

Armen Sarkissian elected Armenia's fourth President



Armenia - President Serzh Sargsyan (R) meets with former Prime Minister Armen Sarkissian in Yerevan, 16 February 2017.

The Armenian parliament voted on March 2 to elect Armen Sarkissian, a former prime minister who has long resided in Britain, Armenia's new and largely ceremonial president.

Sarkissian was nominated for the post by the outgoing President Serzh Sargsyan and the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) in January. He was also endorsed by the HHK's junior coalition partner, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), and businessman Gagik

Tsarukyan's alliance, which is officially in opposition to the government.

The opposition Yelk alliance, the fourth political group represented in the National Assembly, has rejected Sarkissian's candidacy. Yelk, which holds 9 seats in the 105-member parliament, has also questioned his eligibility to serve as head of state.

Sarkissian was elected in secret ballot by 90 votes to 10. He gave a short speech in the parliament moments after the announcement of the vote results.

"I want to thank those who voted for me and those who voted against me," he said. "I will invest my long experience and knowledge and my entire energy in properly performing the duties of Armenia's president and properly serving the Republic of Armenia, its citizens and our people."

"And I certainly expect your and our citizens' support for and participation in our future important victories," added the president-elect.

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Lebanon's President arrives in Armenia

President Michel Aoun of the Republic of Lebanon has arrived in Armenia on an official visit at the invitation of Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan.

The Presidents of Armenia and Lebanon Serzh Sargsyan and Michel Aoun had a meeting in Yerevan.

"The interstate relations between our countries have a history of just 25 years, but the friendship between our peoples is centuries-long," President Sargsyan said as he welcomed his Lebanese counterpart at the Presidential Palace.

"The Armenian community has played a great role in the reinforcement of friendship between our peoples. We are grateful for the people and authorities of Lebanon for the careful attitude towards our compatriots," the Armenian President said.

President Sargsyan also expressed gratitude to the Lebanese authorities, including the Parliament, for acknowledging the fact



of the Armenian Genocide.

Mr. Aoun said, in turn, that "the visit aims to further strengthen the ties between Armenia and Lebanon.

"We hope relations between the two coun-

tries will further expand and deepen. There are many areas in which we can work for the benefit of our two countries," Michel Aoun said.

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Armenia likely to ratify new EU deal by the end of April – President

President Serzh Sargsyan received on February 23 Toivo Klaar, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia.

Noting that 2017 and 2018 were productive from the perspective of development of relations between Armenia and the EU, President Sargsyan said that "Armenia is resolute to keep developing the relations at the same pace and realize the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) as soon as possible.

The President noted that Armenia will probably ratify the Agreement by the end of April, which will allow to temporarily implement it before the process of ratification by all EU member states is completed.

Serzh Sargsyan hailed the fact that Es-

tonia, the country Toivo Klaar comes from, has already ratified the Agreement and voiced hope that other EU member states would do that in the foreseeable future.

The EU representatives said, in turn, that ratification takes a long time in some member states, which, he noted, does not prevent Armenia and EU from moving towards temporary implementation of CEPA. He noted that Armenia is a good example of how a member of the Eurasian Economic Union can well co-operate with the European Union.

The interlocutors exchanged views on negotiations on the Karabakh conflict settlement process. Toivo Klaar reaffirmed the EU support for the activity of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and their proposa



Georgian Prime Minister arrives in Armenia for official visit

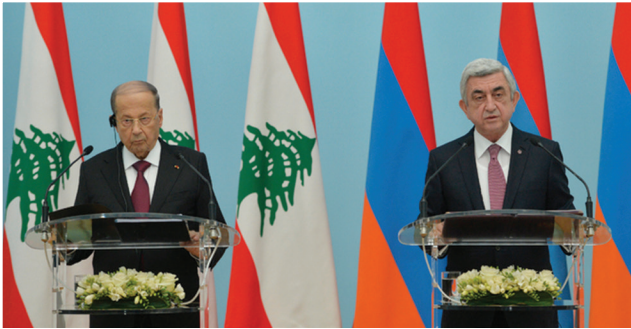


Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili arrived in Armenia on March 2 on official visit. Armenian Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan welcomed his counterpart at Zvartnots airport.

The delegation led by Giorgi Kvirikashvili includes First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Dimitri Kumsishvili, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikheil Janelidze, Defense Minister Levan Izoria, Finance Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and other officials.

After the official welcoming ceremony, the Prime Ministers headed for the Office of RA Government where Armenian-Georgian talks will be held first in narrow, and then in expanded formats.

Lebanese president: Armenia-Lebanon ties achieve tangible progress in recent years



Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and President of Lebanon Michel Aoun, who was in Armenia on an official visit, issued a jointed statement summing up the results of their talks held on February 22.

In his speech, the Lebanese leader assessed the talks with President Sargsyan as positive and constructive, the presidential press office said.

“We touched upon the recent developments in bilateral relations, the ongoing efforts and the tangible progress achieved so far. Our meeting went off in a warm atmosphere of friendship, which reflects the strong human ties that bind us together, the specific relationship between the Armenian and Lebanese peoples, and the availability of numerous Lebanese citizens with Armenian roots. Many of them are with me today, including Lebanese government ministers and MPs. I called President Sargsyan’s attention to the fact that the Lebanese Armenians are held in deep respect in our society for their vitality, culture, civilization, social and political influence on our country’s political and economic life,” he said.

Michel Aoun noted he also discussed the situation in the Middle East, the ongoing crises and wars in the region, especially in neighboring Syria with the Armenian leader.

“We agreed on the need to find lasting solutions to these crises and stop the war machine, as violence cannot but trigger violence and extremism as evidenced by the last seven years’ agitations and turbulences in our region.

