

“I am convinced that the Armenian political miracle will be followed by the Armenian economic miracle” - Nikol Pashinyan



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on February 23 attended the “My Step for Lori Marz” investment business-forum in Vanadzor, which brings together numerous Armenian and foreign businessmen and investors.

Welcoming the participants, Nikol Pashinyan stated, in part: “The main issue in the air is whether the economic revolution is feasible in the Republic of Armenia and whether the government and the people of Armenia can succeed in what is internationally deemed to be an economic miracle? The answer to this question is evident. The nation that succeeded in what we can call a political miracle, can implement an

economic miracle. The economic revolution is our most important priority, but we need to understand its indicators – new jobs, new income level and higher living standards.”

The Prime Minister added that the economic revolution first of all implies a new level of prosperity. “Let us see who can achieve it economically, who is the author of any result? The man is supposed to do this, and we want to encourage and support all those capable of creating added value. We can also encourage people by means of words. Unfortunately, in our reality, it is common to underestimate the word’s true value. As the first nation to have adopted

Christianity, we should state that everything starts with words and thoughts, but not only with words, of course. Our next important task is to create real economic opportunities through regulations, eradication of monopolies and corruption, legislative reforms and improvements,” the Premier said.

According to the Head of Government, the political revolution came when every citizen of Armenia decided that they should block the streets where corruption and irresponsibility thrived. “The economic revolution must be carried out by every citizen of the Republic of Armenia. Everyone

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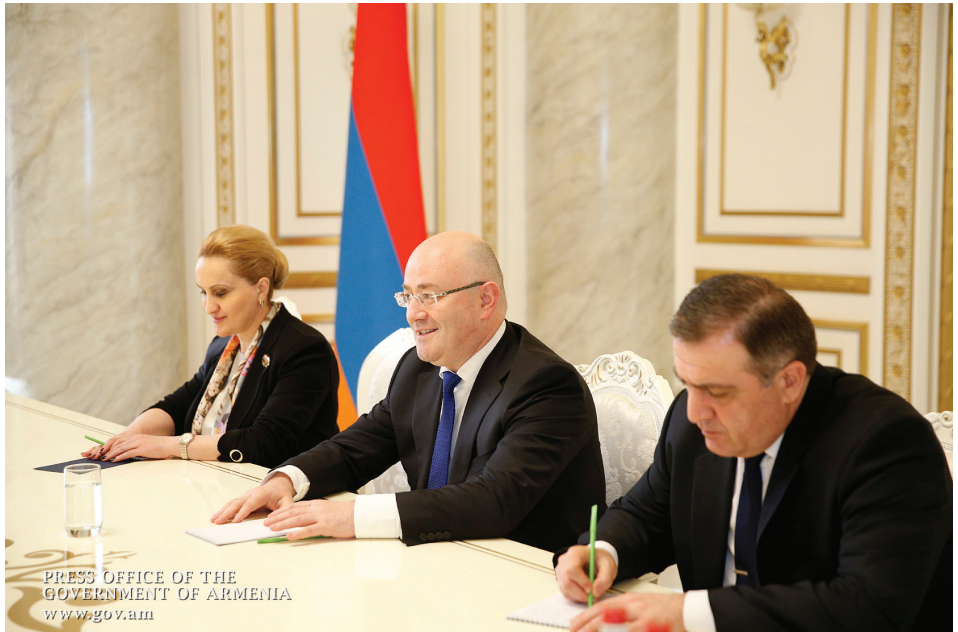
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PM receives Georgian Minister of Defense

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received Georgia's Defense Minister Levan Izoria, who is in Armenia on official visit. Welcoming the delegation of the Georgian Ministry of Defense to Armenia, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of strengthening and deepening fraternal relations between the two countries in different fields.

Nikol Pashinyan referred to his January meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Mamouka Bakhtadze in Bolnisi, noting that the friendly working atmosphere between Armenia and Georgia will promote the development of cooperation and bring it to a new level. In this context, the Premier stressed the importance of reciprocated high-level visits and political consultations between the two countries.

Noting that he was happy to pay an official visit to Armenia, Levan Izoria highlighted today's meeting with the Armenian Defense Minister and the signing of the 2019 bilateral cooperation program in the field of defense. He noted that Georgia is interested in strengthening and deepening relations with Armenia and is eager to continue the ongoing effective cooperation in this area.



The parties discussed issues related to the defense cooperation program between Armenia and Georgia, reaffirming their mutual commitment to stronger partnership and implementing new initiatives. As they exchanged views on regional security and stability and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the interlocutors stressed the impor-

tance of joint efforts in this direction.

Prime Minister Pashinyan stressed the importance of a balanced position in the settlement of regional conflicts. The Georgian Minister of Defense noted that Georgia stands for good-neighborly relations and supports all efforts aimed at settling conflicts peacefully.

No amnesty for leaders of Armenian radical group



(Yerevan- RFE/RL) - The leaders and other members of a radical group that seized an Armenian police station in 2016 do not qualify for a general amnesty declared by the authorities late last year, Justice Minister Artak Zeynalyan confirmed on January 22.

Under an amnesty bill passed by the Armenian parliament, participants of the deadly attack can be pardoned only with the consent of their former hostages and other individuals who were subjected to violence by them.

The three dozen gunmen took several police officers hostage when they seized the police compound

in Yerevan in July 2016 to demand the resignation of then President Serzh Sarkisian. Among the hostages were Valeri Osipyan, who became last year the chief of the Armenian police, and Vardan Yeghiazaryan, a former deputy police chief.

