollande's latest comments on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, calling on Baku to send a note of protest to Paris. He believes "France supports Armenia in violation of the norms of international law."

Addressing the Parliament's plenary sitting, the MP described Hollande's recent statement on self-determination for Karabakh as a "non-constructive" step.

He said "France is a country which has the closest relationship with Armenia" and noted that French citizens constitute the majority of those visiting Nagorno Karabakh.

The comments come after French President Francois Hollande's remarks at the annual dinner with the Coordinating Council of the Armenian Organizations of France. Addressing the meeting Francois Hollande announced plans to discuss the Karabakh issue with Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan during the latter's visit to

France in March. He emphasized the urgency of finding a way out of the conflict "because the murderous clashes that occurred during those terrible days of April 2 to 5 remind us that deaths are reported in Nagorno-Karabakh almost every day."

"So we have to act. We must act, first of all, to stop hostilities when they happen – this is what we did with our Russian and American partners: there was a halt to the fighting, the opening of a dialogue, a truce. But we cannot be satisfied with a truce, because the ceasefire is not the solution. We must open real negotiations for the resolution of the conflict. It would be a serious mistake, once again, to consider that the situation has stabilized. We need to find elements of conflict resolution. We know them; they have been fixed; these are the Madrid principles – I will not state them here – but we know that they will lead, if they are applied, to the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh," Hollande stated, in part.

"This was the first time a President of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing country declares that if applied, the Madrid Principles will lead to the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh," said Kayts Minasyan, analyst at the Center of Strategic Studies of France, said in an interview with Public Radio of Armenia. According to him, no President had done it before.

"President Hollande spoke about the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination, without even referring to the other ones. Surely, other principles are also included in the Madrid Principles, but he didn't speak about territorial integrity," said Minasyan, who was present at the dinner.

Commenting on Azerbaijan's anger over the statement, the expert said: "Azerbaijan has recently suffered three defeats on the diplomatic fields. First, France's current Interior Minister is on Azerbaijan's black list for having visited Nagorno Karabakh two years ago. The second defeat was President Hollande's statement. The third defeat was the refusal of the French Court to accept a complaint from Azerbaijan against MP Francois Rochebloine, a friend of Armenians."

## Human Rights Watch: Armenia's new strategy to help those in pain

Armenia is taking an important step towards ending the suffering of cancer patients, Giorgi Gogia, Human Right Watch Director for South Caucasus, Europe and Central Asia Division, has said.

"The government recently adopted a national strategy to introduce palliative care services, which focuses on treating pain and other physical symptoms, and provides psychosocial support for people with life-limiting illnesses. The strategy specifies reforms in policy, education, and medicines' availability, and designates the responsible state institutions," he said.

The strategy recognizes the need to amend regulations restricting access to pain relief medications, and the government plans to review them in 2018. But thousands of cancer patients in Armenia have waited long enough.

"Armenian authorities should urgently overhaul the regulations and promptly take the necessary steps to ensure that



cancer patients can get the pain treatment they need – and to which they have the right," Giorgi Gogia noted.

## The Day of the Restoration of the State of Lithuania Celebrated in Yerevan with a Unique Concert



**Gourgen Khazhakian**

**Chief Correspondent**

On the Occasion of the Day of the Restoration of the State of Lithuania the Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the Republic of Armenia H.E. Mr. **Erikas Petrikas** and Mrs. **Ilona Petrikienė** invited for a concert performed by Lithuanian soprano **Hasmik Grigorian** and pianist **Feliks Zakrevskij** that was followed by reception held in the evening of Thursday, February 16, 2017 as usual, at the Arno Babajanyan Philharmonic Small Concert Hall.

Two dates in the 20th century on which Lithuania declared the re-establishment of her Independence. We speak of RE-ESTABLISHMENT as opposed to establishment, since Lithuania was independent state in earlier times.

As the day approaches, you ask yourself a question - what does the date mean to me as a Lithuanian citizen of the 21st century?