I presented to President Sargsyan the challenges facing Lebanon due to the Syrian war. In particular, I called attention to the penetration of terrorist threats into our country, the region as a whole, and other countries of the world. Here, I assured him that Lebanon has successfully defied these challenges by destroying the terrorist cells and establishing peace and stability in the country.

We agreed on the need to abide by the culture of progress, respect for the rights of individuals and nations on the way to building bilateral and international cooperation in the fight against terrorism, since no country is safe from its implications,” he said.

According to the Lebanese president, they talked about the problem of Syrian immigrants, which is more complicated in the neighboring countries, especially in Lebanon.

“I told my counterpart that our country has been subjected to economic, social, and security pressures resulting in more than one and a half million immigrants along with insufficient international assistance to meet their needs. In this connection, we emphasized that it is necessary to work toward achieving an international consensus that will ensure the return of Syrian refugees to their country under the control of the Syrian government.

I expressed gratitude to President Sargsyan for standing by Lebanon in the international arena, and assured him in turn that Lebanon will support Armenia in protecting its people’s legitimate rights, sovereignty, peace and prosperity,” Mr Michel Aoun said.

He informed the meeting also addressed the Israeli threats to Lebanon, which affect our oil entitlements within the exclusive economic zone, the construction of a dividing wall that goes as far as the disputed points near our southern border.

“I confirmed that Lebanon has been able to safeguard its inland and maritime borders through all legal means. In this matter, we rely on our friends from the international family and look forward to having their backing in countering these threats and de-escalating the situation. I also thanked the President for the invitation to attend the Francophone Summit to be held in Yerevan this October. I promised to respond to the invitation, wishing the Summit successful proceedings,” the Lebanese president concluded.

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Only seven Yelk deputies cast ballots on Friday, suggesting that three other lawmakers affiliated with the HHK, Dashnaktsutyun or the Tsarukyan Bloc secretly broke ranks to vote against Serzh Sargsyan’s preferred successor. It was not clear who they are.

Yelk’s parliamentary leader, Nikol Pashinyan was quick to pounce on that fact. He declared with sarcasm that there are “hidden Yelk members” in the ruling party’s ranks.

Armen Sarkissian will be sworn in on April 9 immediately after Serzh Sargsyan completes his second and final term in office.

The outgoing president is widely expected to become prime minister later in April.

With Armenia switching to a parliamentary system of government, he would remain the country’s most powerful man in that case.

Under sweeping constitutional changes controversially enacted by Serzh Sargsyan, the new president of the republic will have largely ceremonial powers. In particular, he will appoint members of the government, Armenian ambassadors abroad and the Armenian army’s top brass. But all of those officials will have to be nominated by the prime minister first.

Sarkissian, 64, has repeatedly stated in recent weeks that despite the lack of executive powers he intends to play a major role in Armenia’s political and economic life. He has pledged, among other things, to strive to heal what he sees as serious divi-

sions existing within the Armenian society.

A physicist and mathematician by education, Sarkissian worked at the Cambridge University when he was appointed as newly independent Armenia’s first ambassador to the United Kingdom in 1991. He served as prime minister for four months in 1996-1997 before being again named ambassador in London.

His second ambassadorial stint was cut short in 1999 by then President Robert Kocharyan. Sarkissian stayed in Britain and made a fortune there in the following decade, working as an advisor and middleman for Western corporations doing business in the former Soviet Union. He was appointed as Armenian ambassador to Britain for a third time in 2013.

Dutch Parliament Recognizes Armenian Genocide

(Reuters) - The Dutch parliament on February 22 passed a motion recognizing as genocide the massacre of as many as 1.5 million Armenians in 1915, although the government said it will not become official policy of the Netherlands.

The motion, which was opposed by just three lawmakers out of 150, risks further straining relations between The Hague and Ankara, which have been tense since the Dutch barred a Turkish minister from campaigning in the Netherlands last year.

"The government will not follow the judgment of the parliament," Foreign Minister Sigrid Kaag told Dutch television before the vote.

She urged "utmost caution when applying the term genocide to past events". "This cabinet wants to be very careful about relations with Turkey, which have been better," she said.

Relations between the two countries, both members of NATO, went into a freeze last year when the Netherlands deported a Turkish minister who had come to campaign among the Dutch Turkish minority for a constitutional referendum in Turkey.

Turkey summoned the Dutch charge d'affaires to Ankara on Saturday to express its unhappiness with the impending vote on Armenia. Nearly a dozen other EU countries have passed similar resolutions. On February 5, the Netherlands said it will not attempt to appoint an ambassador to Turkey for now.

A second motion passed on Thursday calls for a high level Dutch government official to attend Armenia's formal genocide remembrance day on April 24. In the past the country's Dutch ambassador



has attended.

Kaag said the government will consider how best to represent the Dutch government at the commemoration.

Most scholars outside Turkey consider the killings were a genocide, that is, an attempt to destroy an entire people in part or whole.

Turkey accepts that many Christian Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were killed during World War One, but contests the figures and denies the killings were systematically orchestrated or constitute a genocide.

"The politicization of 1915 events by taking them out of historical context is unacceptable," Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said in a statement before the vote.

Dutch Parliament Vote Hailed By Armenia, Condemned By Turkey

Armenia has praised while Turkey condemned the Dutch parliament for reaffirming its official recognition of the 1915 genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

The Dutch House of Representatives described the massacre of some 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks as genocide in a resolution overwhelmingly adopted late on Thursday. Another resolution passed by it calls for a high level Dutch government official to attend an official commemoration of the genocide anniversary in Armenia on April 24.

