

## Armenians will build the homeland of their dream with hard work: Nikol Pashinyan's message on Labor Day



Armenians are hardworking, creative and talented people; they will build the homeland of their dream with hard work, acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in a congratulatory message on Labor Day.

“We must all move towards materializing that goal, straightening our back; we must believe in our strength, build a strong, developed, innovative, forward-looking state through joint work,” he said.

The message reads:

Dear compatriots,

Congratulations to all of us on International Workers' Day!

The COVID-19 crisis and the war triggered many challenges and problems, which cannot be tackled but through daily work, with the individual effort of each of us and a fully developed creative potential. The crisis of 2020 exposed the problems we had failed to address ever since independence as we did not take them seriously for objective or subjective reasons.

During the last three years, the main task of our government has been to encourage citizens to work, act, carry out economic activities, and to believe in their own strength and success.

It seemed to bear fruit already, but last year's emergencies unfortunately hampered our progress and development.

Dear compatriots,

Our further steps will be aimed at creating opportunities for our citizens to develop their individual capabilities, providing proper conditions for education, continued development of skills and knowledge. The protection of workers' rights is a daily focus for the Government of Armenia, and we are taking steps in that direction.

The Armenians are hardworking, creative and talented people; they will build the homeland of their dream with hard work. We must all move towards materializing that goal, straightening our back; we must believe in our strength, build a strong, developed, innovative, forward-looking state through joint work. This process is underway and will reach its objective in spite of the crisis, the problems and difficulties caused by the war.

There is a future in Armenia, and we will build that bright future with energetic and creative work.

Happy May Day!

Long live creative work!

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## Armenian Foreign Ministry condemns desecration of statue to Mahatma Gandhi



The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has strongly condemned the damaging and burning of the pedestal of the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, a symbol of India's independence and statehood, peace advocate and humanist.

This is a provocation against the centuries-old Armenian-Indian friendship, dynamically developing since the indepen-

dence, the Ministry said in a statement.

“The issue of preserving monuments is an obligation of all of us, and any such act of vandalism and desecration is an encroachment on the universal values, the perpetrators of which must be held accountable within the law,” the statement reads.

## Armenian President urges ICRC to take all measures to ensure the immediate release of POWs

President Armen Sarkissian sent a letter to the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Peter Maurer, anticipating the Committee's assistance in ensuring the soonest return of Armenian prisoners of war and civilians held by Azerbaijan.

In the letter, President Sarkissian particularly emphasized that during the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh, with the active support and direct participation of Turkey, and after the cessation of hostilities several hundred Armenian servicemen and civilians were captured, tortured and inhumanely treated by Azerbaijan.

“Addressing the humanitarian situation in Artsakh today is a priority, urgent attention is required from the international community. The international community, all



the countries of the OSCE Minsk Group, international organizations, individuals must give an adequate assessment to the actions of Azerbaijan,” the President emphasized.

He reminded that in line with the trilateral statement on the ceasefire of November 9, 2020, the Republic of Armenia has transferred all prisoners of war to Azerbai-

jan. “However, it is extremely important that the exchange of all prisoners of war or civilians be carried out under the “all for all” principle, which is ignored by Azerbaijan.

“In gross violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, Azerbaijan hides the true number of Armenian prisoners of war and continues to deny and prevent the return of hostages and prisoners of war,” said President Sarkissian, adding that “Armenia expects support from international partners in ensuring the immediate return of all prisoners.”

He urged the International Committee of the Red Cross to take all necessary measures in accordance with international humanitarian law to ensure the immediate release and safe return of prisoners of war.

## Armenia's acting FM discusses post-war situation in Artsakh with French lawmakers

Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Ara Aivazian received members of the French National Assembly Guy Teissier, François Pupponi, Valerie Boyer, Marguerite Deprez-Audebert and Xavier Breton.

Ara Aivazian hailed the support to the Armenian people and the contribution of the French parliamentarians to advancing the agenda of the Armenian-French friendship. Acting Minister Aivazian noted that the high representation by France at the events commemorating the 106th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide is a reaffirmation of France's unwavering commitment to universal values and dignity.

