

Armenia, Artsakh Republic mourn the war heroes



Mourning procession in memory of Artsakh war heroes, December 19, 2020.

Armenia began on December 19 an official three-day mourning period for thousands of Armenian soldiers and several dozen civilians killed during the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire.

All flags on public buildings across the country were lowered to half-mast and memorial services hold in all Armenian churches on Sunday to pay tribute to victims of the six-week war during which the Armenian side suffered massive territorial losses in and around Artsakh.

Thousands of people led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan marched to the Yerablur military cemetery in Yerevan where many of the Armenian soldiers killed during the hostilities were buried.

In a televised address to the nation aired earlier in the day, Pashinyan urged Armenians to join the procession and demonstrate that “we are going to live on” despite the “severe consequences” of the war.

Thousands of other Armenians walked to Yerablur late on Friday. The march was organized by a coalition of opposition parties that blame Pashinyan for Azerbaijan’s victory and demand his resignation.

The precise number of Armenian and Artsakh Armenian sol-

diers killed in action remains unknown. The Armenian Ministry of Health confirmed earlier this month over 2,800 combat deaths.

Hundreds of other Armenian soldiers remain unaccounted for more than one month after Russian President Vladimir Putin brokered the Armenian-Azerbaijani ceasefire agreement. Armenian and Artsakh rescue have been looking for them or their remains in various areas seized by the Azerbaijani army. There were chaotic scenes at Yerablur when the crowd led by Pashinyan, his close political associates and security detail reached the military pantheon in the afternoon. It was confronted by several hundred angry protesters chanting “Nikol traitor!” and trying to stop Pashinyan from laying flowers at soldiers’ graves. “Nikol prime minister!” shouted back some Pashinyan loyalists.

Riot police pushed back the protesters. They also intervened to stop scuffles that broke out between some protesters and Pashinyan backers.

Opposition leaders claimed ahead of the ceremony that the embattled premier will turn it into a pro-government rally as part of his efforts to hold on to power in the aftermath of the war. Pashinyan denied any political motives behind the “mourning march” to Yerablur.

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Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh a threat to security in Eastern Neighborhood region, Ayvazyan tells Borrell

Ahead of the third sitting of the Armenia-EU Partnership Council held in Brussels, Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan had a private talk with Josep Borrell, Vice-President of the European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The sides stressed that the regular meeting of the Partnership Council provide a good opportunity to summarize the achievements registered within the framework of the Armenia-EU partnership, to hold substantive discussions on further activities and programs.

Issues of regional security and stability were high on the agenda of the meeting. Touching upon the Turkish-Azerbaijani



aggression against the people of Artsakh and its consequences, the Armenian Foreign Minister considered unacceptable the violation of the values underlying the East-

ern Partnership, setting a dangerous precedent for trying to resolve conflicts by force with the active support of Turkey.

The Armenian Foreign Minister noted with deep concern that Azerbaijan's actions with the direct involvement of Turkey and foreign armed terrorists endanger the security environment in the Eastern Neighborhood region, and could have catastrophic consequences for regional security.

The sides emphasized the importance of addressing issues of the Nagorno Karabakh peace settlement within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship format.

Defense Minister visits newly created military positions on Armenian-Azerbaijani border

Armenian Minister of Defense Vagharshak Harutyunyan visited the south-eastern border on December 18, where he followed the combat duty in the new military positions, talked to the commanders and servicemen.

Minister Harutyunyan visited the areas where the distance between the Armenian and Azerbaijani positions is, in some cases, only 100 meters.

The Defense Minister paid special attention to the living conditions of the



newly created and equipped positions, the trench infrastructure for the combat personnel.

During the meeting with the staff of the military unit, Vagharshak Harutyunyan thanked the servicemen who took part in the war, awarded a group of officers and conscripts. The Minister noted that the Ministry of Defense will take all measures to make the front line as safe as possible for service and to create the necessary living conditions.

Armenian FM, EU Commissioner for Neighborhood discuss regional security issues

On December 17, ahead of the 3rd session of Armenia-EU Partnership Council, Foreign Minister of Armenia Ara Ayvazyan met with Olivér Várhelyi, Neighborhood and Enlargement Commissioner of the EU.

The sides touched upon a wide range of issues on Armenia-EU partnership agenda. Minister Ayvazyan noted that the further strengthening of collaboration with the EU and its member states remains one of the priorities of Armenia's foreign policy.

The interlocutors exchanged views on



the current stage of the implementation of the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, as well as on the vision of the Eastern Partnership 2020.

The Foreign Minister and Commissioner Várhelyi discussed issues concerning regional security and stability. With this regard, Minister Ayvazyan drew the attention of the Commissioner to the steps being undertaken to eliminate the consequences of the war unleashed by Azerbaijan and Turkey against Artsakh and address the humanitarian crisis.

In this context, Minister Ayvazyan specifically emphasized the involvement of the international organizations on the ground in addressing the humanitarian crisis and the urgent needs of the Armenians of Artsakh.

Not a single millimeter of land from Armenia's territory ceded – PM

In the Syunik sector, the borders are being adjusted, or rather, the Armenian Armed Forces, the border guards are being deployed on the internationally recognized borders of Armenia, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in a video address.

“This, of course, brings some changes in the environment we are familiar with, creates certain complications and inconveniences. Mostly, it creates emotions,” the Prime Minister said.

He added that there are even assessments that what's happening is a threat to Syunik or means surrendering the province.

“The reality, however, is exactly the opposite. All this is being done to guarantee the security of Syunik, to strengthen the guarantees,” Pashinyan added.