The Armenian government swiftly hailed the development. "With this step, the parliament of the Netherlands once again reconfirmed its commitment to universal human values and the noble cause of prevention of genocides and crimes against humanity," Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said in a statement.

Nalbandian noted that the Dutch par-

liament had already recognized the Armenian genocide in 2004.

Predictably, official Ankara strongly condemned the Dutch resolutions, calling them "baseless." "They are neither legally binding nor have any validity," read a statement released by the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

The statement at the same time pointed to the Dutch government's decision to distance itself from the resolutions. Dutch Foreign Minister Sigrid Kaag said before the vote that the government "will not follow the judgment of the parliament."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry also summoned the Dutch charge d'affaires in Ankara on Friday to express its unhappiness with the resolutions.

Relations between the two NATO member states began rapidly deteriorating last year when the Netherlands deported a Turkish minister who tried to campaign among the Dutch Turkish minority for a constitutional refer-

endum in Turkey. On February 5, the Netherlands said it will not attempt to appoint an ambassador to Turkey for now.

At least 23 countries, including France and Germany, as well as most scholars outside Turkey recognize the Armenian genocide. "The historical record on the Armenian Genocide is unambiguous and documented by overwhelming evidence," the International Association of Genocide Scholars said in 2007.

Successive Turkish governments have vehemently denied a premediated government effort to exterminate Ottoman Turkey's Armenian population during the First World War.

Ankara reacted angrily after French President Emmanuel Macron pledged late last month to assign an official day of commemoration for the Armenian genocide victims. Macron also signaled support for a French law that would criminalize public denials of the genocide.

Armenian parliament adopts statement on 30th anniversary of Sumgait pogroms



The National Assembly of Armenia has adopted a statement on the 30th anniversary of Sumgait pogroms.

Acknowledging that Sumgait pogroms were planned and organized by the Azerbaijani authorities 30 years ago, and were another manifestation of Azerbaijan's consistent policy of extradition and extermination of the Armenian people from its cradle, commenced with the establishment of Azerbaijan in 1918 through the massacres of Armenians, particularly in Baku – 30,000 (1918) and Shushi – 20,000 (1920), then continued in the Soviet era through the forcible eviction of Armenians of Nakhijevan and other regions, as well as repressions against the Armenians of Artsakh. This process gained the momentum, particularly, by the massacres committed against the Armenians in Sumgait, Baku and Gandzak (Kirovabad) from 1988 to 1991; since 1991 a large-scale aggression against Artsakh, with the involvement of thousands of mercenaries, closely related to the international terrorist organizations, the ethnic cleansings and deportations in 22 Armenian villages through "Koltso" (Ring) military operation, killings of elderly, women and children living in Maragha village in 1992, the annexation and de-armenization of the Shahumyan region and part of Martakert region in 1992, the murder of the population of the Khojaly town nearby Aghdam committed by the Azerbaijani armed groups and aimed at using it for the internal struggle for power in Azerbaijan and ascribing it to the Armenians, the glorification of those who committed crimes against the Armenians, disseminating anti-Armenian hatred and intolerance, the annihilation of

the Armenian historical-cultural heritage, falsification of history, violation of the 1994-1995 trilateral ceasefire agreements, which have no time limitation, and subversive penetrations, murder of peaceful population and the military personnel, targeted bombings of civilian infrastructure, the new large-scale aggression against Artsakh in April 2016, which was accompanied by the gross violations of the principles of the humanitarian law – killings of children, women and elderly, the mutilations of corpses of killed soldiers, beheadings of the captured Armenian soldiers in the style of terrorist groups.

Acknowledging the fact, that the anti-Armenian violence, pogroms and deportations perpetrated by the Azerbaijani authorities in response to the peaceful demands of the people of Artsakh, who were under the threat of ethnic cleansings, de-Armenization and physical extermination, to exercise, in accordance with the norms and principles of the international law and in line with the existing at that time legislation, the implementation of one of the fundamental principles of international law – equality and self-determination of peoples, together with the extreme anti-Armenian state propaganda, has made the existence of Armenians in Azerbaijan impossible.

Stating that the Azerbaijani authorities, opposing the efforts of the international community and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, undermine the negotiation process on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and continue to rely on the use of force and threat of force.

The National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia

Condemns the massive violence, murders and deportations as well as the Armenophobic, racist manifestations and aggressive military actions against the Nagorno-Karabakh.

Commemorates the innocent victims of Azerbaijani crimes against Armenians.

Calls on the Parliaments and the Parliamentary Assemblies, the international organizations, the human rights organizations:

- to condemn the committed and ongoing atrocities of Azerbaijan against the peaceful population as well as the violations of the humanitarian law which threaten not only the Armenian people, but also the security, stability and development of the whole region.
- to undertake practical steps to prevent them.

Brazilian Ambassador says he has many programmes to implement connected with Armenia

Armenian National Assembly Speaker Ara Babloyan received on February 21 the newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federative Republic of Brazil to Armenia Agemar de Mendonça Sanctos.

As the parliament press service reported, Ara Babloyan noted that Armenia and Brazil being far from each other by distance get united by the friendly warm relations and the availability of the Brazilian-Armenian community.

Touching upon the activities of the Armenian community of Brazil, the RA NA President characterized them as honest and dignified citizens of Brazil. The head of the parliament has documented that the relations between Armenia and Brazil develop and expand year by year, opening horizons for new spheres of cooperation.

Ara Babloyan emphasized the high-level visits during many years and the agreements reached as a result of them.