For sure, for the 20 founding fathers of Modern Lithuanian State it was as an act of bravery to sign the Declaration of Independence on this particular day 99 years ago, thus proclaiming the restoration of Independent Lithuania as a democratic republic within its ethnographic borders and free of any official obligations ever undertaken with other states.

For the first time since the Middle Ages the

tions to Siberia, resistance fights by our partisans which ended only in 1953. Throughout all those 50 years of occupation the 16th of February was secretly commemorated by dissidents and Lithuanian Catholic Church who risked their lives to keep alive the flame of freedom.

My own generation, although still aware of the soviet rule, was formed by the independence movement "Sąjūdis" of 1988-1990s, until the breakthrough from the Soviet Union and a comeback to the European family in 2004. The 16th of February for me personally means an honor and duty to serve as a Lithuanian diplomat and greet you - all Lithuanian friends in Armenia - today.

Now, my son's generation takes our independence and freedom for granted, as if it has been this way for ages. But nothing is for



Below The Highlights readers can find Ambassador's remarks:

"Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you here tonight on the occasion of the 99th anniversary of the re-establishment of our Independence. In Lithuania and throughout the world Lithuanians celebrate the 16th of February 1918 and the 11th of March 1990.

Lithuanians were again masters of their own destiny. Lithuanian language became the official language. Out of the ashes of the First World War they built a flourishing market economy with a stable currency during what was to be a tragically short period of independence until 1940.

My parents' generation was the one that witnessed occupations - first, by Germany, then by soviets followed by massive deporta-

granted and nothing is as fragile as freedom. It comes at a very high price and cannot be forgotten.

Quite often for our some friends Lithuania is mildly mocked as a state of certain phobias toward some of its neighbors. Why? The other day I came across the lines that answered the question. Most probably since Middle Ages we have a mentality of a FORTRESS. We will defend ourselves till the last drop of



blood, and fight for freedom in an issue of life and death to us. Probably, we never had a luxury to fight a war of choice (as it is often a case nowadays) where you may or may not engage into a war. Always being at the main European crossroads, we had no other choice but to defend ourselves, thus freedom and independence play a very special, dramatically different role in our live and in our history.

Now, moving to a cultural part of this evening, I am happy to introduce to dear Armenian public and friends a Lithuanian opera diva Hasmik Grigorian who has also Armenian roots. Her late father, Gegham Grigorian, was a prominent Armenian and Lithuanian opera star soloist, Artistic Director of Speniaryan National Opera and Ballet Theatre. We are really very honored that despite their busy schedule, Hasmik and pianist Feliks Zakrevskij decided to celebrate this 16h of February in Yerevan.

Lastly, my sincere thanks go to the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Armenia Mr. Armen Amiryan, the Director of Arno Babajanyan Concert Hall Mr. Gagik Manasyan and their teams for their wholehearted support to our event".

The concert program included a multicultural variety of pieces: Lithuanian ones such as Dalia's aria from opera "Dalia" by

B. Dvarionas, "Today My Soul Feels Festive" by J. Tallat-Kelpa and indeed a work by great Ciurlionis – "Prelude", Russian – Three Songs by Rachmaninov and a song by Tchaikovsky, Italian – arias from Puccini's operas, Czech – by A. Dvorak and indeed the Armenian ones: Anoush aria from "Anoush" opera by A. Tigranyan and "Kroonk" (The Crane) by the great Komitas.



To say that the concert was a success means to say nothing 'cause it was a NON-STOP STANDING OVATION by audience in jam-packed hall!

Speaking to you author after concert, Hasmik Grigorian said that simply she could not refuse invitation to come to Armenia by Ambassador Petrikas as, in her own words, "he has been a very good friend in both sorrow and joy". Coming back to her Armenian roots, she said she's kept her Armenian iden-

tity thanks to her father, a world-know opera singer **Gegham M. Grigorian** of the blessed memory.