“The problem is that during the past few days there has been a threat of resumption of hostilities in areas outside the internationally recognized borders of Armenia, and had the situation escalated in the mentioned area, it could well be transferred to Syunik region, the territory of the Republic of Armenia, with the ensuing consequences,” the Prime Minister said.

“And today, by deploying troops on our internationally recog-



nized borders, we create a new guarantee of security for Syunik, because today's border is already the border of the security system of which we are a member, and where completely different security rules apply,” Nikol Pashinyan added.

“Today, the Russian border troops and other forces are fully involved in Syunik, and this is a completely new security situation.

Of course, as a result of all this, transport and

logistical difficulties may arise, the uninterrupted operation of some of our roads may be difficult, but these are solvable issues, and we are making efforts to address them, including through the trilateral document,” the Prime Minister said, adding that he will visit Syunik on December 21 to assess the situation on the spot and allay all the fears of the people of Syunik.

“And I'm sure I will be able to do that. Now, however, I want to repeat that not a single millimeter of land has been ceded from the territory of Syunik region, not a single millimeter of land has been ceded from the whole territory of the Republic of Armenia. You can be sure of that, and any claim to the contrary is simply not true,” PM Pashinyan stated.

Armenian opposition calls for general strike

Armenian opposition groups campaigning for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's resignation called for a general strike on December 22 during continuing anti-government protests in Yerevan on December 16.

“A nationwide strike and a boycott of university classes in Armenia is declared starting from 12 a.m. on December 22,” said Ishkhan Saghatelian, one of the leaders of a coalition of 16 opposition parties that launched the protests following Armenia's defeat in the war with Azerbaijan.

“The whole country must be paralyzed so that this scarecrow resigns as soon as possible,” Saghatelian told opposition supporters that again marched through the



city center.

He said that Tuesday will be “the most decisive day” of the opposition push to oust Pashinyan and install an interim government tasked with holding fresh parliamentary elections within a year.

The opposition forces hold Pashinyan

responsible for the Armenian side's defeat in the war and say he is not capable of confronting new security challenges facing Armenia. Their demands for his resignation and the formation of an interim government have been backed by President Armen Sarkissian, the Armenian Apostolic Church and prominent public figures in Armenia and its worldwide Diaspora.

Pashinyan again rejected these demands when he spoke to RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Wednesday. He reiterated that he still has a popular mandate to govern the country and that the opposition wants to “wrest power from the people.”

Bodies of nine Armenian servicemen found in Hin Tagher-Khtsaber section

On December 16, the bodies of nine Armenian servicemen found near the Armenian military positions in the direction of Hin Tagher-Khtsaber were handed over to the Defense Army of the Republic of Artsakh by the Russian peacekeeping contingent stationed in the area, Artsakh's



Ministry of Defense said.

Necessary actions are being taken at the moment to find out the circumstances of the soldiers' death and their identity, the Ministry added.

The Defense Army said on the eve that the fate of 73 people in that section was unknown.

EU ready to assume a role in shaping a durable settlement to the Karabakh conflict – Borrell

The 3rd Partnership Council meeting between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia was held in Brussels on 17 December 2020. The Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Mr Josep Borrell, and attended by EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi. Foreign Minister Mr Ara Ayvazyan led the Armenian delegation.

The Partnership Council reviewed the implementation of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which covers a wide range of cooperation in the political, economic, trade, and other sectoral areas. It also discussed other issues relevant for EU-Armenia relations. The EU reiterated that it remains fully committed to the joint agenda as well as to supporting Armenia in overcoming challenges on its reform path.

The Partnership Council also addressed the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, underlining the EU's support to Armenia's efforts protect lives and livelihoods, and to reopen societies and the economy.

The EU and Armenia also discussed the situation in and around Nagorno-Karabakh following the cessation of hostilities on 10



November 2020, the EU's role in supporting recovery and reconciliation, as well as regional issues.

“The EU welcomes and supports Armenia's strong commitment to further pursue its reform agenda and to fully implement our bilateral agreement, despite the challenges the country is confronted with”, said High Representative, Josep Borrell. “The EU stands ready to assume a role in supporting and shaping a durable settlement to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, in close complementarity with the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. We are ready to use our peacebuilding and reconstruction tools to support this.”

Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, underlined that “The EU is strongly committed to support Armenia's socio-economic recovery

and continued domestic reforms for the benefit of the Armenian citizens and businesses. With substantial assistance already provided to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the government's priority reforms in justice and police, we stand ready to explore how to further support Armenia under the current challenging circumstances. We are also ready to contribute €10 million to further humanitarian assistance and to work towards more comprehensive conflict transformation and longer-term socio-economic development.”

Ahead of the Partnership Council, the European Union issued a report on developments in Armenia and EU-Armenia relations since May 2019. The report underlines Armenia's progress in implementing the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, its commitment to domestic reforms, and the key role of the EU in supporting them.

The EU-Armenia Partnership Council took place one day ahead of the EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council. These meetings reiterate the importance of the EU's partnership with the countries in the region and the EU's support to its recovery and to sustainable peace.

Belgian Parliament adopts resolution on Nagorno Karabakh conflict

The Belgian House of Representatives has passed a resolution on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and its aftermath with 130 votes in favor and 12 abstentions, the Armenian National Committee of Belgium reports.

The resolution condemns the resumption of hostilities by Azerbaijan on September 27, 2020, and calls on the government to take a number of measures aimed at alleviating the plight of the war-affected population, identifying those responsible for war crimes, bringing them to justice, maintaining the ceasefire and negotiating a peaceful agreement respecting the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh, and its people's right of its people to self-determination.

Among other things, the Parliament



condemns the harmful role that Turkey has played in this war, demands that it “cease military intervention in this conflict” and “refrain from destabilizing roles in the region.”