Speaker Babloyan touched upon the activities of the parlamenta-

ry Friendship Groups and the enlivening of cooperation, expressing hope that as an experienced diplomat, Agemar de Mendonça Sanctos would promote the deepening of the Armenian-Brazilian relations and the mutually beneficial cooperation.

The newly appointed Ambassador thanked Ara Babloyan for the reception and presented the works to be done, the initiatives directed to the expansion of bilateral relations and cooperation. In his words, he is for practical diplomacy, and he has many programmes to implement connected with Armenia.

According to Agemar de Mendonça Sanctos, the agreements reached during the meeting of the heads of the two countries, particularly the signed treaties will begin to be implemented after the ratification in the Senate of Brazil. In the Ambassador's word, the ratification will give an opportunity to carry out programmes in the sphere of agriculture, open the Brazilian market for the Armenian manufacturer and increase the volumes of the goods turnover.

European Union and Armenia sign Partnership Priorities



The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Edward Nalbandian, signed the EU-Armenia Partnership Priorities in Brussels on February 21.

This sets the joint policy priorities for the coming years, in line with the new EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

The four main areas of cooperation are:

- Strengthening institutions and good governance;
- Economic development and market opportunities;
- Connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate action;
- Mobility and people-to-people contacts.

The Partnership Priorities will be key in guiding EU financial assistance to Armenia until 2020. For that period, the EU has earmarked

around €160 million for Armenia to invest, among other areas, in education and innovation, which are key for Armenia's economic development.

"The European Union and Armenia are, with these Partnership Priorities, further enhancing our already strong friendship and cooperation", said the EU High Representative/Vice-President, Federica Mogherini. "Combined with our new Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement that we signed only three months ago at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels, we are reinforcing our joint commitment to delivering positive results in areas that really make a difference to peoples' lives, both in the EU and in Armenia. We stay engaged to push ahead and work to turn those commitments into reality."

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, said: "I welcome the adoption of the Partnership Priorities between the European Union and Armenia, which is a direct result of differentiation in our bilateral relations based on mutual interests. This will pave the way for our cooperation with the aim to bring tangible benefits to the daily lives of Armenian citizens."

The meeting also gave the High Representative and the Minister the opportunity to discuss relations between the European Union and Armenia more broadly, including plans for the implementation of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, which was signed in the margins of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on 24 November, as well as follow-up on the progress on the 20 deliverables for 2020. The agreement provides for the wide-ranging approximation of Armenian legislation to that of the European Union. Once implemented, the agreement will bring concrete benefits to citizens, including job creation through economic growth, improved safety and environmental standards, fairer rules when it comes to competition and public procurement.

Iran ready to supply more gas to Armenia

Iran is ready to increase the volume of gas supplied to Armenia, Iran's Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said in Yerevan during the 15th joint economic commission meeting between Iran and Armenia.

Asked whether the gas price could be lower than that offered by Russia, he said Iran's Petroleum Ministry and Armenia's Ministry of Energy will soon hold talks on the issue.

The Minister believes there are huge perspectives for the development of cooperation between the two countries not only in the energy sector, but also agriculture, tax and road communication, mining, etc.

According to him, the free economic zones, construction of the Iran Armenia 3rd third high-voltage power transmission line and the Meghri HPP will come to contribute to the development of trade between the two countries.

"We hope the negotiation between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)



will produce good results in the future. I'm confident that Armenia's role and the friendly ties between our two countries will contribute to the development of relations with EAEU," Reza Ardakanian stressed.

Armenia's Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources Ashot Manukyan said he sees no obstacle for the development of cooperation between the two

countries.

"To eliminate any obstacles, we opened the Meghri free economic zone on the territory of Armenia. There is also the Aras free economic zone operating on the Iranian territory. I'm confident the cooperation between these two zones will help overcome any legislative differences," the Minister said.

Armenia reports 25.2% growth in exports 2017



At a working meeting held with the President of the Republic of Armenia, Minister of Economic Development and Investments Suren Karayan reported progress in the implementation of the assignments issued by the President of Armenia at the previous meeting and the activities scheduled for 2018, President's Press Office reported.

Minister Karayan reported that a 25.2% growth in exports was recorded in 2017. As instructed by the President, efforts were made to ensure information access to target markets and launch online sales systems in order to facilitate access to foreign markets for domestic producers and businessmen. Suren Karayan noted that the talks between Iran and China were completed. Agreements with Serbia, Israel, India, Egypt and Singapore are at different stages of negotiations. He highlighted the introduction of the self-certification electronic system referred to as Registered Exporters System (REX) under the GSP+ preferential trade regime with the European Union. The Minister advised that the registration of exporters started this January.

According to the Minister of Economic Development and Investments, there are encouraging trends in tourism, including the 18.7%

growth of 2017, which allow the stakeholders to develop more ambitious projects for the next few years. Suren Karayan noted that this was largely due to the marketing activities carried out in this field. To this end, the border crossing process has been simplified for China, UAE, Qatar, Japan, India and Russia.

Coming to the reforms aimed at improving the business environment, Minister Karayan noted that 47 activities were implemented in 2017, with 43 measures scheduled for 2018. The Minister specifically highlighted the programs aimed at facilitating the issuance of construction permits, improving the protection of small shareholders' interests, tax and customs administration, bankruptcy procedures and enforcement of contracts.

In connection with another presidential instruction on exploring the legislative framework applicable to the protection of foreign investors' interests and elaborating an appropriate draft, Minister Karayan said they had drafted a bill, which was approved by the Government and sent to the National Assembly.

In compliance with the presidential instruction to provide continued assistance to Meghri Free Economic Zone activities, the Minister of Eco-

nomics Development and Investments advised that after the first stage, which started with the launch of the free economic zone on December 15, 2017, efforts are underway to implement the second expansion phase, due to be completed by this yearend.