In his brief interview with The Highlights **Konstantine G. Orbelian**, the Artistic Director/Acting Director of the Armenian Natl Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre said that, first, he was impressed by speech of the Ambassador, and, second, by the concert indeed.

Maestro Orbelian informed this author that some two years a CD was released that included duet of **Dmitry Khvorostovsky** - Hasmik Grigorian accompanied by Moscow Chamber Orchestra conducted by K. Orbelian, and also they gave several concerts in Zagreb, St.-Petersburg, Moscow.

According to Orbelian, technical data of Hasmik allow her to have a full suppleness, freedom.

And such a freedom, - independent from any technical capacity, with no sign of "fear" is a very rare thing for many and many performers, Maestro Orbelian stressed.

He added that they've agreed with Hasmik Grigorian already for a solo concert in late April, and her collaboration with the Armenian opera and Ballet Theatre has very promising prospects.

## News from the Youth Orchestra: A Saturated Week...

**Sergey Smbatyan:**

**We make recordings, digitize and pass to the future generations the best pieces by the Armenian composers**

The 8th Armenian Composers' Art Festival was launched on February 15. Earlier, on February 13, a press conference dedicated to the festival took place at the multimedia press center of Sputnik Armenia. During the event the organizers spoke about the main aim of the festival, the concert programs and the general activities carried out under this initiative.

The Armenian Composers' Art Festival is held under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Armenia. It is organized by the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia, with the support of the Ministry of Culture. The very festival is dedicated to the 120th anniversary of the Armenian composer Haro Stepanyan and is entitled "Haro Stepanyan-Fest".

During the conference the composer **Vardan Ajemyan** stressed the importance of the initiative. "A wonderful initiative, we should appreciate our great composers! Haro Ste-

panyan is a great composer, who has created pieces in rather different genres but, unfortunately, his musical heritage is being forgotten. The initiative of the Youth Orchestra is an excellent one. Thanks to it we will be presented compositions not only by Haro Stepanyan, but also the ones by the contemporary composers. The main aim of the festival is to reveal and create musical values. Undoubtedly this year we will witness such a miracle!".

**Armine Ghazaryan**, the Head of the Department of Contemporary Art of the Ministry of Culture of RA noted the importance of the festival, which aims to preserve the continuity of the Armenian composer's art.

"Once again we have the opportunity to present the works by contemporary compos-

ers, celebrate their anniversaries. During the 5 concerts the Armenian and world premieres will be presented", – Armine Ghazaryan said. She also stressed the importance of the activities carried out in the framework of the festival by its organizers: the latter digitized the musical heritage by Haro Stepanyan thus ensuring its safety for the decades ahead.

The Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia **Sergey Smbatyan** noted the high responsibility entrusted to the organizers of the festival, as it is held under the patronage of the RA President.

"It is very important to have a festival, which despite its specialized focus follows a serious purpose and mission: the young audience, and not only, should be familiar with our heroes. Haro Stepanyan is one of them," – Sergey Smbatyan said.

Maestro Smbatyan also noted that over the past seven years, the festival has digitized more than 50 symphonic and chamber compositions by Armenian composers, more than 200 works were recorded, more than 150 premieres by Armenian composers



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## News from the Youth Orchestra: A Saturated Week...

from page 11

were presented.

**Sargis Balbabyan** who is in charge of the artistic issues of the Armenian Composers' Art Festival, noted that Haro Stepanyan made a great contribution to the development of the Armenian classical music. He has composed in almost all genres and has left a great legacy. Unfortunately, for many decades his compositions haven't been performed and the main reason for this is the poor state of the scores. The latters are kept in the archive of the composer, in written form. These pieces are of great artistic value and have never been presented to the general audience.

### The Armenian Composers' Art Festival is the best platform to present pieces by the Armenian composers

The 8th Armenian Composers' Art Festival was launched on February 15 at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall. The festival is dedicated to the 120th anniversary of the Armenian composer Haro Stepanyan.