The Armenian National Committee of Belgium welcomes the fact that the Parliament has adopted a clear, constructive position on this issue, and thanks the par-

liamentarians who have contributed to it. Thus, the resolution paves the way for concrete and constructive actions in the region.

The Committee urges the Government to act promptly on the recommendations of Parliament. It particularly emphasizes the urgency of humanitarian aid and the Belgian presence in the region.

Today the House of Representatives adopted another text proposed by MP Michel de Magd. According to the text, December 9 is a national day dedicated to the memory of the victims of the genocides officially recognized by the Belgian state. The Committee welcomes this decision, which will contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of genocide.

Putin says hostilities in Nagorno Karabakh increased the risk of terrorism

The hostilities in Nagorno Karabakh increased the risk of terrorism, Russian President Vladimir Putin says.

“The clashes, unfortunately led to numerous human casualties, exacerbated the already difficult situation in the South Caucasus, and increased the risks of the spread of the terrorist threat,” addressing the CIS summit.

“Russia has undertaken certain mediating efforts to stop the bloodshed in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, achieve a complete ceasefire and begin the stabilization process. At the same time, we tried to follow the key agreements reached in the OSCE Minsk Group, in particular, between its co-chairs – the Russian Federation,



France and the United States of America,” the Russian President said.

As you know, on November 9, a trilateral statement of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia was signed. Colleagues have already talked about this.

He attached importance to the fact that the statement signed on November 9 is being consistently implemented.

“The Russian peacekeepers deployed along the line of contact are doing everything to prevent a new aggravation of the situation. Now, the international community and, undoubtedly, all our countries are faced with the important task of helping the affected areas in solving humanitarian problems associated with, among other things, the return of refugees, in restoring the destroyed infrastructure, in the protection and restoration of historical, religious and cultural monuments,” Putin stated.

U.S. Says Russian Peacekeepers Risk ‘Destabilizing’ Situation

The United States believes that the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh risks “destabilizing” the situation in the region, said U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs R. Clarke Cooper on December 17.

“In such cases Russia’s presence threatens with destabilization,” Cooper said when asked by an Azeri reporter whether or not the US “could counter the Russian influence.”

“This, of course, is a challenge for all parties and states involved,” Cooper added.

Russian peacekeepers have been de-



ployed in Nagorno Karabakh as part of the November 9 statement signed by the Armenian, Russian and Azerbaijani leaders that ended the 44-day war in Artsakh. The

Russian peacekeepers mission includes providing humanitarian aid and medical assistance to the Armenians of Artsakh, they have cleared landmines and have disposed unexploded ordnances.

The Russian troops are guarding the borders of the Republic of Artsakh, as well as the Lachin corridor. The peacekeeping contingent’s Commander, Lt. General Rustam Muradov is personally supervising the repatriation of the Armenian POWs from Azerbaijan. The Russian peacekeepers are also escorting the refugees back to Artsakh, and are assisting in the search and retrieval of bodies from the battlefield.

Sixth report on Azerbaijani atrocities to be sent to international bodies

The Human Rights Defenders of Armenia and Artsakh Arman Tatoyan and Artak Beglaryan have finished the 6th closed report on atrocities committed by the Azerbaijani armed forces against captured ethnic Armenians and bodies of the dead.

It is the 6th report covering only torture and cruelty and refers only to the period from 2 to 16 December, 2020.

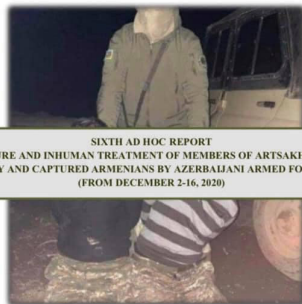
The report provides concrete evidence of all atrocities and war crimes committed by the Azerbaijani armed forces. All these were committed only because people were ethnic Armenians. These are the result of



THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OF ARMENIA



THE HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN OF ARTSAKH



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18+

YEREVAN
STEPANAKERT
DECEMBER 2020

the Azerbaijani state supported policy of hate speech in Azerbaijan.

The report contains evidence and analysis confirming the Azerbaijani policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide through terrorist methods in Artsakh.

The Ombudsmen do not publish the content of the report given the severity of atrocities and torture committed by Azerbaijan. It will be submitted to international bodies, as well as to relevant state bodies of Armenia.

Sarkissian Still Awaiting Government Report On \$100 Million Donation

(RFE/RL) -President Armen Sarkissian has still not received a financial report on the use of \$100 million raised by a pan-Armenian charity for Nagorno-Karabakh and controversially donated to Armenia's government.

The Hayastan All-Armenian Fund launched an international fundraising campaign immediately after the outbreak of the war in Karabakh on September 27. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians from around the world responded to its appeal for urgent aid to Karabakh and its population, donating roughly \$170 million within weeks.

The charity headquartered in Yerevan redirected more than \$100 million of those proceeds to the government. The Armenian Finance Ministry said on November 24 that the sum will finance the government's "infrastructure, social and healthcare expenditures" necessitated by the six-week war.

Sarkissian publicly criticized the donation, saying that its undermined do-



Armenia - President Armen Sarkissian chairs a meeting of the board of trustees of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, Yerevan, May 25, 2018.

nors' trust in Hayastan. In a December 6 statement issued by his office, he said the government should consider redefining the hefty contribution as a "loan" and eventually reimbursing the fund.

Sarkissian also urged the government to release a detailed report on how it has used the economic and humanitarian aid to Karabakh. The president is still awaiting such a report.

Hayastan's executive director, Hayk Arshamyan, told RFE/RL's Armenian Ser-

vice on December 18 that he has asked the Ministry of Finance to specify in writing about "how that money has been used and will be used." He said the fund has not yet received an adequate response that can be forwarded to President Sarkissian.