Both officers objected to an amnesty for members of the group called Sasna Tsrer when they testified at their trial earlier this month. "I lost comrades," Osipyan told the judge, referring to the three policemen who were killed during the gunmen's two-week standoff with Armenian security forces.

According to Zeynalyan, the objections mean that 21 members of Sasna Tsrer charged with hostage

taking cannot be pardoned and will therefore remain on trial.

Those defendants include the two leading members of the group, Varuzhan Avetisyan and Pavel Manukyan.

Shortly after Sargsyan resigned in April 2018 amid peaceful mass protests, Avetisyan, Manukyan and all but two other members of Sasna Tsrer were set free pending the outcome of their trials. The two defendants remaining behind bars stand accused of murdering the police Colonel Artur Vanoyan and Warrant Officers Gagik Mkrtchyan and Yuri Tepanosyan. They deny the accusations.

One of the Sasna Tsrer lawyers, Arayik Papikyan, deplored the legal clause that precludes the pardoning of the group's members. "No person in Armenia must be in a position to agree to the enforcement of a law," he told RFE/RL's Armenian service. "This is nonsense."

Papikyan also condemned Osipyan for opposing the amnesty, saying that the police chief lacks a "statesmanlike thinking."

Osipyan was a deputy chief of Yerevan's police department at the time of the attack. He went into the police facility shortly after it was seized by Sasna Tsrer early in the morning.

In his February 6 court testimony, Osipyan said that he was beaten up by several gunmen. He claimed that they also threatened to kill him if he refused to tell police forces to join Sasna Tsrer.

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needs to block those conventional streets where poverty and despair thrives. We should agree that we must implement the economic revolution together, because the methodology of change should be the same. The new situation is different in that there are no unlawful and illegitimate guarantees: everyone is equal and no one can share the business responsibility with the government. No one can create artificial obstacles for business,” Nikol Pashinyan emphasized.

The Premier pointed out that the responsibility of economic revolution can actually be borne by courageous people, by those businessmen who are confident in their diligence, honesty and principles, who are winners of the kind. “I know that there are winning businessmen in Armenia. Indeed, the economic revolution is to be carried out with the help of brave people who believe in their ideas, powers and talents. I want to state that many of you have joined this forum by virtue of your trust in your power rather than in that of the government. I do believe that everyone sitting here knows that he is a winner; you know how to get richer and enrich others. First of all, I would like to thank you for your readiness, which is the strongest pledge. I am convinced that



the Armenian political miracle will be followed by the Armenian economic miracle. I want to once again make public the motto of the economic revolution: “We have had enough sitting idle, let us get up and walk?” Nikol Pashinyan said.

More than 50 investment projects aimed at developing tourism, agriculture, industry, information technologies and other spheres in Lori Marz will be presented at the business forum. Panel discussions will be held within the framework of the conference.

An exhibition of local products is on with the participation of over 40 companies. Prime Minister Pashinyan toured the exhibition and got acquainted with the products on display.

The business forum in Lori has been initiated by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development and Marz administrations as part of this year’s regional business forums as sponsored by SME DNC. 8 more forums will be held this year in other regions of Armenia.

OSCE chief hopes for progress in Karabakh settlement process



The OSCE hopes to see progress in Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement, Secretary General says.

“We hope to see progress in the Minsk Process working towards a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” Secretary General Thomas Greminger said at the opening of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s winter session in Vienna.

He said “the commitment by the leadership of Armenia and Azerbaijan to prepare their populations for peace is a very promising signal.”

Thomas Greminger stressed the need to intensify efforts to work together constructively in all the existing mediation formats.

Mediators start fresh trip to Karabakh conflict zone



U.S., Russian and French mediators met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Yerevan on February 20 at the start of a fresh tour of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone which follows a series of high-level Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations.

A statement by Pashinyan's press office said they "outlined further steps" in the negotiation process and discussed ways of creating an "appropriate atmosphere" for that. "They stressed the importance of implementing understandings on maintaining the ceasefire regime," it said.

According to the statement, Pashinyan also briefed the three diplomats co-heading the OSCE Minsk Group on his meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev held in Davos, Switzerland January 22. It was their third face-to-face encounter since September.

The Davos meeting came a week after the Armenian and Azer-

baijani foreign ministers met in Paris in the presence of the Minsk Group co-chairs. According to the mediators, the ministers acknowledged the need for "taking concrete measures to prepare the populations for peace."

Those developments fueled Armenian media and opposition speculation about far-reaching agreements reached by Pashinyan and Aliyev. Some critics claimed that Pashinyan may have agreed to make significant territorial concessions to Azerbaijan.

The prime minister brushed aside these "conspiracy theories" on January 23. He stated a week later that Armenia and Karabakh will not agree to such concessions to Azerbaijan in return for mere peace in the region. Baku criticized that statement, saying that it could undermine the peace process.

On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov cautioned against excessive expectations of decisive progress towards a Karabakh settlement. "Given that the new government of Armenia was formed only recently, additional time is needed to understand just how intensively and far it is possible to advance the settlement process at this stage," he told a news conference in Moscow.

"The co-chairs and the OSCE can only help to create conditions for dialogue," said Lavrov. "Decisions will have to be made in direct negotiations between the parties."