Concerning the President's instruction to promote the public-private sector partnership process based on success stories, the Minister advised that a relevant draft law had been worked out with the expertise of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The bill will be ready for discussion in March. According to Suren Karayan, the document takes into account the best international and domestic experience.

Minister Karayan next reported that specific work was done in the period under review with the use of appropriate toolkits to bolster industry. AMD 220 billion-worth 27 investment projects have been approved under the VAT Payments Deferment Instrument as proposed by the customs and tax authorities within the framework of investment programs. The participation of 93 Armenian companies in international exhibitions has been ensured.

The Minister stressed that a 12.6% increase was recorded in industry, largely contributed by the 15.7% growth in the processing industry which developed twice as fast as in 2016. The exports of manufactured goods increased in 2017.

According to Minister Karayan, this year's main goal is to build on the current achievements, find targeted solutions to the issues raised in specific areas that will help tap the existing potential. The following activities shall be done in this direction: participation in the feasibility study of a copper smelting plant, the establishment of a training and service center with the UNIDO for providing access to textile product export markets, support for the introduction of GMP standards in pharmaceutical industry and a number of other activities.

Tom de Waal: The Karabakh Conflict as “Project Minimum”

By Thomas de Waal, the article was originally published on the website of the Carnegie Moscow Center

Moscow has never pulled the strings in the Karabakh conflict, but it remains the most influential outside actor. A Karabakh peace process will remain “Project Minimum” for Russia, the United States, and France, unless its key actors, local and international, decide to rethink their strategic priorities.

February 2018 marks the sad 30 anniversary of the crisis in a remote corner of the Soviet Caucasus named the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, which precipitated the conflict that persists to this day.

The Karabakh conflict is now an international confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan in which two well-equipped armies face each other against the line of trenches known as the Line of Contact. It has mutated from being a dispute about the status of one small region in one country to an interstate contestation between two independent states, fought in world capitals and social media. It exercises minds in Ankara, Brussels, Teheran, and Washington.

There are two constants over the three decades, however. One is that the core issue remains the disputed status of the mountainous territory of Nagorno Karabakh. This was what caused the Armenian-majority Regional Soviet (Oblsoviet) of Nagorno Karabakh to make its unprecedented resolution on February 20, 1988. That vote, boycotted by Karabakh Azerbaijanis, expressed “the wishes of the workers of the NKAO” to ask the Supreme Soviet in Moscow to transfer the region from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. The resolution—the first of many challenges to the borders between Soviet republics—unleashed a conflict between Armenian and Azerbaijani claims to the same territory, which many fine minds and big powers have failed to reconcile.

The second constant is also there in the text of the resolution of February 20, 1988, and its appeal to the Center. That is the specific role Moscow plays in the Karabakh conflict. For thirty years it has been unwilling arbiter and great-power neighbor, simultaneously indispensable and mistrusted by both sides.



This was a conflict that was not foreseen in Moscow in 1988, and which Mikhail Gorbachev failed to halt. It is painful to read the Politburo transcripts about the February 28 pogroms in Sumgait and how slowly the Center reacted to the outbreak of violence in the Azerbaijani town. (The Politburo discussions are also a reminder that the Sumgait pogroms were not instigated in Moscow, as conspiracy theorists still like to allege. They happened due to a combination of what we now call “fake news” about alleged Armenian atrocities against Azerbaijanis, enraged crowds, and a cowardly local leadership, and were made worse by a lack of decisiveness in the Kremlin.)

Many Armenians and Azerbaijanis believe to this day that Moscow “pulls the strings” of the Karabakh conflict. That is a forgivable illusion in two small nations for which the former colonial power still looms large. It is a less forgivable mistake among some Western commentators, who lazily lump all the conflicts in the post-Soviet periphery together, missing important differences between them.

A specific feature of the Karabakh conflict is that Moscow—or rather certain actors in Moscow who had more influence at a given moment—has certainly manipulated it, but always from a position of weakness. Different Russians backed both sides during the conflict of 1991–1994. Different groups in Moscow still lobby for Armenian and Azerbaijani interests.

Yet throughout these thirty years, Armenians and Azerbaijanis—for whom Karabakh remains their Number One national priority, rather than one of twenty foreign policy issues—have always defined the shape of the conflict they share. When it suits them to reject Russian interference, they do so, as both sides did in 1994, when they jointly sabotaged plans for a Russian peacekeeping force on the Line of Contact, after a Russian-brokered ceasefire was signed to end the fighting.

Since Vladimir Putin has been in office, Russian policy on the conflict has become much more conservative. One of Putin’s first actions as president was to work to repair the damaged Azerbaijan-Russia relationship, which had been extremely poor under Boris Yeltsin. Since then, he has always indicated that he values equal bilateral relations with Baku and Yerevan and is reluctant to “take ownership” of the Karabakh conflict.

In 2004, Putin said, “We cannot take responsibility on ourselves and get sucked into this conflict, which may drag on for many years.” In 2010, he stated, “We cannot force the sides to take a decision and we cannot put pressure on them.”

Essentially, the Russian position is: We would like to see the Karabakh conflict resolved, especially if that can preserve or enhance Russian influence in the region, but we will not try to impose a resolution, as that will only damage our relationships with Baku and Yerevan.

That position means Moscow can continue to make promises to both sides and even earn millions selling both of them weapons which they point against each other. It means that Russia conspires in a secretive, top-down, slow-moving negotiating process, led by presidents Ilham Aliyev and Serzh Sargsyan, which lacks key elements of a genuine peace process: a bilateral channel between the two sides, substantial discussions on the big issues, the involvement of society as a whole.