Arshamyan at the same time defended the \$100 million donation to the government, saying that it was authorized by most members of Hayastan's board of trustees headed by Sarkissian.

Arshamyan also argued that later in November Hayastan raised in the United States and France \$26 million in fresh funds for Karabakh. "Does this testify to [donor] trust or distrust?" he said.

Hayastan has implemented \$370 million worth of various infrastructure projects in Karabakh and Armenia since being set up in 1992. Its board of trustees mostly comprises Armenia's political leaders and prominent Diaspora philanthropists.

Dutch Parliament passes motion, calling for humanitarian assistance to Nagorno Karabakh

The Dutch Parliament passed a motion today, calling on the government to immediately offer humanitarian aid to Armenians affected by the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, in support of their basic necessities, such as food, shelter and medical aid, reports the Federation of Armenian Organizations in The Netherlands.

The motion establishes that many hospitals and other basic facilities in Nagorno-Karabakh have been devastated by the violence of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Syrian rebels.

It stressed the urgent need for humanitarian assistance for both the civilian population of Nagorno Karabakh and people displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh.

From 27 September 2020 to 8 December 2020 there have been 22 motions submitted in the House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer) of the Netherlands concerning the war violence by Azerbaijan, Turkey and Syrian rebels against Nagorno-Karabakh.



Government approves more aid programs for Artsakh refugees

The Armenian government approved on December 17 two temporary employment programs for residents of Nagorno-Karabakh who fled to Armenia during the recent war with Azerbaijan.

In particular, it pledged to create public works jobs for the ethnic Armenian refugees remaining in the country. A government statement did not specify how many of them will be covered by the scheme. It said only that they will be able to work for up to three months and receive 8,000 drams (\$15) a day.

The government will also offer to finance paid internships for unemployed refugees willing to gain work experience in new fields. It will pay each intern 100,000



drams a month and compensate their employers for all resulting taxes.

“These are short-term programs that do not encourage permanent work ... because more long-term employment encouragement programs are planned in Artsakh (Karabakh). They will enable Artsakh citizens to have stable incomes,” Labor and Social Affairs Minister Mesrop Arakelyan

said during a cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

The government also announced three-month financial assistance to families in Armenia and Karabakh temporarily hosting Karabakh Armenians who lost their homes during the six-week war stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire on November 10. They will get 30,000 and 45,000 drams respectively for every person hosted by them.

According to authorities in Stepanakert, at least 90,000 civilians making up around 60 percent of Karabakh’s population fled their homes during the war. Most of them took refuge in Armenia. At least 40,000 Karabakh Armenians have reportedly returned home over the past month.

Hayastan Fund sends eight diesel powered generators to Artsakh

Hayastan All-Armenian Fund has sent eight diesel powered generators to Artsakh.

“An additional eight diesel powered generators are currently on the way to Artsakh which will supply enough electricity to cover the needs of several communities,” the Fund



said in a Facebook post.

To date, the Fund has provided 108 diesel generators to various communities with power outages in Artsakh.

The project is implemented thanks to the funds raised through the “We Are Our Borders” global fundraising campaign.

Artsakh Government’s structure to change

President of the Artsakh Republic Arayik Harutyunyan has signed a decree on changing the structure of the Government of the Republic.

According to the decree, the following structure has been defined:

- 1) State Minister.
- 2) Ministry of Labor, Social Migration;
- 3) Ministry of Health
- 4) Ministry of Justice;
- 5) Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- 6) Ministry of Economy and Agriculture;
- 7) Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports;



- 8) Ministry of Defense
- 9) Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure;
- 10) Ministry of Urban Development
- 11) Ministry of Finance

From now on, the powers of the State

Minister of the Artsakh Republic will be exercised by the Minister of Finance of the Republic.

And the new structure of other public administration bodies of the Republic of Artsakh is defined as follows:

- 1) National Security Service.
- 2) State Emergency Service.
- 3) Cadaster and State Property Management Committee;
- 4) Police.
- 5) State Revenue Committee.

The Government of the Republic of Artsakh has been instructed to make relevant decisions arising from the decree.

Ombudsman to send maps presenting parts of Armenia as “historical Azerbaijani lands” to international bodies

Armenia’s Human Rights Defender Arman Taoyan has presented the maps that the Azerbaijani military have in their special booklets. Most of these maps show the Republic of Armenia as a historical territory of Azerbaijan.

According to the Ombudsman, these maps are accompanied by texts that clearly do not correspond to reality, which are directly based on the theses of the propaganda of



tained by the Human Rights Defender of Armenia.

“It is obvious that in the face of these challenges today more than ever we need solidarity, unity, respect for each other and exclusion of any kind of development that could lead to tensions within our country, for the sake of each of us and the rights of our entire nation,” the Human Rights Defender said.



and continue to commit war crimes, atrocities (beheadings, shootings, torture, etc.) against Armenians in April 2016, September-November 2020 and other periods.

Expert examination of videos of atrocities by Armenian Ombudsman’s staff confirms that Azerbaijani servicemen use expressions derived from the propaganda theses of inspiration when torturing or killing Armenian soldiers or civilians.

All this is confirmed by real and concrete evidence ob-

“The international community, and especially international organizations with a mandate to protect human rights, must take decisive action to prevent a reprehensible propaganda of hatred and enmity towards Armenians based on ethnicity, using information that is clearly untrue. They must prove that they are true to their calling and mission, that they still adhere to the international rules they have established,” Arman Tatoyan added.