During the opening concert of the festival the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia presented the Symphonic Dances by Haro Stepanyan, Love Songs for soprano and string orchestra by Arthur Aharonian (soloist Julieta Aleksanyan, soprano), Concerto for Qanun by Grigor Hakhinyan (soloist Karine Hovhannisyan, qanun, arrangement for orchestra and qanun by Melik Mavisakalian) and the symphonic poem "Dedication to Bartok" by Martin Vardazaryan. The orchestra performed under the baton of the conductor **Ruben Asatryan**.

Ruben Asatryan highly appreciates the Armenian Composer's Art Festival. Recalling the Soviet period, he mentioned the activities of the State Symphony Orchestra, which used to perform pieces by the Armenian composers.

*"In some respects, it was a unique laboratory. However, after the Soviet collapse, the orchestra was disbanded. Today this gap is filled in by the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia headed by Sergey Smbatyan, the initiator of the Armenian Composer's Art Festival. During the festival the audience is presented numerous premieres, both the pieces which haven't been performed for decades and the ones, which are written just yesterday. I can see listeners enjoying these concerts!"* - said the conductor.

The soloist **Karine Hovhannisyan** (Qanon) emphasized that despite the fact the Concerto for Qanon by Grigor Hakhinyan is included in the conservatory program, its orchestral version is presented to the audience for the first time.

According to musicologist **Olga Nurijanyan**, the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia implements the project of truly national importance. Year after year, the latter refers to the creative path of one of the greatest representatives of the Armenian composing school. The festival provides students and even professionals a unique opportunity to explore the achievements of the Armenian music.

Speaking of Haro Stepanyan, the musicologist said that he was an active musician, a pedagogue, one of the greatest figures of his time, the scope of Stepanyan's activities extended far beyond the music. Solely thanks to such personalities today we have musical culture which is not only alive but thriving.

The Armenian Composer's Art Festival is held under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Armenia. The organizer of the festival is the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia, supported by the Ministry of Culture.

### SYOA ensembles performed within the framework of the "Musical Wednesday at Khachaturian House" project

A concert entitled "Pictures at an Exhibition" was held within the framework of the project entitled "Musical Wednesday at Khachaturian's House" on February 16 at the Aram Khachaturian House-Museum. The ensembles of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia – the Abgar Muradyan Duo and the Alexander Aroutiunian Woodwind-Piano Quartet (Gevorg Avetisyan (flute), David Gyulamiryan (clarinet), Nikolay Poghosyan (bassoon), Lilit Zakaryan (piano)) performed during the concert.

The compositions by E. Bagdasarian, F. Poulenc, K. Debussy, A. Rosenblatt, M. Mussorgsky were presented.

### Haro Stepanyan-Fest presents works by Armenian composers which hasn't been performed for decades

The chamber works by Haro Stepanyan were presented on February 17 at the Aram Khachaturian House-Museum within the framework of the 8th Armenian Composer's Art Festival- Haro Stepanyan-Fest were presented. During the concert, consisting of two parts, preludes for piano and romances by the composer were performed.

This chamber concert is an interesting example of cooperation within the framework of the festival. The festival is always open for talented young musicians, and the students of the Yerevan State





Conservatory performed during the concert. The highlight of the concert was the performance of the State Chamber Choir Hover (artistic director and conductor **Sona Hovhannisyan**).

Pianist **Armen Babakhanyan** noted that Haro Stepanyan is the greatest composer, whose music, unfortunately, hasn't been performed for more than 30 years. And he welcomes the initiative of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia, as the audience has a chance to hear compositions by our great composers.



Babakhanyan particularly emphasized the format of the festival. Not only the works of the composer, to whom the festival is dedicated, are performed but also the works of other composers are presented to the audience.

The Armenian Composer's Art Festival is held under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Armenia. The organizer of the festival is the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia headed by Sergey Smbatyan and supported by the Ministry of Culture.