Lavrov met with his Armenian counterpart Zohrab Mnatsakanyan on February 16 on the sidelines of an international security forum in Munich, Germany.

Lynne Tracy sworn in as US Ambassador to Armenia

Lynne Tracy has been sworn in as US Ambassador to Armenia.

"Honored to swear in Lynne Tracy as US Ambassador to Armenia," Carol Z. Perez, Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources at the US Department of State, said in a Twitter post.

"Lynne has had a long and accomplished career in the Foreign Service, receiving the Secretary's Award for Heroism for her service in Peshawar. Congratulations, Ambassador!" she added.

Lynne Tracy is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class o of State.

Previously, she served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Russia, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs at the Department of State, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, and Principal Officer at the U.S. Embassy Branch Office in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Additionally, Ms. Tracy served as the Principal Officer at the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar, Pakistan, where she was awarded the Sec-



retary's Award for Heroism. She is the recipient of the State Department's Distinguished Honor Award. Ms. Tracy earned her B.A. from the University of Georgia and J.D. from the University of Akron.

Nikolas Aznavour to Nikol Pashinyan: “Thank you for everything you are trying to do for Armenia”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received the son of world-famous Armenian singer Charles Aznavour, Nicolas Aznavour who is the co-founder of the Aznavour Foundation.

Greeting the guest, Nikol Pashinyan said, “I am glad to meet you and I am happy to meet you in Yerevan. I hope your future projects are closely related to Yerevan. In any case, there are media publications to that effect. I hope this is true, and we will have the opportunity to meet more frequently: it will be very interesting to hear about your plans, what you intend to do in order to preserve the legacy of Charles Aznavour in Armenia and make Armenia one of the most important centers of Aznavour’s art.”

Nicolas Aznavour thanked Prime Minister Pashinyan for the warm welcome: “I am happy to see you. First of all, I would like to thank you for your visit to Paris. You know it was very important and very touching for me personally and for my whole family. I want to express our gratitude.



I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Prime Minister. I even voted in Armenia. We came to Armenia to vote because it was very important to us. Even when we travel or we are far away, we always follow the news coming from Armenia. Thank you for all you are trying

to do for Armenia. It is not that easy, but I consider it positive as we can see in the Diaspora your efforts reach our common goal.”

During the meeting, Nicolas Aznavour briefed the Prime Minister on Aznavour Foundation’s activities and programs.

Armenia Invited to more NATO drills in Georgia



Georgia’s Defense Minister Levan Izoria expressed hope that Armenia will continue to participate in NATO-led military exercises held in his country each year as he visited Yerevan on February 21.

Izoria met with his Armenian counterpart

Davit Tonoyan for talks which he described as productive.

Both men called for closer military ties between the two neighboring states at a joint news conference held after the meeting. They also signed a plan of joint activities by their ministries for this year.

“I agree with Mr. Izoria on the need to expand our cooperation in the area of defense and to include new elements in it,” said Tonoyan. He cited “millennia-old friendship between the two peoples” in that context.

Izoria voiced appreciation for the participation of Armenian army officers in the “Noble Partner 2018” exercise held near Tbilisi in August. “And I hope that the Armenian side will continue to be actively involved in such exercises held in Georgia under the NATO aegis,” he said.

The “Noble Partner” drills involved 3,000 soldiers from Georgia, the United States and a dozen other nations, including Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The Armenian military did not participate in another NATO-led exercise, codenamed “Agile Spirit,” which took place elsewhere in Georgia in September.

Yerevan controversially dropped out of the previous “Agile Spirit” war games held in 2017. Armenian officials denied that the decision was made under pressure from Russia, Armenia’s main military ally. Moscow has repeatedly denounced the annual exercises organized by NATO or the U.S. military in Georgia.

Armenian growth rate in 2018 reported by Government

The Armenian economy grew by 5.2 percent last year on the back of major gains in manufacturing, trade and other services, according to official statistics released on February 20.

The figure is virtually identical with a growth estimate made by the World Bank last month. The bank also forecast that economic growth in Armenia slow down this year before accelerating in 2020 and 2021.

Armenian growth reached 7.5 percent in 2017. It hit 9.7 percent in the first quarter of 2018,

just before the start of weeks of mass protests that led to the resignation of the country's long-time leader, Serzh Sargsyan.

The Armenian Statistical Committee recorded a nearly 9 percent rise in the 2018 volume of retail and wholesale trade. It said that financial and other services were up by as much as 19 percent.

The government agency also registered a 4.3 percent increase in industrial output mainly driven by manufacturing sectors. By contrast, the Armenian mining industry, a key ex-

port-oriented sector, contracted by 14 percent. This seems to have primarily resulted from the closure in early 2018 of a large copper and molybdenum mine in the northern Lori province.

GDP growth was also dragged down by an 8.5 percent fall in agricultural production. Government officials blame it on unfavorable weather conditions.

In its comprehensive policy program approved by the parliament last week, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's

government pledged to ensure that the domestic economy expands by at least 5 percent annually for the next five years. It said rising exports will be the "main engine" of that growth.

The program reaffirms Pashinyan's repeated pledges to carry out an "economic revolution" that will significantly reduce poverty and unemployment in Armenia. It says the government will improve tax administration, ease business regulations, guarantee fair competition, and stimulate exports and innovation.

Tonoyan gives more details of Russian-Armenian fighter jet deal



Armenia wants to buy a total of 12 multi-role fighter jets from Russia and will likely receive four of them within a year, Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan said on January 18.