The Ombudsman will send all this, accompanied by a corresponding analysis, will be sent to international bodies and will be provided to the relevant structures of Armenia.

anti-Armenianism and hostility organized by the Azerbaijani authorities.

Moreover, he says, those very texts are accompanied by inflammatory and inspiring expressions of deep hatred towards Armenians.

“All this is falls within the competence of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, as it concerns the guarantee of the entire Armenian people’s rights to life, property and all others rights, their protection from torture and inhuman treatment,” Arman Taoyan said.

According to him, it is this kind of propaganda that has over years developed an institutional system of propaganda of hatred and enmity towards Armenians based on ethnicity in Azerbaijan.

The Ombudsman’s investigation shows that these are among the main reasons why the Azerbaijani Armed Forces committed



Aliyev Once Had Called Turkey's Leaders 'Liar, Cheat and Betrayer'

Harut Sassounian

Last week, when Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev held a victory parade in Baku, he expressed his appreciation to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who attended the ceremonies. Tens of thousands of Azeris turned up in the streets singing the praises of Turkey and waving Turkish and Azeri flags. The two presidents uttered lavish words for one another and repeated their catchphrase, "one people, two states."

Even though the Turkish military and its advanced drones played a decisive role in the recent Artsakh war, both Aliyev and Erdogan repeatedly lied about Turkey's involvement in the war, just as they lied about the transfer of Syrian mercenaries to Azerbaijan to fight against the Armenian troops. The successful Azeri/Turkish/mercenary war cemented the influence of Turkey over Azerbaijan and its policies. Many commentators have described this situation as the occupation of Azerbaijan by Turkey. Since the Ottoman army seized Baku one hundred years ago, this is the first time that the Turkish military has reached the shores of the Caspian Sea. This reality is reinforced by the November 9, 2020 agreement signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, which provides for a route across Armenia linking Azerbaijan proper with Nakhichevan, thereby allowing Turkey access to Azerbaijan and the chance of going beyond to connect with other Turkic republics, thus realizing the age-old dream of Pan-Turanism.

But the Azeri-Turkish relations have not always been this warm and jovial. In 2009, when Armenia and Turkey were negotiating the protocols to open their mutual border, Azerbaijan was furious that Turkey would consider making such a move with Armenia, while ignoring the interests of Azerbaijan.

Wikileaks revealed a "Secret" cable dispatched by the U.S. Embassy in Baku to the Department of State reporting on the over one-hour long meeting held on April 3, 2009, between President Aliyev, Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, Matthew Bryza, the U.S. co-chair of the Minsk Group of negotiators on the Artsakh conflict and Anne Derse, the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan. The cable was titled, "President Aliyev Reasonable on Nagorno-Karabagh Options, Still Furious with Turkey."

In the summary paragraph, the cable stated that "Aliyev hid none of his outrage at Turkey's apparent disregard for Azerbaijan's interests, and the intensity of his display seemed calculated to underscore the seriousness of the repercussions for Turkey

if Azerbaijan's interests in NK [Nagorno Karabagh] are sacrificed for the sake of the Armenian accord."

Under the subtitle, "Resentment at Ankara's Betrayal," the cable stated that "Aliyev responded with a lengthy and bitter indictment of Turkey as a 'liar, cheat and betrayer' of Azerbaijan. Noting that the consequences of the current volatile situation in the region are unpredictable, he complained that Azerbaijan had quietly supported the recent improvement in Turkish-Armenian relations, including President Sargsian's 'football diplomacy,' never dreaming that Turkey 'would cheat us' by delinking progress on NK from that process. [Turkish] President Gul had promised that there would be no doors or borders opened for Armenia without progress on NK, Aliyev asserted. 'He lied, I no longer trust him.'"

The cable then stated: "Aliyev noted that when he met Prime Minister Erdogan in Davos this January [2009], Erdogan had said nothing about the steps Turkey was contemplating with Armenia.... After Davos, Erdogan had sent Foreign Minister Babacan to Baku to explain what was occurring with Armenia with respect to re-establishing relations. 'Babacan asked for my support, saying we should try to make progress 'in parallel' on NK,' but without linkage, Aliyev said incredulously. Aliyev told Babacan Azerbaijan would not support Turkey's steps with Armenia without progress on NK and outlined 'all the possible consequences for Turkey and this region' if Turkey pursued this course. The Turks asked that Aliyev keep the conversation confidential. Aliyev agreed, he said, but shortly thereafter, RFE/RL's [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty] Armenian Service reported that NK was 'no longer an obstacle' to improvement in Turkish-Armenian relations. This had sparked a press campaign in Azerbaijan which continues to this day, Aliyev added."

According to the cable: "Aliyev said he had twice sent Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov to Turkey to outline for the Turks what they would win and what they would lose from normalization without resolution or progress on NK, and to propose a joint Turkish-Azerbaijani statement on the matter. Azimov returned without results, and Azerbaijan now confronts 'the reality' that Turkey will initial, sign and ratify an agreement with Armenia to open the border and establish diplomatic relations."

The cable continued: "Azerbaijan also can no longer maintain its posture of 'patient silence' about the Turkish-Armenia process, Aliyev said. He noted that given

Erdogan's political weakness going into the recent Turkish elections, Azerbaijan had refrained from public statements to avoid impact on the vote. But 'silence was a sign of friendship the Turks do not deserve.' Turkey is manipulating public opinion, portraying Azerbaijan as acquiescent in its process with Armenia, so Azerbaijan must now clarify, publicly, its position."