## Sergey Smbatyan Conducted Natl Philharmony Orchestra of Russia with Ovation

As The Highlights has informed in November 2016, on February 8, 2017 a concert of the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia (NPOR, Founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor **Vladimir Spivakov**), had to be held at the Moscow International Music House (MIMH), with conductor the Founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia (SYOA) **Sergey Smbatyan**. And then we've noted that this, of course, was to be a great success for the young conductor 'cause, in fact, the NPOR is the main orchestra of Russia created by **Vladimir Putin's** personal order. The concert program included "The Isle of the Dead" Symphonic Poem and the First Piano Concerto of Rachmaninov as well as "Scheherazade" Symphonic Suite by Rimsky-Korsakov. That time it was announced that the soloist would be **Yekaterina Mechetina**.

But due to some reasons the soloist was changed and it was **Philipp Kopachevsky**, a prize-winner at international competitions in Russia, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany and Spain who has gained particular popularity in Japan where he has recorded a Chopin Album on commission by NHK. (Critics give him the highest appraisal: "The young pianist's playing has a perceptibly personal message. The natural blend of mastery and spiritual maturity with raw emotion, the freedom with which the pianist expresses himself and his Romantic sincerity and nobleness win one over from the very first notes..." "From the first notes he plays, you sense the pianist's powerful and lyrical individuality. His piano sings – this is a very rare quality nowadays, typical of a Romantic worldview; he

retains clarity in his pianism and his phrasing is beautiful and pliant...").

The Svetlanovsky Hall of the MIMH was really jam-packed, and the concert was interrupted by numerous "Bravo!"-s and "Encore!"-s that turned into ovation.

In the eve of the concert Sergey Smbatyan was interviewed by Sputnik Armenia extracts of which presented to the readers below:

**-Sergey, on February 8th you will con-**



**duct the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia. Is it easy to work with such a celebrated ensemble, to find common language with them?**

- Well, that's a rhetorical question to the conductor. It can be debated for a long time, but when there is one professional language of communication - music and ideology, then you start to think about the fact, what is the essence of the work of the conductor. Although to conduct a team that is headed by Maestro Spivakov is a complicated thing.

Every time working with a new orchestra is something undiscovered for a conductor. I treat this tenderly and am looking forward to meeting. This is one of the best orchestras in Russia, in Moscow, and this is my first concert with this famous ensemble. I hope that we will discuss plans for the future, and our

cooperation will be continued.

**-With which orchestras you plan to cooperate in the near future?**

- In 2017, I have a lot of concerts in Germany, in April I debut with the Munich Symphony Orchestra in Wuppertal. There are a lot of plans and concerts too. Also performances in South America and beyond are planned.

You know, my foreign trips are to promote people to know that there are musical traditions of the highest level in Armenia. We are able to work in a team, we have persons who can create ensembles.

But at the same time, when the conductor from Armenia is invited to perform with a foreign orchestra, and I have not played with the Munich orchestra before, you understand that they wait from you for something special. The question arises: what is expected by the orchestra musicians and their director from an Armenian

conductor who will conduct, for example, Schumann Symphony №4?

**-What overseas performances of the State Youth Orchestra are expected in the nearest future and what about this year's repertoire?**

- Negotiations are underway at present. We have invitation for late March-early April, to play six concerts outside of Armenia with the most popular and outstanding soloists. And this is an evidence of the Orchestra's quality 'cause when international stars are ready to play with an Armenian orchestra, in my opinion, it is big victory.

The Orchestra is also invited to the Beethoven Easter Festival in Warsaw, with works by Aram Khachaturian. Naturally, during our overseas concerts we're striving to represent Armenian music.

## ANCA, Senator Menendez discuss benefits of a U.S.-Armenia Double Tax Treaty



Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) Chairman Raffi Hamparian recently held a working meeting on Capitol Hill with U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) on a range of shared priorities, including the negotiation of a new U.S.-Armenia Double Tax Treaty.