The interlocutors exchanged views on a number of issues on the Armenian-French bilateral agenda. The close cooperation established on the parliamentary platform, both bilaterally and multilaterally, was highly appreciated.

Issues of regional security and peace were touched upon during the meeting. In this context, Ara Aivazian drew the attention of the parliamentarians to the humanitarian situation in Artsakh due to the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression, the socio-economic problems facing the Armenians of Artsakh, and the urgency of addressing them.



Ara Aivazian thanked the French parliamentarians for supporting the Armenians of Artsakh during and after the war.

## “We have always felt your support, which is especially important now” - Nikol Pashinyan receives French parliamentarians

Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received a French parliamentary delegation led by Guy Tessier, Vice-President of the French National Assembly's Armenia-France Friendship Group and Chairman of the France-Artsakh Friendship Caucus.

The delegation consists of Senator, Vice-President of the French Senate's Armenia-France Friendship Group and Founding Member of the France-Artsakh Friendship Caucus Valérie Boyer, MP and Vice-President of the Armenia-France Friendship Group Jean-Pierre Cubertafon, MPs Jacqueline Dubois and Xavier Breton.

“Armenia highly appreciates the fact that France has always stood by Armenia, as evidenced by the visits paid by high-ranking delegations from both the legislative and executive branches in such a difficult period and your participation in commemorative events on April 24. As a token of solidarity with friendly Armenia and Artsakh, this comes to reaffirm the continuity of deeply rooted Armenian-French relations and the common set of democratic values. I stated this in my latest phone talk with President Emmanuel Macron.” Nikol Pashinyan said. He went on to highlight the key role played by France in the process of international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide with the adoption of the law on recognition of the Armenian Genocide (which turned 20 this year). On President



Macron's initiative, April 24 was proclaimed as Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day and commemorated at the state level. Taking the opportunity, Nikol Pashinyan thanked the guests for submitting to the French National Assembly on April 16 a draft resolution on the release of Armenian prisoners of war by Azerbaijan.

Guy Tessier noted that having gone through many trials and destructive wars throughout its history, France best understands and shares the pain suffered by the Armenian people. In his words, it is shameful that Azerbaijan fails to respect the laws of war and has not released the Armenian prisoners of war as of yet. The submission of a resolution for discussion at the French National Assembly pursues that very goal, moreover, it is planned to submit a similar resolution for discussion in the French Senate.

Mr. Tessier emphasized that despite the hardships, the hope of revival is alive for Armenia and Artsakh, and France will back it in every possible way. To this end, on December 3, 2020, the National Assembly

of France passed a resolution on the need to recognize the Artsakh Republic by 188 votes to 3.

The French parliamentarians shared their impressions of a recent visit to Artsakh, noting that they had also called at the Servicemen's Rehabilitation Center. They said that they had been shocked by what they saw at the Stepanakert cemetery and in Yerablur, and that they were deeply saddened at the loss suffered by Armenian families. At the same time, the guests emphasized that they were impressed by the contacts had in Armenia and Artsakh, including with young people who were full of hope and faith in the future.

Issues related to the situation around Artsakh were discussed during the meeting. The interlocutors touched upon the steps taken to resume the talks in the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs' format, the impediments to the repatriation of Armenian prisoners of war, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Artsakh, and the joint efforts aimed at providing medical support to servicemen. The French parliamentarians assured of their continued support to both Armenia and Artsakh, including the process of post-war rehabilitation and development.

“I am impressed by your kind remarks and your willingness. We have always felt your support, which is especially important now,” Nikol Pashinyan said.

## Armenia blocked Azerbaijan's participation in EEU intergovernmental council session

Azerbaijan as a non-member of the Eurasian Economic Union did not participate in the organization's recent intergovernmental council meeting because there was no consensus among the members – something required for the participation of any third country, the Armenian caretaker Deputy PM Mher Grigoryan told reporters, according to 1lurer.am.

When asked after the meeting whether or not it was Armenia who vetoed it, he said: “Yes, you can say so, because a third



country's participation at the EEU intergovernmental council session requires a consensus decision. Naturally there was no

consensus over this issue, particularly Armenia did not agree to the Azerbaijani representative's participation in the session.”