Furthermore, "Turkey is about to commit 'a serious historical mistake that will never be forgotten,' Aliyev asserted. 'Our relations will never be the same. We are not one nation and we never will be. Our relations will be damaged, it will be a disaster on all issues, security, economy, energy,' Aliyev continued. 'Turkey has to decide what it will gain and what it will lose. It will lose Azerbaijan, certainly; Central Asia as well, and end Turkic solidarity,' he continued. There will be consequences for Georgia if Turkey and Azerbaijan split. Energy negotiations will end. 'They did everything to ruin energy cooperation,' Aliyev said heatedly. He added later that Turkey underestimates the degree to which Azerbaijan can influence its domestic politics. Azerbaijan has never interfered in Turkish internal politics before, 'but this is a matter of national concern,' he warned." Aliyev added that he felt "personally betrayed" by Gul and Erdogan.

Aliyev concluded his remarks to the U.S. officials with a warning to Turkey, "noting that when the Azerbaijanis had asked the Turks point blank whether they had agreed to normalize with Armenia and open the border without progress on NK, the Turks 'had not responded,' Aliyev exploded. 'Silence means yes...they did it! They will be on the black list always.'"

Following this meeting, Aliyev continued pressuring and threatening Erdogan and Turkey so it would not ratify the Armenia-Turkey protocols. Erdogan was forced to add a new condition to the protocols, seeking the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Artsakh which was unacceptable to Armenia. Eventually, the protocols fell apart as neither Armenia nor Turkey proceeded to ratify them by their respective parliaments.

Aliyev was successful in preventing a rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey. Now that Aliyev and Turkey have solved most of the Artsakh issue militarily, they have resumed their love fest creating an existential threat to both Artsakh and Armenia.

One hopes that new unexpected developments could revive the old feud between Aliyev and Erdogan, undermining their current close relations.

Turkey says “rejects” Belgium’s resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh

Turkey says it “rejects” the resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh adopted by the lower house of the Belgian Parliament.

Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hami Aksoy said in comments to Anadolu Agency that “resolution 1597 related to Nagorno-Karabakh adopted by Belgium’s House of Representatives is inaccurate, false and follows an Armenian agenda.”

“Resolution 1597 is neither historical, legal nor compatible with the facts in the field. We reject this decision, which includes baseless allegations and accusations against Turkey,” he said.

Aksoy emphasized that this decision is an obvious example of how the Belgian House of Representatives and some parliaments are becoming tools of “one-way Armenian rhetoric, act with prejudices and remain hostages



to narrow interests aimed at domestic politics.”

“The decision will not contribute to Turkey-Belgium relations, nor will it serve efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region,” he said.

“The reference to the events of 1915 in the decision of the Belgian House of Representatives to declare Dec. 9 as the day of remembrance of the victims of the genocides, adopted on the same day, is also contrary to the basic prin-

ciples of law, especially the decisions of the European Court of Human Right (ECHR),” he said.

Aksoy said that he expected Belgium to act with reason and to stay away from taking steps that will overshadow bilateral relations.

The resolution adopted by the Belgian Parliament condemns the Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh, urges Brussels to adopt measures to prevent the plight of those affected by the conflict and to negotiate an agreement that acknowledges the people’s right to self-determination.

The resolution also condemned Turkey’s role in the war.

Belgium also December 9 as a national day dedicated to the memory of the victims of the genocides officially recognized by the Belgian state.

Russia could increase the number of peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh, if parties agree – Putin

Russia could increase the number of peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, if all parties to the conflict deem it necessary, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

Speaking about the possibility of expanding the peacekeeping mission, Putin said “this is a purely technical issue.”

“If everyone comes to the conclusion that this is necessary, we will do it. If not, then we will not do it,” Putin said at an annual press conference.

A Russian peacekeeping contingent currently comprises 1,960 servicemen.

Putin noted that not only peacekeepers, but also employees of the Russian Emergencies Ministry, as well as the border service of the Russian Federal



Security Service, have been dispatched to Nagorno Karabakh.

He noted that only one case of ceasefire violation has been registered after the cessation of hostilities and hopes such cases will not repeat in the future.

“I do hope that all parties will still be able to sit down at the negotiating table, with our mediation or with the

mediation of the Minsk Group – this is not important, the most important is to get the process going,” he said.

The President added that Russia is ready to continue providing humanitarian aid to the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also hopes for help from international organizations.

“We very much hope that the international mediators will finally move from words to deeds, and will actually start helping people who need help, first of all, refugees returning to Nagorno-Karabakh. That not only Russia will do this by sending humanitarian convoys, but also international organizations, will finally deploy – UNICEF, UNESCO, and the UN food organization,” Putin said.

Highest authorities of Azerbaijan continue to openly preach hatred towards ethnic Armenians- Tatoyan

Ombudsman of Armenia Arman Tatoyan has issued a statement, noting that the highest authorities of Azerbaijan continue to openly preach hatred and animosity towards ethnic Armenians.

The statement says:

“The highest authorities of Azerbaijan continue to openly preach hatred and animosity towards ethnic Armenians:

1. The President of Azerbaijan continues to generate hatred towards the entire Armenian people with his public speeches, to make threats against the entire population of Armenia, to make insulting and hateful expressions.
2. In particular, during the military event held in Baku on December 10, 2020, the President of Azerbaijan delivered a public speech full of open threats of genocide addressed to the entire people of Armenia, as well as systemic hatred. During the same event, the President of Turkey had a public speech with more open threats addressed to lives of the entire people of Armenia praising the organizers and perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide.

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia has already presented the very dangerous consequences of these two speeches not only for the people of Armenia, but also for the international human rights system in his public statement of the same day.

3. It is especially condemnable that after those speeches, the President of Azerbaijan made similar statements during the December 12, 2020 meeting with the OSCE Minsk Group France and the US Co-Chairs, i.e. not for the domestic, but for the international audience in presence of international figures.
4. The speech of the President of Azerbaijan of December 12, 2020 is full of expressions inciting hatred and animosity towards Armenians, open threats of mass violence against Armenians.