This bilateral tax agreement, which would facilitate increased investment by removing the threat of earned profits being taxed twice, is among the ANCA's economic development priorities, along with Millennium Challenge funding for STEM education and direct Los Angeles to Yerevan commercial

and cargo flights.

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on which Senator Menendez serves, is constitutionally charged with ratifying all treaties, including a future tax accord with the Republic of Armenia.

"We are pressing forward with our pro-active engagement with the full range of American and Armenian stakeholders in support of a new U.S.-Armenia Double Tax Treaty," remarked Hamparian. The ANCA looks forward to the day when Senator Menendez and his colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will have the opportunity

to further strengthen America's partnership with Armenia by ratifying this long overdue bilateral accord."

In an opinion article late last year, Hamparian made the case for why a U.S.-Armenia Double Tax Treaty is mutually beneficial: "A new tax treaty would represent a great way to give substance to the rhetoric – from both Washington and Yerevan – about improving U.S.-Armenia bilateral relations. This accord would both reflect and reinforce the progress we saw last year [2015] with the signing of a U.S.-Armenia Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. It would, as well, create the conditions for the future growth of the U.S.-Armenia economic relationship, the continued development of bilateral government-to-government ties, and, of course, the strengthening of the enduring bonds of friendship that have long connected the American and Armenian peoples."

The current treaty governing double taxation issues between the two countries is the 1973 U.S.-U.S.S.R. Tax Treaty, an outdated forty year-old accord. The lack of a double tax treaty between the United States and Armenia creates legal uncertainty that deters potential U.S. investors, diverts investment flows and disadvantages American businesses seeking to invest in the Republic of Armenia.

## Armenian Genocide commemoration to be Held in Times Square on April 23



Thousands will gather in New York's Times Square (43rd St./Broadway) to commemorate the 102nd anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide On April 23, 2-4 p.m., the Armenian Weekly reports.

In recognition of Genocide Awareness Month in April, Holocaust Remembrance Day will also be commemorated, along with other genocides committed in contemporary history.

This powerful event, free and open to the public, will honor the 1.5

million Armenians who were massacred by the Young Turk Government of the Ottoman Empire and the millions of victims of genocide worldwide. Speakers will include well-known artists, politicians, academics and humanitarians. Dr. Rachel Goshgarian, Professor of History at Lafayette College and Armen McOmber, Esq. will preside over the program. The theme of this year's commemoration is "Turkey is Guilty of Genocide: Denying the Undeniable is a Crime."

The 102nd Armenian Genocide Commemoration is organized by the Mid-Atlantic chapters of the Knights & Daughters of Vartan ([www.kofv.org](http://www.kofv.org)), an international Armenian fraternal organization headquartered in the United States, and co-sponsored by the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), the Armenian Assembly of America, and the Armenian Council of America and the Armenian Democratic League-Ramgavars.

Participating organizations include the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, Prelacy of the Armenian Church of America, Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), and Armenian Catholic Eparchy for U.S. and Canada, the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA), the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF-YOARF), Armenian youth organizations and university Armenian clubs.



## ANCA leads signature drive to urge Trump to recognize Armenian Genocide



The leadership of the Congressional Armenian Caucus on Monday called on their U.S. House colleagues to join with them in a bipartisan request that President Donald Trump honestly and accurately commemorate the Armenian Genocide, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

"Visit [anca.org/genocide](http://anca.org/genocide) to add your voice to the Congressional Armenian Caucus in calling upon President Trump to reject Turkey's gag-rule against an honest American remembrance of the Armenian Genocide," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. "This is a vital moment. At the start of this new and disruptive era, we have an opportunity to help America break bad habits that have, for far too long, held America hostage to the irrational dictates of foreign governments. So, please, take action today and then encourage your friends and family to join you in asking their U.S. Representatives to co-sign this Congressional letter."