The Armenian Defense Ministry confirmed earlier this month the signing of a Russian-Armenian contract on the delivery of four Sukhoi Su-30SM jets to the South Caucasus country's Armed Forces. Tonoyan said last week that Yerevan will seek to acquire more such aircraft.

"We are continuing to negotiate on the delivery of the next batch of Su-30SMs," Tonoyan told the RIA Novosti news agency during a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

"Everything will depend on how quickly these products will be manufactured. There are some issues with import substitution [by Russia] and so on."

"We are planning to get the first batch this year or the beginning of next year at the latest," he said, adding that the Armenian military's objective is to have a full squadron consisting of 12 of Russian-made warplanes.

Su-30SM is a modernized version of a heavy fighter jet developed by the Sukhoi company in the late 1980s. The Russian military commissioned the first batch of such aircraft in 2012.

Financial details of the fighter jet deal remain unknown. The Russian newspaper "Kommerstant" reported on February 1 that the Armenian government will use a Russian loan to buy the sophisticated jets at a discounted price. It did not specify their total price.

Russia lent Armenia \$200 million for arms acquisitions in 2015. The weapons delivered to the Armenian military under that deal include, among other things, multiple-launch rocket systems, anti-tank rockets, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles, and army radios.

Yerevan secured another Russian loan, worth \$100 million, for further arms acquisitions in 2017. It is still not clear what types of Russian military hardware will be purchased with that loan.

According to RIA Novosti, Tonoyan did not rule out the possibility of a third Russian government loan to Yerevan. The minister cautioned that it is "too early to talk about" the types of weaponry which would be bought with it.

Mining giant becomes Armenia's top taxpayer

An Armenian mining enterprise replaced the national gas distribution network last year as the country's largest corporate taxpayer, a senior government official revealed on February 20.

Rafik Mashadyan, the deputy head of the State Revenue Committee (SRC), said that the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine (ZCMC) more than doubled its tax payments, to 51 billion drams (\$105 million), in 2018.

"This company had the largest increase [in tax payments,]" Mashadyan told RFE/RL's Armenian service.

The sharp rise contrasted with a 10 percent drop in the combined 2018 output of Armenia's mining and metallurgical companies. They still accounted for more than 40 percent of Armenian exports.

Located in Kajaran, a small town in the southeastern Syunik province, ZCMC reportedly employs more than 4,000 people. A German company, Cronimet, nominally owns 75 percent of it.

The rest of ZCMC is controlled by at least two obscure Armenian firms. Ownership of those firms has long been a subject of speculation, with some local commentators and opposition politicians linking them to former President Serzh Sargsyan or his predecessor Robert Kocharyan.



According to the SRC, Armenia's largest cigarette manufacturer, Grand Tobacco, also significantly increased its tax contributions and became the second largest taxpayer in 2018. It is followed by Gazprom Armenia, the national gas network owned by Russia's Gazprom giant. Gazprom Armenia had paid more taxes than any other local firm in 2017.

The Armenian government's overall tax revenue was up by more than 14 percent, at 1.3 trillion drams (\$2.7 billion), last year. Large companies generated about three-quarters of it.

Mashadyan attributed the increase to economic growth and a tough crackdown on

tax evasion declared by the government.

Vahagn Khachatryan, an independent economist, said while the figure is encouraging, he is puzzled by a surge in taxes collected by the SRC in December. He wondered if the SRC is continuing to force businesses to pay taxes in advance of their anticipated earnings.

"I'm worried that that vicious practice of advance payments [collected from companies] may have continued," Khachatryan told RFE/RL's Armenian service.

Mashadyan ruled out that. "Media claims that the SRC is meeting its targets by pressuring businesses are not true," insisted the SRC official.

Level playing field, administrative simplification – minister presents measures aimed at improving business environment in Armenia

(ARMENPRESS) -Armenia ensures equal opportunities for all investors, Minister of Economic Development and Investments of Armenia Tigran Khachatryan told the reporters in Vanadzor that the states ensures level playing field for business by all means and fosters the improvement of the business environment.

"We have set a task to do so that all the rules are simple – equal for all, without any artificial obstacles for business. It's very important that this message reaches the wide range of the society. Our tax rates today are not an obstacle for business, but I want to underline that new changes are expected that will ensure more favorable conditions, particularly, exempting micro business from taxes, decrease of income tax. The implementation of the mentioned measures means that making investments in Armenia will become more attractive",

ARMENPRESS reports the minister as saying. He added that the state spares no efforts to ensure level playing field, eliminate corruption, liberalization of the market, administrative simplification.



Tigran Khachatryan highlighted the investment conference 'My step for Lori', noting that it's a platform where Cabinet members, people with business ideas and those wishing to fund them meet.

"Don't doubt, if there are good ideas and they are realistic, funding will be found. Finances are the most available thing in the world nowadays. There is no problem of money, there is the problem of ideas and initiatives", the minister said.

Minister Khachatryan informed that 50 business projects are planned to be presented during the conference.

Armenia's international community honors rights advocates



The U.S. Embassy, the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia, the United Nations, the Embassy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Council of Europe in Armenia, and the Embassy of Sweden honored individuals working to promote human rights, freedom of expression, diversity, democracy, transparency, legal reform and equal rights in Armenia at the Universal Rights Awards Ceremony on February 20.