In particular, he mentioned in the part of that speech concerning Armenia. “(...) if Armenian fascism once again raises its



head, we will crush its head with an iron fist.” Moreover, this was done with special reference to the speech of the President of Azerbaijan during the military event held on December 10 in the capital of Azerbaijan.

The President of Azerbaijan also stated. “We gave such a response that destroyed the Armenian army and we can even say the Armenian state (...). “We dispelled the dreams of the so-called “Artsakh” of the Armenian nationalists.”.

5. The same speech used profound expressions of ethnicity towards Armenians, including those that generated hatred on religious grounds.
6. Afterwards, the President of Azerbaijan in his same speech of December 12, 2020 stated that open threats of his speech addressed to the entire people of Armenia should be conveyed to Armenians by the international community. And this was made in the presence of international figures and by a public speech.
7. The rhetorics sowing hatred and animosity are clear continuation of the previous public statements and speeches of the President of Azerbaijan. For example, in one case he stated that “Armenia is a country of no value. It is actually a colony, an outpost run from abroad”. In another case, Armenians were called wild beasts and predators. At the same time, speeches of the Azerbaijanh President on Armenia and the Armenian people constantly contain words of “Armenian fascism” and it is done to insult the Armenian people and incite hatred towards Armenians among the people of Azerbaijan.

8. Studies of Armenia’s Human Rights Defender’s Office, collected evidence confirm that after such speeches of the President of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani mass media and social networks are filled with similar expressions of hatred and animosity not only towards the people of Armenia, but towards all Armenians in general.

9. According to the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, these are the exact speeches that have been made over the years in Azerbaijan and by this an institutional system of propaganda of hatred and animosity towards Armenians on the basis of ethnicity, open promotion of impunity and state supported hatred at the highest level has been established.

State encouragement for killing Armenians in Azerbaijan has reached such a level that even the country’s Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) has publicly stated that Ramil Safarov, who brutally killed an Armenian soldier with ax during a night in a European Union member state, must become an example of patriotism for youth of Azerbaijan.

Such speeches are a direct reasons for the war crimes and the crimes against humanity committed by the Azerbaijani armed forces in September-November 2020 that do not even fit into the human imagination.

The expert examinations of videos of atrocities by the experts of the Human Rights Defender’s Office of Armenia have confirmed that Azerbaijani soldiers use the same expressions of the President of Azerbaijan as inspiration when torturing or killing Armenian soldiers or civilians, cutting off the parts of bodies of killed Armenians.

All above mentioned is confirmed by real and concrete evidence obtained by the Human Rights Defender of Armenia.

10. Therefore, the mentioned speeches of the President of Azerbaijan directly confirm the war crimes and atrocities committed by the Azerbaijani military forces during the wars of April 2016, September 2020-November and in other periods

and still continue.

page 11 These speeches also confirm that the described actions envisaged by international criminal law are results of an organized state policy of Azerbaijan, which clearly proves the Azerbaijani policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide through terroristic methods in Artsakh.

11. It is of particular concern for the Human Rights Defender of Armenia that the President of Azerbaijan delivered his speech full of insults and animosity towards the Armenian people in the presence of international figures on December 12, 2020, and surprisingly he has not been condemned by any of these figures or even their disagreement.
12. The Human Rights Defender of Armenia is convinced that such indifference of the international community in response to the hatred and animosity propaganda is one of the main preconditions that has led to systematic and widespread torture and cruelties of Armenians by the Azerbaijani military in Artsakh.
13. Such extremely dangerous phenomena must be strongly condemned by the international community.

It must be borne in mind that all the above mentioned violates basic principles of international law and undermines the entire international system of human rights and humanitarian protection.

14. Impunity creates new atrocities and torture.
15. The international community and particularly international organizations with mandates to protect human rights must prove that they are dedicated to their titles and missions that they still adhere to the international rules they have established.
16. The reason for this statement of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia on the mentioned extremely dangerous phenomena for human rights is related to the necessity to document, analyze and to submit to the international community the gross violations of right to life, property and other rights of Armenians grossly violated by the Azerbaijani armed forces.

This is due to the fact that these violations have long-term or lifelong negative consequences for their victims (lifelong disability, physical and mental suffering of victims of torture and their families, etc.). The U.S. Senate has overwhelmingly

passed defense bill mandating sanctions against Turkey over its purchase of Russian S-400 missiles.

The Senate passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) by an 84-13 vote on December 11, defying President Trump's threat to veto the bill if it does not repeal liability protections for social media companies, [Axios](#) reports.

The bill provides for the obligation to impose sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) in Turkey within a specific timeframe.

The bill requires the imposition of sanctions within 30 days of the legislation passing. It calls for sanctions on "each person that knowingly engaged in the acquisition of the S-400 air defense system" by Turkey. The bill would allow the president to rescind the sanctions after a year.

Earlier this week, the House passed the bill with an overwhelming majority.

Azerbaijan's efforts to cancel ECHR decisions failed

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), as a result of the actions taken by the Office of Armenia's Representative at the ECHR, has rejected the demand of the Azerbaijani government to eliminate the interim measure applied on September 29, 2020, Armenia's Representation at the ECHR told Armenpress.

"The European Court particularly has taken into account the fact that the demands for applying interim measure for the protection of rights of captured persons and the evidence on that continue to be presented against Azerbaijan. The Court has also noted that Azerbaijan has not regularly fulfilled the demands of



the Court to provide respective information about that persons. Therefore, the Court has found that the circumstances serving as a base for the interim measure continue to exist, thus, there are no grounds to cancel its decisions or their implementation.