In a "Dear Colleague" letter to U.S. Representatives, Armenian Caucus Co-Chairs Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Jackie Speier (D-CA),

David Trott (R-MI) and David Valadao (R-CA) as well as Vice-Chairs Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Adam Schiff (D-CA) explained "there is no debate that an estimated 1.5 million Armenians were massacred in the first genocide of the 20th century. The United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, documented the Genocide and raised significant funds to help the Armenian people in its aftermath." Their letter went on to state that "A Presidential recognition would pay tribute to the lives lost, the perseverance and determination of those who survived, and to the many Americans of Armenian descent who have strengthened our country to this day."

In their letter addressed to President Trump, Members of Congress will note that Presidential action on this matter would be an extension of previous affirmation by the executive and legislative branches of government, including "President Reagan, who recognized the Armenian Genocide in 1981, and the Eisenhower Administration, which did the same in a 1951 submission to the International Court of Justice. The House of Representatives has also commemorated the Armenian Genocide, through HJR148 in 1975 and HJR247 in 1984."

The letter also highlights the historic levels of U.S. assistance provided through the Congressionally chartered Near East Foundation, "which raised \$116 million (over \$2.5 billion in 2017 dollars) to aid the victims of the Ottoman Empire's mass murder of millions of Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Pontians, Syrians, and other persecuted peoples. The generosity of the American people saved countless lives and helped to ensure the continued survival of the Armenian culture." The letter concludes by urging President Trump to "appropriately mark April 24th as a day of American remembrance of the Armenian Genocide."

The ANCA has launched a nationwide online letter writing and calling campaign urging Members of Congress to co-sign the Armenian Caucus letter to President Trump. To learn more and take action, visit [anca.org/genocide](http://anca.org/genocide).

## Former Canadian Parliamentarian Jim Karygiannis to Visit Karapakh as observer for the Constitutional Referendum

### Horizon Weekly

Despite continuous efforts by Azerbaijani authorities to discourage foreign diplomats, parliamentarians and observers from visiting the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh/NKR), former Canadian parliamentarian, the Honourable Jim Karygiannis will be visiting Artsakh in the upcoming week to serve as an international observer in the republic's constitutional referendum that is set to be held on February 20, 2017.

A long-time supporter of Artsakh's

independence and its people's right to self-determination, Mr. Karygiannis is visiting Artsakh at the request of the Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC). Previously and as recent as 2012, Mr. Karygiannis led a team of Canadian Election Observers for the presidential election in the Republic of Artsakh.

In a statement released after the elections, he explicitly stated; "It was a picture-perfect election from start to finish and witnessing the election process in a new democracy was a positive learning

experience. I also met with government officials, residents of Nagorno Karabakh and members of the Canadian Diaspora who were visiting and learned more about the challenges facing this Artsakh".

"Mr. Karygiannis' timely visit to Artsakh is yet another indication that the young republic is a democratic and a fully functioning state, with a thriving market economy and an active civil society, that is striving to achieve its freedom and the formal recognition of its independence," ANCC said.

## U.S. Embassy highlights power of filmmaking with “Mosaic of Human Stories” American film showcase

When the lights go down and a film flickers to life on the movie theater screen, we are quickly transported to a different time and place. Through film we can hear others’ stories and walk in their footsteps. Highlighting the transformative power of movies and filmmaking, the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan opened its “Mosaic of Human Stories” American Film Showcase – a two-month program featuring 33 American films – with a gala screening of the award-winning “Jack of the Red Hearts” on February 13 at the Moscow Cinema.

“Movies transport us to new worlds, open our eyes to different perspectives, and give us a better understanding of the larger world around us,” said U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard Mills, Jr. in his opening remarks.

Janet Grillo, an award-winning filmmaker/producer and the director of “Jack of the Red Hearts,” is visiting Armenia for one week to participate in the launch of the American Film Showcase, engage with Armenian audiences, discuss filmmaking with student groups, and share her experiences with autism. At the opening, Ms. Grillo led a question-and-answer discussion with the members of the audience following the screening of her film, which tells the story of a tough teenage runaway who impersonates a trained caregiver and forms a unique bond with an 11 year-old autistic girl and her family.