At the same event, the Embassy of the Republic of France and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany bestowed their annual Franco-German Award for Equal Opportunities on an Armenian NGO. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended the ceremony as the guest of honor.

Since 2012, the annual Universal Rights Award has recognized leading civil society and media representatives, and government officials who have made significant contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms in Armenia. Armenian officials, foreign diplomats, civil society and press representatives attended the event.

"In 2018, the democratic world applauded peaceful political change that has taken place in Armenia. Underpinned by the fundamental values of freedom, equality and respect for the human rights, we trust, this

course is irreversible. The EU is ready to continue and enhance its support to Armenia on this important path towards a modern, open and resilient society," noted H. E. Piotr A. Świtalski, Ambassador and the Head of the European Union Delegation to Armenia.

"The time and place for human rights is always, everywhere, and last year we witnessed a remarkable, collective stand for greater rights and freedoms in Armenia that resonated across the world, with women and young people at the core. We must ensure this momentum does not falter, but rather spreads to all in Armenia, as the protection of human rights is not only matter of humanity and universal values, but also key to achieving peace, stability and sustainable development in which everyone has a role to play," mentioned Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator in Armenia.

U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Rafik Mansour said, "Our honorees fight for social justice for all – those in the majority and in the minority. This is so important because diversity and inclusion – in government, in business, in education – benefits everyone... The U.S. Embassy will continue working with our partners to promote the universal truth that all people deserve justice, are worthy of education and employment, and are created equal."

UK Ambassador Judith Farnworth said: "Today is about celebrating achievements in human rights promotion in Armenia. This year the panel was almost spoilt for choice when picking the winners – there are so many people who have stood up for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic values in Armenia over the last remarkable year. I salute you all."

"There is one thing that is common among all humans and that is that they are different. These differences could be physical, intellectual, emotional, sexual, you name it. And our differences are what make us unique, what actually define us as individuals", stated the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Yerevan, Ms Natalia Voutova.

"In 2018 Armenia sent a powerful message to civil society groups and activists across the globe. You showed to people who struggle to stand up for what they believe in that their hard work can one day result in real political change," stressed Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy of Sweden, Martin Fredriksson.

Jonathan Lacôte, Ambassador of France said: "I'm happy that "Armenian Camp" is the awardee of Franco-German Prize for Equal Chances because of their valuable contribution in promotion of equal and full realization of the rights and fundamental freedoms of disabled persons in Armenia." Matthias Kiesler, Ambassador of Germany noted: "I am happy to announce that we have selected "Armenian Camp Non-Governmental Organization" to be the winner of the Franco-German Prize in 2018. The "Armenian Camp NGO" has been actively supporting the rehabilitation and training of people with disabilities for the past 15 years. The heads of the NGO, Ms. Varduhi Aramyan and Mr. Samvel Rostomyan, succeed that people with disabilities can practice sports like skiing or mountain-trekking and by this can enjoy the same sport activities as people without disabilities. Practicing the same sports as people without disabilities is very important for the self-esteem of the disabled.

America Has No Right to Tell Armenia Not to Send a Humanitarian Squad to Syria



By Harut Sassounian

The US government recently created a new and unnecessary controversy, this time with the Republic of Armenia.

It all started when the Armenian government decided to send a non-combat humanitarian squad of 83 doctors, sappers, and other servicemen to Syria to provide assistance to the important, but dwindling Armenian community in Aleppo. Armenia had previously sent four airlifts of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people.

A Russian cargo plane flew the Armenian squad to Aleppo on February 8. Apparently, this small role played by Russia was enough to provoke the ire of the cold-warriors in Washington. On February 13, the US Embassy in Armenia released an announcement by the State Department criticizing the dispatch of the Armenian humanitarian squad to Syria.

“We do not support any engagement with Syrian military forces, whether that engagement is to provide assistance to civilians or is military in nature. Nor do we support any cooperation between Armenia and Russia for this mission,” stated the State Department.

This statement antagonized not only the Armenian government, but also the population of Armenia which the United States has been trying to win over in recent years. More importantly, this provocative US statement irritated the large Armenian-American community.

The Armenian squad’s involvement in Syria was based on several factors:

1. Syria’s Arabs had played a critical role by providing a life-saving refuge to the remnants of the Armenian Genocide, including this writer’s grandparents. It is only fitting that the Armenian government and all Armenians reciprocate to Syria’s goodwill by coming to the rescue of the destitute local Armenians and Syrians in general.
2. The Armenian government has sent the humanitarian squad based on an inter-state agreement signed by Armenia and Syria in 2001. Therefore, this action is not only of a humanitarian nature, but also complies with requirements of international law.
3. The United States, on the other hand, has dispatched its Air Force and soldiers to Syria without the approval of the Syrian government, thus violating all relevant international laws. This illegal action is not committed by Armenia, but by the United States.
4. The Trump Administration and particularly hawkish National Security Advisor John Bolton have been striving to distance Armenia from Russia and draw it closer to the American sphere of influence. Regrettably, criticizing the Armenian government’s humanitarian aid to its compatriots in Syria does not endear the United States to Armenians. Just the opposite, it antagonizes Armenians worldwide. The US position simply reflects a poor knowledge of the realities in the Middle East by Trump officials. It makes no sense to try to compel Armenia to desist from sending a humanitarian squad to Syria, knowing full well that such pressure will be rejected, making the American government look weak and ineffective. US officials should have the wisdom to know when to exert their influence and when not to. In this particular case, pressuring Armenia was counter-productive; it only served to strengthen the influence of Russia. Fortunately, such a minor issue will not undermine the friendly relationship between the United States and Armenia. Armenians understand that the US displeasure is

more directed towards Russia and Iran than to Armenia itself. The US government is well aware that Armenian troops have participated in international peacekeeping missions, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and Lebanon.