Asked by reporters whether or not Armenia's position is related to Azerbaijan's refusal to return POWs, Grigoryan said: “The issue is very compound and I wouldn't want to point out one condition or precondition out of context. There was no consensus over this issue, while such participation requires the participation of all member-countries,” Grigoryan said.

## U.S. Hopes for Democratic Elections in Armenia

The United States hopes that Armenia's upcoming snap parliamentary elections will be free and fair and will closely monitor them, the U.S. ambassador in Yerevan, Lynne Tracy, said on April 26.

"This is something we will be following closely," Tracy told RFE/RL's Armenian Service in an interview. "USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development) will be providing some technical assistance to the Central Election Commission as well as helping with voter information."

"What we certainly hope to see is that Armenia is able in the conduct of its elections to meet or even exceed that very good, high bar that it set in 2018. And we think ... that's very achievable," she said.

The elections expected in late June are meant to end a serious political crisis sparked by last year's war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Opposition groups blame Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for Armenia's defeat in the six-week war, having tried to topple him with street protests. National security is therefore expected to be the main theme of the unfolding parliamentary race.

"What I think we will see in this election is an opportunity for candidates to talk about how they intend to help secure Ar-



menia's future," said Tracy. "That's what a free and fair election is all about."

Both Pashinyan and most of his political opponents stand for a further deepening of Armenia's defense and security ties with Russia. The prime minister has indicated his desire to see more Russian troops deployed in the country and its southeastern Syunik province in particular.

Russia already dispatched soldiers and border guards to Syunik late last year in addition to 2,000 Russian peacekeeping troops deployed to Karabakh.

Asked whether Washington regards increased Russian military presence as a threat to Armenia's sovereignty, Tracy said: "We think that while obviously Russia is a partner for Armenia in certain spheres such as the military ... it's important that Armenia has options and choices, has diversity in its economy, energy spheres so that it can make the kinds of choices that are in the best interests of Armenians."

"There is military security but there are also other kinds of security," she said. "There is economic security. There is security in having strong, resilient institutions of governance that are deeply rooted in integrity ... And so, these are areas that the United States can contribute to."

"I think it's more concerning to see an overdependence on one particular partner. So, we think that we have a role to play here and we would like to be able to continue working in these areas of good governance and economic growth," added the envoy.

Citing U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's comments made earlier this year, Tracy also said that the Biden administration plans on "reinvigorating" U.S. involvement in international efforts to resolve the Karabakh conflict.

"The fighting is stopped but what we see is that there are still some very critical issues to be addressed: the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the issues of displaced persons," she said. "So, there are a number of issues that still very much remain on the agenda for the United States and the other Minsk Group co-chairs (Russia and France), and we intend to stay engaged on those issues."

By Harry Tamrazian

## Republican Party of Armenia to run in snap elections in alliance with Hayrenik



Former President Serzh Sargsyan's Republican Party (HHK) announced on April 29 its decision to seek an electoral alliance with another opposition party led by former National Security Service (NSS) Director Artur Vanetsyan.

The HHK and Vanetsyan's Hayrenik (Fatherland) party have been affiliated with the Homeland Salvation Front, a coalition of opposition forces that have tried to topple Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

over his handling of last year's war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Unlike Hayrenik, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) and other members of the alliance, the HHK until recently signaled its desire to boycott snap parliamentary elections expected in June, saying that they could be rigged by Pashinyan.

But the former ruling party eventually decided against an election boycott at a meeting of its governing body headed by Sargsyan. In a statement, it cited the "vital need" to oust Pashinyan.

"Given the existing political realities, we believe that the Hayrenik party's possible political cooperation is the most effective way to dethrone the capitulator [Pashinyan,]" Armen Ashotyan, the HHK's deputy chairman, told a news conference.

The HHK thus chose not to team up

for now with Robert Kocharyan, another former president who is expected to join forces with Dashnaksutyun. Kocharyan again said earlier this month that he will be Pashinyan's main challenger.