The American Film Showcase runs through March 31 and features both documentary and feature films, which will be shown in Yerevan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor. Other movies to be screened as part of the Showcase deal with topics such as disabilities, online bullying, environmental protection, the gender gap in computer programming, and the ties between food and culture. All screenings are open to the public and free, with seats available on a first-come, first-served basis. A complete schedule can be found online at [www.usa.am/announce/AFSArmenia](http://www.usa.am/announce/AFSArmenia).

Along with film screenings, the “Mosaic of Human Stories” American Film

Showcase includes a week-long training session on film editing for Armenian documentary filmmakers with Doug Blush, an Oscar award-winning film editor, as well as an award-winning director, producer, writer and cinematographer.

“Armenians have so many moving stories to tell, and I think it is wonderful that our guests will be spending so much time with young Armenian filmmakers,” Ambassador Mills said. “By strengthening the skills of these filmmakers, we hope to help give a stronger voice to the next generation of Armenian artists so they can share their stories with wider domestic and international audiences.”

## Charles Aznavour to tour Australia in June



Armenia Media Inc. reports that French-Armenian singing legend, Charles Aznavour will perform in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth as part of a “Farewell Tour” in June 2017.

Promoter VisionMax International has announced three Concert dates on June 17 (Perth), June 21 (Melbourne) and June 24 (Sydney).

Charles Aznavour (born Shahnour Varinag Aznavourian) on 22 May 1924 is known for his unique tenor voice: clear and ringing in its upper reaches, with gravelly and profound low notes.

He has written over 800 songs and recorded over 1,200, sung in eight languages and sold more than 180 million records.

In 2009, he was appointed ambassador of Armenia to Switzerland, as well as Armenia’s permanent delegate to the United Nations at Geneva.

Aznavour is the longest standing “A list” star, still filling major venues all over the world. He started his most recent tour in 2014.



# ARMENIA

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Yerevan Home Care is the first and the only one company launched in 2011 in Yerevan. The company is providing a 24/7 qualified care service to older adults, disabled people, people suffering from chronic diseases or those who need postoperative care, as well as to people with dementia.

Creating the company we concenter to support many families that live abroad and have their elderly family members staying in Armenia. We succeed in supporting these families to have not only a solution of the raised problem but to have a deep feeling of satisfaction that their relatives are in good hands.

The organization's greatest wealth is educated, professional, skilled, experienced staff and people with high values and psychological knowledge.

We treat each patient with a strong sense of responsibility and show an individual approach to the families, at the same time maintaining the accepted norms and using contemporary approaches.

Taking your relative's care on our shoulders, we bring harmony between the different generations.

Apart from the professional knowledge the company pays a great attention to the humanitarian qualities of the serving staff, to their kindness, patience, attention and cour-



home health aides. Home health aides might also provide limited assistance with things such as taking blood pressure or offering medication reminders.

Nursing care is more related for patients after surgery, traumas, different chronic diseases

Rehabilitation service is for people who need professional rehabilitation in their recovery periods after some types of diseases and surgery. Dementia /Alzheimer /special care is for people with dementia in all stages when you worried about their safety or a health problem.

Yerevan Home Care provides all type of medical equipment that will increase the quality of life of your loved ones. (rent of the equipment is acceptable)

Transportation is a key issue for older adults and for people with temporary or permanent disabilities especially in Armenia where the streets and buildings are not adjusted for disabled people. Yerevan Home Care is providing a transportation service for people that are in wheelchairs.

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teous manner.

We assure that we will be your irreplaceable assistant in helping and surrounding your relative with care and support.

We provide service to all type of patients who needs care assistance.

Personal care is for elderly people who are alone and need support in daily living, such as dressing, bathing, feeding, or meal preparation. This type of care includes personal care aides, home care aides, and



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