5. The United States government has lost its moral authority to lecture Armenians on any subject given the fact that successive US Presidents in recent decades have refused to utter the term Armenian Genocide under pressure from the despot Turkish regime.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anna Naghdalyan reacted to the State Department’s statement by declaring that “throughout the Syrian conflict the plight of civilians, minorities, including the sizable Syrian-Armenian community has consistently been a priority concern for the Armenian people worldwide. The Armenian public opinion strongly reflects deep compassion and concern for the sufferings of civilians and the devastation of the country. We speak about a country which has had an indispensable contribution for the survival of the Armenian nation in the wake of the Armenian Genocide.”

Naghdalyan also stated that the deployment of the humanitarian mission to Syria is intended to support the Armenian community in Aleppo. “It is a purely relief mission guided by International Humanitarian Law and [Armenia] coordinates its work with the relief agencies and international partners present on the ground.”

Going a step further, on February 12, Armenia’s Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan announced that the humanitarian mission did not exclude the possibility of deploying combat troops in Syria in the future. However, the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan quickly rejected that possibility, stating that “we have no such plans.”

Americans, Russians, and everyone else should understand that the Armenian government will pursue its national interests regardless of the wishes of other nations. No amount of pressure will deter Armenians from their own objectives.

Nikol Pashinyan welcomes Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II and Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on February 22 met with His Holiness Garegin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia.

In his greeting remarks, Prime Minister Pashinyan stated, in part: “Your Holiness, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, Your Holiness, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia,

It is a great pleasure to meet with you. Indeed, we have met in the past, and I warmly remember my visit to Antelias on the occasion of your activities’ anniversary. I meet His Holiness on a regular basis. Some of our meetings are given media coverage, others not. I appreciate our dialogue. I even think that the conversation has not started yet, because there was a period when we were cautious about some issues and that was natural.

But I think we have succeeded in that we have shaped a truly open atmosphere of dialogue, as especially as this dialogue is important for the future of our country, the future of our people, because I think we have a crucial mission of discussing the nationwide agenda and forming our national agenda.

We are convinced in one thing: our people, our church, and our clergy share the view that we should not be defeated; we must defy the challenges facing our statehood, our people, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Artsakh and the Diaspora.

I am convinced that this kind of communication, our relations with the Church, and all discussions on this issue have a decisive significance. I am happy for today’s occasion and I am grateful for your visit.”

Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Garegin II stated, in part: “Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. Today, we have a wonderful occasion to visit you with Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, Aram I. Thank you for this opportunity. As you may know, Catholicos Aram I has been in Armenia at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin for several days now. We have discussed issues facing the Church, as well as issues relevant to national life. We told Catholicos Aram I that you have set up a



commission to study the relations between the State and the Church and find a satisfactory solution.

We touched upon the mission of our Church, our national life, our spiritual life, highlighting the efforts aimed strengthening the spiritual unity of our people, the national unity of our people, as well as the progress of our country.

We emphasized, in private, the need for stability and an atmosphere of love in our country. The Armenian Church has always been with the State and has brought its support to the safe, secure existence of the state and its patriotic activity.”

Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I, said:

“Dear Mr. Prime Minister, this is our second meeting, and this time I officially welcome the Prime Minister as your mission because the work of a person dedicated to the homeland is not an ordinary matter, but a mission for his essence and purpose and that mission must be accomplished with the consciousness of the title. And I am convinced that with this consciousness you are committed to this mission, having responsible people around you on the path of the same mission.

Consequently, I wish you all the best and every success. Your success is the Homeland’s success. In turn, the Homeland’s success is that our nation, because the Republic of Armenia has some responsibilities that are beyond the borders of the Republic

of Armenia. Therefore, I see your mission from a broader perspective.

My expectation is that people’s expectations and needs will be fulfilled in a milestone. With this commitment, you have taken on this mission and emphasized the importance of all your public statements that you come from the people who are the power, and the people’s expectations must become a driving force for you and your government. Naturally, it should be realistic: one cannot immediately conceive of emotions and fulfill those expectations. Having different opinions is enriching, provided they meet somewhere, interact with each other over our national values and ideals.

We have to make sure that we do not cause polarization. If there are polarizations, they should be bridged over commonly shared values. And I think the role of the Church in this direction is very important.

I am glad that you touched upon the role of the Church in your speech. The Catholicos himself said that the Church-State relations or rather their cooperation is imperative in the sense of nationalism and patriotism, even allowing for different opinions and different approaches. As I said, differences should complement each other, because we are all in the same circle and on the same road. Consequently, Mr. Prime Minister, I once again wish you every success in your mission. May God save you and our beloved Homeland.”

Armenian American Museum announces \$8.1 million at inaugural Telethon

The Armenian American Museum announced \$8,138,986 at its inaugural Telethon, a major milestone that puts the historic project one step closer to its highly anticipated groundbreaking celebration.

Thousands of community members and supporters from across the country and around the world tuned in to the six-hour Telethon on February 17, 2019. The widely watched television event featured informative video segments and interviews with community leaders, organizations, and special guests as well as check presentations by generous supporters.