Hayrenik did not immediately react to the HHK announcement. Vanetsyan founded the party a year ago after being relieved of his duties in September 2019.

Vanetsyan, 42, was appointed as head of the NSS immediately the 2018 "Velvet Revolution" that toppled Sarkisian and brought Pashinyan to power. He quickly became an influential member of Pashinyan's entourage, overseeing high-profile corruption investigations into former government officials and Sargsyan's relatives.

Ashotyan downplayed this fact and said the former security chief has cooperated with various opposition forces since his resignation.

## Unblocking communications can alter economic situation in entire region – Pashinyan tells Mishustin



Acting Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan particularly emphasized the role of Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin in stopping the war in Nagorno Karabakh during the meeting with Russian PM Mikhail Mishustin. Pashinyan

assessed the activities of the Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh as effective.

“I want to also point out the activities of the trilateral working group, co-chaired by the Deputy PMs of Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan.

We have a constructive approach to this issue. I have to note that we greatly appreciate the

works of the trilateral working group, since the unblocking of the regional communications can alter the economic situation in our region and strengthen the economic relations and integration between Arme-

nia and Russia. In this context, I want to mention Russian Deputy PM Alexei Overchuk’s important and constructive role.

We really greatly appreciate his work and hope it will lead to concrete results. It’s clear for everyone that it’s important not only for our region, but our region in a broader sense, since we are talking about the restoration of links between the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Russian Federation.

This can really become a powerful economic factor for the development of the Eurasian Economic Union. I wish to once again confirm that we have a constructive stance and hope that the ongoing works will lead to concrete results that will bring stability, peace and welfare to our region”, Nikol Pashinyan said.

## EU urges release of Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan

The European Union has called on Azerbaijan to free all Armenian soldiers and civilians held by it more than five months after a Russian-brokered ceasefire stopped the war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In a statement released on April 28, the EU welcomed the “consolidation of the ceasefire on the ground,” repatriation of the remains of people killed during the fighting and humanitarian aid provided to civilians in the conflict zone.

“The European Union reiterates, however, that renewed efforts are necessary to build confidence between both countries and make progress towards sustainable peace,” read the statement submitted to the Council of Europe.

“This includes refraining from hostile and offensive rhetoric, finalizing, as soon as possible, the return of all remaining prisoners of war and detained persons, regardless of the circumstances of their arrest, and cooperating also on other important issues such as demining,” it said.

The truce agreement calls for the un-



conditional release of all prisoners held by the conflicting sides. The Russian peacekeepers stationed in Karabakh arranged several prisoner swaps in December and early this year. No Azerbaijani prisoners are known to be held in Armenia or Karabakh at present.

A total of 69 Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians have been freed to date. More than 100 others are believed to remain in Azerbaijani captivity.

Azerbaijan says that they are not covered by the truce accord because they were captured after it took effect on November 10. Azerbaijani officials have branded them as “terrorists” and said Baku does not

intend to release them.

In recent months, Baku has also reportedly refused to provide the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) with information about the whereabouts of the remaining Armenian prisoners.

The EU statement stressed that the Azerbaijani authorities are obliged to comply with relevant “interim measures” issued by the ECHR in response to lawsuits filed from Armenia. “We call on Azerbaijan to provide the outstanding information requested by the Court,” it said.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hailed the “very important” EU statement during a weekly session of his cabinet on Thursday. He said the growing international pressure on Baku “increases our optimism about achieving concrete results on this issue.”

“We need to be as united, patient and consistent as possible,” added Pashinyan.

The U.S., Russian and French mediators co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group also called for the release of the Armenian POWs civilians earlier this month.

## Digital transformation remains one of the pillars of integration, Armenia's acting PM says at EAEU meeting



Industry is one of the main driving forces of the Eurasian Economic Union's economic system, Armenia's acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at the extended sitting of the EAEU Intergovernmental Council in Kazan.

He stressed that it is impossible to cre-

ate a full-fledged single market for goods without developing a coordinated policy in that direction. "We consider it necessary to continue the work aimed at deepening industrial cooperation and coordination of national industrial policies."