For that reason, Moscow's position on the international context of the Karabakh conflict also strongly differs from its position on Abkhazia, South Ossetia, or Ukraine. Moscow certainly wants to keep its leading role as a co-chair of the OSCE's Minsk Group, mediating the conflict, but it also wants to share the burden of responsibility with Western powers.

There is a problem, however. A conservative approach can manage a smoldering conflict, where neither side wants to go back to war. It does not work so well when the two adversaries start fighting one another. When the ceasefire broke down in April 2016 and Armenians and Azerbaijanis went back to war for four days, Moscow found itself in an uncomfortable position, being blamed by both sides. The Azerbaijani side was angry at Russia's intervention to try to impose a ceasefire. The Armenian side was

angry that Russia was not honoring its military alliance with Yerevan and coming to their defense. An Azerbaijani cartoon depicting Putin as gloating over the conflict he had created was very wide off the mark.

In the aftermath of the "four-day war" of 2016, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov redoubled his diplomatic efforts in 2016, assisted by his U.S. counterpart John Kerry. Lavrov appears to have a somewhat different perspective from Putin, believing that a phased resolution of the conflict that begins with restoring transport communications in the region can make the situation around Karabakh less dangerous while simultaneously enhancing Russian interests.

Yet, when the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents evidently decided in the second half of 2016 that a real peace process was too risky for them, international high-level interest fell away again.

Russia's strategy—manage the conflict, keep up good relations with both Baku and Yerevan, strive to maintain the ceasefire—sets the tone for overall international engagement with a conflict universally perceived as being intractable. It can be described as "Project Minimum."

France and the United States, the two other co-chairs of the Minsk Group, have made occasional high-level interventions, when they have sensed an opportunity to convince Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders

to reach an agreement. Washington in particular has occasionally aspired to a more active role.

But, like Moscow, Washington and Paris also evidently do not want to take on responsibility for a conflict where not so many people are dying, the television crews are not filming, and, most importantly, the conflict parties show little resolve to close their differences. Until the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan and of Nagorny Karabakh itself signal more readiness to work together on a common solution, most diplomats will choose to steer clear. In that respect, the Minsk Process has become a kind of Bermuda Triangle of Baku, Yerevan, and Moscow (a Rectangle, if you include the Karabakh capital Stepanakert), in which good intentions, ideas, and well-meaning diplomats disappear into the mists.

All conflicts do end, eventually. The hope for the Karabakh conflict as it enters its fourth ruinous decade is that it will come to be resolved because the actors in it rethink their strategic priority. The alternative—that another round of fighting forces Moscow and its Western partners to try to impose a solution on Armenians and Azerbaijanis—would entail the sacrifice of more lives to bring the sad story to a better conclusion.

Tom de Waal is a senior fellow with Carnegie Europe, specializing in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region.



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 liposuction, 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 Wellashape 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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Karabakh must be the primary subject of peace process, scholars say

On February 27 the European Parliament deputies Michèle Rivasi (Verts/ALE) and Lars Adaktusson (EPP) hosted a public debate featuring prominent international scholars and diplomats who examined developments in international law, the status of the negotiations, and recommendations for achieving a peaceful resolution in Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh).

Speakers included Dr. Alfred de Zayas, UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Dr. Paul Williams, Professor of Law, American University's Washington College of Law and co-founder of the Public International Law & Policy Group, Dr. Sergey Markedonov, associate Professor at Russian State University, Armine Aleksanyan, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Artsakh Republic and moderator Giro Manoyan, board Member of the Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights (ALC). The event was co-organized by ALC, Tufenkian Foundation and the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy (EAFJD).

Held at the European Parliament, the debate reviewed the findings of a colloquium held on Feb. 26-27 at the Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS), with the participation of over a dozen distinguished international law experts and former diplomats. The colloquium was co-organized by the Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights and the Tufenkian Foundation.

The findings of the colloquium included the following:

– Nagorno Karabakh must be the primary subject and not the object of the peace process;

– Under well-established international legal precedents, people, including those in Nagorno Karabakh, have the right to declare independence;

– Under international law there is a duty not to respond with violence to a declaration of independence;

– Nagorno Karabakh is a functioning state based on the concept of earned sovereignty, since it has institutional capacity, a democratically elected government, control of its borders and a functioning civil society;

– International community should actively engage with Nagorno Karabakh regardless of its status;

– International law provides a framework, but by itself cannot serve as sole tool for resolving conflicts, one cannot ignore the role politics plays in a conflict resolution;

– Confidence-building is a key tool to peace and a final resolution;

– Escalation of armenophobic rhetoric and war-mongering are not acceptable and must be discouraged, incitement to violence and hatred is prohibited by international law.

During his presentation Dr. de Zayas stressed that self-determination of peoples often misinterpreted as destabilizing, is in fact a crucial component of regional and international stability. Commenting on the four-day war in April 2016, he noted: "Azerbaijan's aggression in April 2016 constituted a breach of peace and must be condemned as a violation of the UN Charter."

To emphasize the need to create mechanisms for dealing with the right to self-determination, Dr. Williams noted that there were over 70 active self-determination movements in the world and the failure to create mechanisms to address them has resulted in

over 20 million deaths in the past 50 years.

"Failure to adequately develop a plan to resolve self-determination movements is deadly," explained Williams. He went on to propose the concept of "earned sovereignty" as a crucial mechanism that would prevent the deadly conflict. Earned sovereignty would require de facto states build functioning state institutions and democracy rooted in respect for human rights before gaining recognition.