"We are so grateful for the unprecedented outpouring of support from our community for the Armenian American Museum," stated Museum Executive Chairman Berdj Karapetian. "We are inspired by our community's generous contributions that will help us reach the next major milestone for the project with the groundbreaking cele-



bration."

The Telethon finale featured a \$1 million joint check presentation by the ten cultural, philanthropic, and religious non-profit organizations who serve on the Armenian American Museum Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees include representatives from the Armenian Catholic Eparchy, Armenian Cultural Foundation, Armenian Evangelical Union of North America, Armenian General Benevolent Union Western District, Armenian Missionary Association

of America, Armenian Relief Society Western USA, Nor Or Charitable Foundation, Nor Serount Cultural Association, Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, and Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Proceeds from the Telethon went towards the Armenian American Museum Groundbreaking Campaign. The campaign's goal is to raise an estimated \$12 million by early 2020 to begin construction on the project. The Museum has raised \$8.1 million through its cumulative fundraising efforts and is approaching the campaign's fundraising goal.

The Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California is a developing project in Glendale, CA with a mission to promote understanding and appreciation of America's ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Armenian American experience.

Sergei Parajanov's Museum provides audio guide services by the support of Ucom



Recently Co-Founder and Director General at Ucom Hayk Yesayan visited Sergei Parajanov's museum and provided smartphones for the implementation of the museum's audio guide services. For the museum staff that hosts around 20 000 visitors a year, the audio guide is an essential and awaited support, Ucom told Armenpress.

"Having audio guides was a very important issue for us, because during the high touristic seasons the amount of our staff members is often not sufficient to host all the visitors. People used to arrive from faraway countries and complain when they couldn't hear the explanation of the guide at the moment. The audio guide is available from January 1. Although this was an unfamiliar process for us

in terms of implementation, it's wonderful that it was realized thanks to Ucom", said Zaven Sargsyan, Director of Sergey Parajanov's museum.

Since 1991 the genius film director and artist's museum has exhibited his creative heritage not only in Yerevan, but also in different countries around the world. The museum has organized more than 60 international exhibitions, thus arousing great interest to S. Parajanov's art.

"To my amazement, I've learnt today that the museum is open every day from January 1 to December 31, and this digitization moves them one step forward so that everyone can see, hear, and understand what the great master was divergent for in the Soviet era. The audio guide will help tell Parajanov's legacy in different languages, which is important not only for us, Armenians, but it is also a lasting value of universal importance for those interested in art. The preservation of such values is

a priority. As you remember, two years ago Ucom assisted to implement the "Greater Armenia, 360 degrees" project, thanks to which the most important pieces of the cultural heritage of Western Armenia were immortalized, and sadly some of them are preserved today only in digital option", said Hayk Yesayan, Co-Founder and Director General at Ucom.

Let us add, that Ucom supports technically and provides free of charge internet access to a number of cultural hubs, including the National Gallery of Armenia, the area adjacent to Garni temple, the Central Library after Avetik Isahakyan and dozens of other cultural sites.

Louise Manoogian Simone dies at 85

American Armenian philanthropist and one of the most consequential figures in modern Armenian life Louise Manoogian Simone passed away at the age of 85 on February 18, 2019, the Armenian General Benevolent Union informs.

One of the collectively admired and respected leaders in AGBU's century-old history, Louise Manoogian Simone will leave an indelible mark of hope and inspiration through her dedicated service to the Armenian people, the Armenian homeland and the Armenian Church.

Upon learning of her passing, current AGBU President Berge Setrakian, who served as Vice President under Simone's leadership, described her as a pioneering spirit and a woman far ahead of her time.

"She was called upon to steer the AGBU through many challenges, rising to become a driving force behind many of the successes and benefits that Armenians across



the world enjoy today. She was a role model for all who had the good fortune to work with her and watch her brilliant mind at work. Always idealistic, yet practical, efficient and wise, she managed to see past the immediate obstacles to find solutions that would yield lasting results," he said.

Louise Simone's life was one of great destiny. During her tenure, she was the first to organize the massive relief effort in the aftermath of the 1988 Earthquake in Arme-

nia; she brought aid and comfort to combat victims and their families in war-torn Nagorno-Karabakh; and was instrumental in the rebirth of an independent Armenia, helping it to overcome many hardships created by a collapsed socio-economic and educational system.

"The sheer number of fronts on which she operated on any given day was truly astounding, not only managing all the moving parts with grace, but also maintaining all the existing AGBU educational, cultural and artistic programs across the diaspora," Mr. Setrakian noted.

Among Louise Simone's proudest achievements was the establishment of the American University of Armenia, AGBU Children's Centers, and AGBU Senior Dining Centers, all of which continue to thrive in Armenia to this day, thanks to her inspired leadership

EBRD awards 6 sustainable energy programs in Armenia



The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), within its Energocredit program, has awarded Armenian companies for best investments in energy saving and renewable energy sector.

The EBRD's Energocredit program was funded by the EU and the Austrian government.

As part of the program, funds have been provided to Armenian financial institutions, which in turn gave loans to private and apartment construction sectors to implement investments aimed at energy efficiency in the country.

The EBRD also initiated a new funding solution – the Green Economy Financing Facility (GEFF).

Six winners were awarded in the Best Impact category.

A number of financial institutions were also awarded in the Agent for Change category.