"Undoubtedly, we are also interested in improving the competitiveness of goods produced in the EAEU, both in domestic and foreign markets," the acting PM added.

Speaking about the document on the main directions of industrial cooperation within the EAEU until 2025, Pashinyan

said one of its most important guidelines is the joint promotion of the innovative development of the industry and digital transformation.

"Given the changing economic situation, the transition to a new level of technological development of economies is crucial. Digital transformation remains one of the pillars of integration. We are traditionally of the opinion that it is necessary to deepen cooperation in this direction from now on," the acting PM stated.

"I am confident that the implementation of the Strategic Directions in the future will allow us to achieve an agreed industrial policy and, together with other measures, will serve to improve the competitiveness of products produced in the Union," Pashinyan stated.

## Minister offers rosy outlook for Armenian economy

(RFE/RL) - Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan said on April 29 that he will resign if the Armenian economy does not grow at a double-digit rate this year.

Kerobyan insisted that this is a realistic target despite the continuing coronavirus pandemic that plunged Armenia into a recession last year.

"True, I'm not quite happy with month-on-month economic growth in March," he told reporters. "Instead of 7-7.5 percent projected by us, only 3.8 percent [growth] was registered, according to preliminary data. But that will still be enough to ensure our double-digit economic growth by the end of this year."

The Armenian Finance Ministry expects the country's GDP to increase by only 3.2 percent in real terms after shrinking by 7.6 percent last year. The Armenian Central Bank has forecast an even lower 2021 grow rate: 1.4 percent.

Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have offered simi-



lar outlooks. "The recovery will be slow; the economy is unlikely to return to pre-COVID output levels until 2023," the bank said in a report released late last month.

"I will resign if Armenia does not have double-digit economic growth," Kerobyan declared after a weekly cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

The 44-year-old businessman joined the government in November 2020 in a cabinet reshuffle initiated by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. He was the chief executive of Armenia's largest food delivery company until then.

Kerobyan spoke to journalists as he faced protests against his decision to lay

off about 70 employees of the Armenian Ministry of Economy for cost-cutting purposes. The latter have worked at nationwide ministry divisions providing counseling to farmers and monitoring the use of the government's agricultural subsidies.

Many of the affected officials gathered outside the government headquarters in Yerevan to demand that Kerobyan annul his decision.

"Imagine a wheat farming program subsidized by the state. Shouldn't we verify whether public funds have been used efficiently and whether the wheat was actually planted?" said Artak Khachatryan, the acting head of one such division based in northwestern Shirak province.

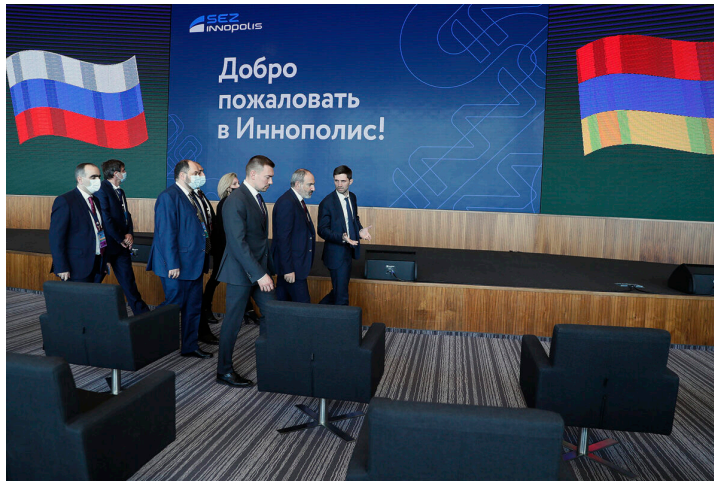
Kerobyan said these monitoring functions must be outsourced to banks and financial institutions working with the government. "We are trying to spend taxpayers' money as efficiently as possible," he said.

## Armenia's acting PM visits the Innopolis innovative city in Kazan

Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan visited the innovative city of Innopolis in Kazan on April 30 as part of a working visit to Russia. It is the first Russian city for IT specialists.