Dr. Markedonov, who provided an overview of recent developments, stated that the recent escalations of violence and war rhetoric has set the sides apart, making a negotiated settlement even more difficult. He also cautioned against the current focus only on the Karabakh-Azerbaijan border, since "one more important challenge is along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border which is not contested territory," but experiences cease-fire violations.

Deputy Foreign Minister of the Artsakh Republic Aleksanyan noted: "Nagorno Karabakh is not merely a name of a conflict, it is a place where people live. These people were destined to fight for their right to live." As proof of Artsakh's determination to build a strong democratic state, Aleksanyan emphasized that the country has unilaterally signed several human rights treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Geneva Conventions, and the ICCPR.

The conference participants agreed that Nagorno Karabakh has a very strong claim for self-governance and that international community should become more heavily engaged with Nagorno Karabakh and the peace process to facilitate an appropriate solution to the conflict.



U.S. Ambassador Mills unveils plans to expand Yerevan American Corner

On March 2, U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard Mills, Jr., announced plans to expand the Yerevan American Corner during a ceremony in which he was presented with the Avetik Isahakyan Medal in recognition of his contribution to the development of the Yerevan City Central Library.

"While you present this award to me, it is important to note that I stand on the shoulders of many Americans and Armenians who over the years of our partnership developed the Corner into a vital and lasting bridge between our countries and our people," he said as Library Director Hasmik Karapetyan presented him with the honor. "Together we ensure that the Isahakyan Library and the American Corner continue to be the first stop for thousands of students, teachers, and researchers who seek to broaden their knowledge, expand their views, and enrich their lives."

During the ceremony, Ambassador Mills took the opportunity to announce that the Yerevan American Corner would soon expand. The current location in the Isahakyan Library will continue, but a new American Corner TechnoLab at the Yerevan City Library Branch #33, after Lyudmila Motalova, which is located on Kievyan Street. Patrons from all over the city will be able to go to the new American Corner TechnoLab for free access to 3D printers, computers, electronics, gaming and creative tools.

"These are the resources Armenians need to develop their skills for the digital age. I am excited about this expansion of our Yerevan Corner, one of the most vibrant American Corners in the world," Ambassador Mills said.

Since its founding in April 2005 as the first American Corner in Armenia, more than 210,000 people have visited the Yerevan American Corner to borrow books and magazines, conduct research online, get



hands-on sessions with cutting edge technology, and improve their English by joining lectures, discussions, and debates.

The U.S. Embassy operates five American Corners in Armenia – in Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Charentsavan, and Kapan. All their programs are free and open to the public.

March 2 was also the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts' Read Across America Day, an annual effort to encourage young people to read. The day is the birthday of beloved children's author Dr. Seuss. So, before the medal presentation Ambassador Mills joined several young American Corner patrons in reading one of Dr. Seuss' classic books.

The U.S. National Endowment for the Arts encourages reading to children because research has shown that children who are motivated and spend more time reading do better in school.

Armenia ranked 107th in Corruption Perceptions index 2017

Armenia is placed 107th (up from 113th last year) in the Corruption Perceptions index 2017 released by the Transparency International on February 22.

Other countries in the region are placed as follows: Georgia 46th, Turkey – 81st, Azerbaijan 122nd, Iran – 130th.

Armenia's partners in the Eurasian Economic Union Russia and Kazakhstan are ranked 135th and 122nd respectively, Belarus is 68th, Kyrgyzstan is 135th.

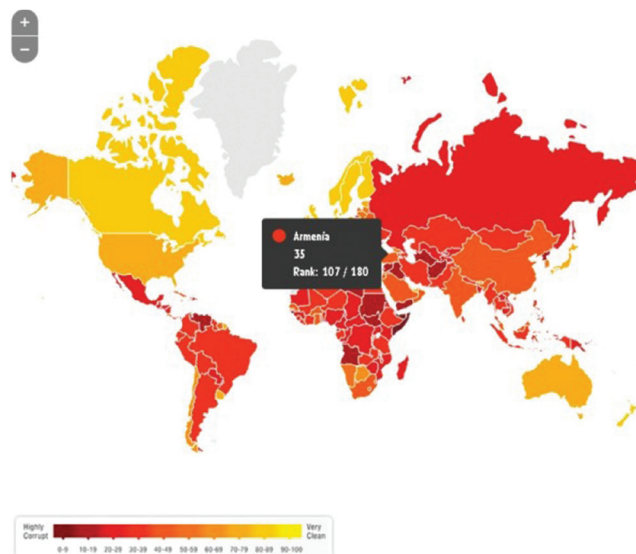
This year's Corruption Perceptions Index highlights that the majority of countries are making little or no progress in ending corruption, while further analysis shows journalists and activists in corrupt countries risking their lives every day in an effort to speak out.

The index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople, uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very

clean.

This year, the index found that more than two-thirds of countries score below 50, with

an average score of 43. Unfortunately, compared to recent years, this poor performance is nothing new.



Yerevan to host 9th Armenian Composers' Art Festival



From March 5 to 9 Yerevan will host the 9th Armenian Composers' Art Festival. This year's event will be dedicated to the 110th anniversary of the composer, teacher, People's Artist of the USSR Grigor Yeghiazaryan.

Grigor Yeghiazaryan is one of the found-

ers of the contemporary Armenian composing school. Alexander Ajemyan, Emin Aristakesyan, Grigor Hakhinyan, Edgar Hovhannisyan, Geghuni Chitchian, Martun Israyelyan and many other composers are among his students.

Grigor Yeghiazaryan composed music

mainly in symphonic and ballet genres, wrote symphonic poems, symphonies, ballets, romances, music for theater and cinema.