Winners include – Ameriabank (green investments in greenhouse business), ACBA Leasing (renewable energy investments), Inecobank (green investments in textile sector), ACBA CREDIT AGRICOLE Bank (green investments in housing sector, HSBC



Armenia bank (green investments in packaged goods sector), ArmSwissBank (green investments in food sector), SEF International Crediting organization (support for green investments through micro-financing).

City Spa, one of the founders of Aesthetic medicine in Armenia, that was established 14 years ago, is still following the main principles that were implemented since the launch: to use only clinically and scientifically approved, highly effective and safe with FDA approval products and equipments imported mainly from UK and Europe.

Depilation: Last year City Spa launched a very safe, painless and fast acting new machine for permanent hair removal. It is the "Primelase" produced by Cocoon Medical. The machine has an innovative



international leading brands such as ZO Skin health (Beverly Hills US), GLO therapeutics (ColoradoUS). Skin Ceuticals (US) etc.

And that's not the all: pedicure, manicure and massage will make your day.

You are welcome to City Spa. The aesthetic doctor's consultations and skin diagnostics with Skin Scanner is fee. The atmosphere in City spa is full of love and peace. The pricing strategy is very flexible and discounts for good long term clients are available during whole year as well as different Gift Cards.

method (dynamic mode) which allows to treat very large areas of the body within few minutes.

Localized fat removal: In Armenia the first cryolipolysis method was implemented by City Spa in 2016. Cooltech is an innovative machine that acts as a none surgical liposaction, with a new method of cryolipolysis for permanent localized fat removal and body reconturing. It is safe, painless and very effective. City Spa is equipped also with the Wellshape machine for anti-cellulite treatment.



Anti aging Facial treatments and Care: City Spa offers the latest scientifically approved anti aging treatments and products for care. The doctors are regularly improving their qualifications in London and Paris, bringing the new inventions to Armenia. The products used in City Spa are only



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Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

You are entering a new phase of attention which will continue through mid-April. Issues of money and resources, or matters of personal values will be prominent as motivators. Be aware of the temptation to overly identify with things that you deem important, whether it is a material object or an idea. Do not confuse your individual identity with these things of the world



Leo (July 22–August 21)

You want to do things your own way this week. There is no blame in that. It will help your relationships if you explain your need to be independent without seeming critical of the Others in your life. By the end of the week your attention will change focus to organizing your estate and planning for the financial future.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Jupiter is your planetary avatar. It is amazing that He has no aspects this week, when there is so much traffic among the other planets. You may be relaxed and unscathed by events, while you watch others run back and forth. Enjoy!



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

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.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

You may have more than one experience of déjà vous or odd coincidences during this week. They are likely to be experienced with your partner (business or personal) or through his/her interactions with others. Don't ignore anything which seems meaningful. The information may serve you later.



(December 21–January 19)

A new person or an option is present in your career or work in the world. The "new" one offers positive ideas, encouragement, and a fresh means of expanding your territory. You may be mixing business and pleasure in a pleasant combination. Business takes on a more collegial quality.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Please read the lead paragraph carefully. Your planetary ruler is Mercury and it is making four septiled aspects this week. Watch and listen carefully for subtle cues about what is going on around and within you. The general area of activity is career and life direction. Septiled aspects are easy to miss, but enormously gratifying if you follow the pointers.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

It is common for you to need to curl up on the sofa with a good book or movie during February every year. Librans give of themselves a lot during the winter holidays. Even though you are a normally a people person, it is important to pull yourself together and be still now. The middle of winter may be the only time you have a break in the whole year. Enjoy!



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

You are likely finishing one or two projects at this time while the Sun is in the last few days of your sign. The closure date is February 18, 2019. Then you will turn your attention to working more in the background. It likely will be a relief.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Your heart and mind may be in conflict over just how to proceed with your next projects. This is a good time to reorganize drawers, closets, or maybe your desk. The act of putting clutter into order will clear your mind and then the solution is likely to surface.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

Your partner may take on an uncharacteristic manner of self-assertion. He or she is not so likely to back down from a fight. Life will be generally more harmonious if you stay off the hot topics. If it is important to tackle them, seek a counselor, a trusted friend, or a negotiator to keep things fair.

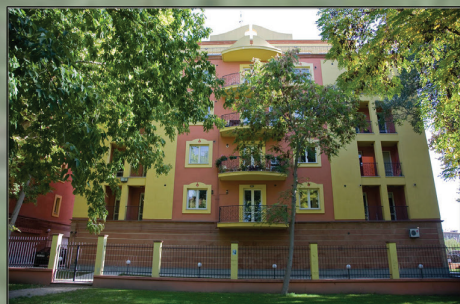


Pisces (February 18–March 19)

You are likely finishing one or two projects at this time while the Sun is in the last few days of your sign. The closure date is February 18, 2019. Then you will turn your attention to working more in the background. It likely will be a relief.

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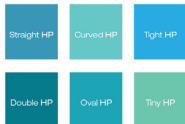
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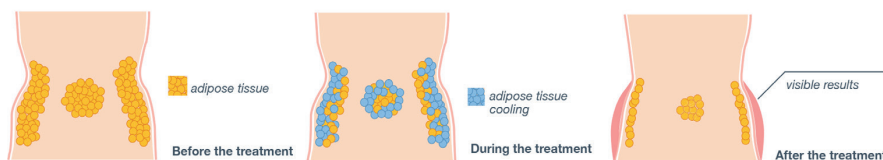
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