Finally, the European Court has stated that it will continue examining the demands submitted for applying interim measures.

Let us remind that according to the decision of September 29, 2020, the European Court has called on Azerbaijan to refrain from measures, in particular from military actions which could lead to violations of convention rights of civilian population, as well as could also endanger their life and health. The ECHR has also called on Azerbaijan to fulfill its convention duties, especially under Article 2nd (right to life) and 3rd (ban on torture, inhuman treatment) of the Convention", the statement says.

Pilgrimage to the Armenian St. Thaddeus Monastery in Iran inscribed on UNESCO Intangible Heritage list



Pilgrimage to the Armenian St. Thaddeus Apostle Monastery in Iran has been inscribed on UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The annual three-day pilgrimage to St. Thaddeus Apostle Monastery in northwestern Iran is held each July. The pilgrimage venerates two prominent saints: St. Thaddeus, one of the first apostles preaching Christianity, and St. Santukhd, the first female Christian martyr.

The bearers of the element are the Armenian population in Iran, Iranian-Arme-

nians residing in Armenia, and followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Pilgrims gather in Tabriz before departing for the monastery. They cover 700 kilometers from Yerevan to the monastery annually.

The commemoration ceremony includes special liturgies, processions, prayers and fasting. It culminates in a Holy Mass with Holy Communion. Special times are set aside for traditional Armenian folk performances and Armenian dishes are served.

The pilgrimage is the primary social and cultural event of the year. Because at-



tendees reside in tents in close proximity to one another, the sense of community is enhanced. The monastery has been a pilgrimage site for over nineteen centuries.

However, during the years of Soviet power in Armenia, participating in the pilgrimage was prohibited. Bearers of the element preserved cultural memories of the pilgrimage and transmitted it to families and communities. Only after independence in the 1990s was the pilgrimage from Armenia resumed.



Attack on Shushi’s Ghazanchetsots Cathedral a possible war crime – Human Rights Watch

Azerbaijani forces attacked a church in the city of Shushi on October 8, 2020 during the Nagorno Karabakh hostilities, in what appears to be a deliberate targeting in violation of the laws of war, Human Rights Watch said.

“Two separate attacks, hours apart, on the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral on October 8 in the town of Shushi suggest that the church, a civilian object with cultural significance, was an intentional target despite the absence of evidence that it was used for military purposes. Weapon remnants Human Rights Watch collected at



the site corroborate the use of guided munitions. President Ilham Aliyev said that the church could have been targeted only by

mistake and was “not among military targets”, Human Rights Watch said.

“The two strikes on the church, the second one while journalists and other civilians had gathered at the site, appear to be deliberate,” said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “These attacks should be impartially investigated and those responsible held to account.”

On October 8, 2020, Azerbaijan carried out two strikes on the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, causing damage to the complex.

First TUMO Box opens in Armenia's Gavar

On December 18th, thanks to the cooperation between the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies and dot818, the first TUMO Box has opened in Gavar, a program aimed at the educational development of small towns and villages.

The event was attended by TUMO and dot818, the sponsor of Gavar TUMO Box,

the Minister of Education and Science, Vahram Dumanyan, Deputy Minister Zhanna Andreasyan, the Deputy Minister of Transport and Communication, Victoria Poghosyan, the Governor of Gegharkunik region, Gnel Sanosyan, the Mayor of Gavar, Gurgen Martirosyan, as well as representatives of local self-government bodies, TUMO alumni and prospective Gavar TUMOians.

Welcoming those present, TUMO CEO Marie Lou Papazian stated, "TUMO's regional expansion is gaining momentum with the opening of the Gavar TUMO Box project. Cultivating Armenian youth is a guarantee to our success in the fields of handicrafts, art, construction, culture and science. I wish the best to the children of Gavar and the TUMO team. Until our next project in Armenia!"

Gnel Sanosyan, the governor of Gegharkunik Province, stressed the importance of the initiative. "I'm thankful to our partners for making the project happen during such difficult times. The regional government and our communities are willing to support TUMO in opening new Boxes in the region. Another one is slated to open in Sevan soon. It is very important to de-



centralize our educational and development efforts, and to fully realize the potential of even our smallest communities. With an initiative like this, students are free to get the most innovative education right in their hometown."

David Tonoyan, the founder of dot818, sent his thoughts about the cooperation and potential of the project from the US, noting, "dot818 is very excited and proud of the implementation of the Gavar TUMO Box project. Cultivating Armenian youth is a guarantee to our success in the fields of handicrafts, art, construction, culture and science. I wish the best to the children of Gavar and the TUMO team. Until our next project in Armenia!"

At the event, the first registered students of the Gavar Box learned more about the program and met with experienced TUMO alumni. Gavar TUMOians Yegor, Hayk and Larisa were the first ones to try out robotics, drawing and programming.

The goal of the TUMO Box project is to make the TUMO curriculum accessible to young people in small communities. It is a small but technically equipped mini TUMO. Students will begin in the self-study phase of the TUMO curriculum in the Box, and will then move onto TUMO Dilijan for workshops and labs. Each TUMO

box will provide the opportunity to educate over 300 young people a year in the fields of technology and design. In addition to TUMO's main program, the Box can be used in the morning for other educational programs.

dot818 is an American marketing solutions company based in Glendale, California, founded in 2011. It specializes



in publisher solutions, advertising solutions and lead distribution. In addition to its headquarters in California, dot818 also operates an office in Charlotte, North Carolina and the United Kingdom. TUMO Box's next location will be in Berd, located in Tavush province, slated to open this December.

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