Since its foundation the Armenian Composers' Art Festival has been held under the high patronage of the President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan. The organizer of the festival is the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and is held under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Culture.

The Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra Sergey Smbatyan emphasized the importance of the Armenian Composers' Art Festival.

"Some people always say that the compositions by contemporary composers are not performed, but the Armenian Composers' Art Festival states just the opposite. The festival has very important mission and purpose. We must preserve our national culture, and the society must also see our heroes, those who create our contemporary music," Sergey Smbatyan noted.

Five concerts will be held within the framework of Grigor Yeghiazaryan-Fest. Compositions by Grigor Yeghiazaryan, by his students and contemporary Armenian composers will be performed.

Innovative Center for Microbiological Biotechnologies and Bio-fuel opens at Yerevan State University

The Innovative Center for Microbiological Biotechnologies and Bio-fuel was officially opened on February 27 at Yerevan State University's Faculty of Biology.

The creation of the center started in December 2015, when the Innovative Biotechnology and Bioenergy Innovation Center grant project was launched within the Innovation Competitiveness Foundation (CIF) grant program provided by the World Bank and the Government of Armenia, co-funded by the Education Improvement Program.

In his opening remarks Dean of YSU Faculty of Biology Emil Gevorgyan described the center as "vital" at no good times for natural sciences.

"Fortunately, this center has been opened thanks to our young scientist, and I am sure that young professionals will have more significant results in their hard work, which will contribute to the development of our faculty," he said.

YSU Rector Aram Simonyan mentioned in his speech that the opening of this center is a result of the ongoing development policy of YSU: "One of our goals is to set up excellence centers and accumulate the best human resources, best equipment, best technologies and best practices in these centers. The most important fact is that young people gather around such centers. These centers are the solution to their scientific interests, which is crucial for today's difficult conditions."

Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia Levon Mkrtchyan said that it is very important to implement such programs, which provide the necessary arsenal for the innovation in Armenia: "I would like to thank our university, which has played a crucial role in this program. This is a very important project for us because it enables to open horizons for the younger generation."

The center is furnished with modern equipment (an unstable booth, a super cold temperature refrigerator, a stereoscopic microscope, gas and liquid chromatographs, etc.) and a lifecycle management system.



Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

Watch your temper and count to 10 early in the week. Finish projects that are on your table. In one week there will be new things to come, represented by the planets Venus and

Mercury. Venus represents friends and lovers, and things which offer beauty and comfort. Mercury represents information, interesting things to read and discuss.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

This is a week to focus on friends and group associates. You may be given a starring role in the center of the action. It definitely will not be lonely. A wound, whether emotional or physical, is due for healing now. Be alert for spiritual messages that

may come through any source.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

You have a desire to reach outward to others. You want to share ideas and express yourself in a larger framework. Talking to yourself is not satisfactory. Circumstances on the romantic front are favorable with

one who shares intellectual interests. Activities involving teaching/learning are favored, along with good aspects for travel.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

The planets Mercury and Venus, along with the Sun remain at cross-wise purposes to your conscious awareness. Whenever you encounter a blockage in your inner or outer worlds, go back to an intention for

peace. Struggle will not make things better at this time. Give it another couple of weeks to sort itself out.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

You or someone else may want you to feel guilty because you are unable to make things better. Recognize that you are not the magician you would like to be and let go of the neurotic guilt. Whatever happens now, you are highly prone to think

dark thoughts about yourself. This is unreal. Let it go.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

This is a fine time for a vacation with someone special. If you cannot go physically to some wonderfully exotic place, then go out to dinner at a romantic restaurant. Your most important relationships and partnerships are flowing smoothly over this

time. You and partner may be lost together in a wonderful fantasy world. Enjoy!



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

This is a great week for those entrepreneurs who work on commission. Clientele will flock to your door. You will really enjoy them even as you parlay resources to your

income. Everyone wants to share thoughts with you because of your balanced wisdom. If you have physical issues, see an alternative healer for relief.



Scorpio

(October 23–November 21)

Financial stressors may play heavily on your mind this week. Don't allow them to interfere with relationships. You might feel irritable but other people should not have to

“pay” for your distress. Activities concerning children and/or lovers will be satisfying. Money has a way of working itself out eventually.



Sagittarius

(November 22–December 20)

This period is especially rewarding concerning home, hearth, and family. You may be making desired alterations or improvements to your

abode. You have a desire to invite people to your home and thus, you want to give it greater coziness. Activities involving writing or publishing are favored.



Capricorn

(December 21–January 19)

Mercury, the Messenger, is at your side this week. It will support your thinking processes with a strong bit of intuitive awareness. This is a good time to allow dreams, visions,

and even fantasies to inform your consciousness. The Pisces stellium (see lead paragraph) is in your corner.



Aquarius

(January 20–February 17)

This is an unusually quiet week for you in the outside world. Things are just rolling along without your attention. Consider it a good breather.

Enjoy books, TV, movies, or anything else that tickles your fancy. It isn't often we get that kind of rest.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

A reality which cracks a prized illusion may pierce the veil and make itself conscious for you. It is disappointing, but let it teach you something. Most would become angry with themselves, which is not useful.

Meditate, pray, play music, or enjoy the fiction you find in books or TV. Don't escape to just forget. Allow some peace for the dust to settle.

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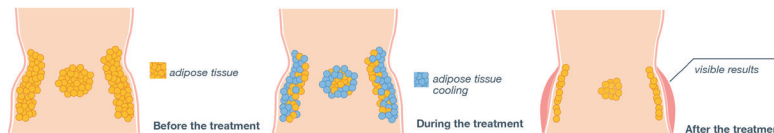
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