Nikol Pashinyan toured the innovative city, got acquainted with the activities of the technopark and the technological environment. Mayor Ruslan Shigaleyev and Director General of the Technopark Renat Khalimov presented the goals and objectives of Innopolis, the current and development programs, the model of city development in public-private partnership.

The city opened in 2015 occupies an area of 1,200 hectares and has 3,800 inhabitants. The infrastructure, economy, education and services are based on information technology and robotics. There is a Special Economic Zone with tax benefits, which makes the city attractive for IT companies



and startups. Currently, more than 360 companies are registered.

Complex infrastructure for providing services has been created. It includes residential complexes, kindergartens, schools, medical and sports centers, postal and banking departments, etc.

Nikol Pashinyan got acquainted with the programs and operating conditions of a number of IT companies in the city. Some technological enterprises expressed interest in developing cooperation with Armenia.

Nikol Pashinyan also visited the Innopolis University, got acquainted with the educational and research programs for training specialists in the field of technology, which are fully funded by the state.

The Acting Prime Minister noted that the IT sphere in Armenia is developing dynamically, and the government is interested in the continuous improvement of the conditions of the activities of the companies in the field. In this context, Nikol Pashinyan attached importance to the exchange of experience with Innopolis.

Before the visit to Innopolis, the Acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Mikhail Mishustin, together with the heads of other governments participating in the sitting of the EEU Intergovernmental Council, visited the Kazan Expo International Exhibition Center, got acquainted with its activities, current exhibitions and events.

## Carrefour to expand operations in Armenia

Caretaker Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan met with Carrefour Armenia CEO Vache Arsen to discuss the company's expansion in the country, the economy ministry said in a news release.

Owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim, Carrefour Armenia currently has three locations in Yerevan.

Carrefour Armenia revealed a 4-year development plan, whereby in the first year it will open 10 "convenience" type super-

markets in Yerevan. Then, in the next few years it will expand further and have presence in other cities across the country.

Arsen said they decided to expand given the measures taken in Armenia for the improvement of the investment environment. He expressed certainty that if this project is a success, they will implement larger projects in the future.

Vache Arsen noted that the expansion of Carrefour in Armenia will enable to sell



Armenian products also in the international chains of Carrefour around the world.

## 100,000 doses of Chinese CoronaVac vaccine delivered to Armenia

100 thousand doses of Chinese CoronaVac vaccine for 50 thousand people have been delivered to Armenia, the Ministry of Health informs.

The vaccine has been provided by the government of the People's Republic of China.

Vaccinations against COVID-19



continue throughout the country seven days a week for Armenian nationals and for foreign citizens living in Armenia.

The Ministry notes that COVID-19 vaccines are 100% effective in preventing death and severe disease. Vaccinations will help break the chain of the epidemic.

## French MP submits draft law to National Assembly legally binding Azerbaijan to return Armenian POWs

Member of the French National Assembly, France-Artsakh Friendship Circle President Guy Tessier has submitted a draft law to the National Assembly which, in case of being adopted, will pressure Azerbaijan to immediately return the Armenian war prisoners, Tessier said in an interview with ARMENPRESS in Yerevan, summing up the visit of the French parliamentarians to Armenia.

**- Mr. Tessier, you were in Armenia with a big delegation on an important day for the Armenian people, the commemoration day of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. What did your visit mean and what meeting did you have?**

- Why we came to Yerevan just on that day? Because April 24 is a very important commemoration day, because it's the most important commemoration of the Armenian Genocide also for us. Frankly speaking, we would like to come during the war and immediately after the war. What 1<sup>st</sup> came to my mind was to come here and celebrate the Christmas with the Armenian people, to celebrate the holidays of hope and beauty in Armenia, but it was impossible to come at that time and we said that we must definitely be in Armenia on April 24. And this time me had a double reason to come to Armenia, not only for the crucially important commemoration of the genocide, but also to honor the memories of all the young people who fell during the last war.

**- Experts say that following the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the U.S. President Joe Biden, the international recognition process has again come to an active phase. What are your expectations, will there be a**



**chain reaction of recognitions by the international community?**

- I can say that it has a great symbolism and will have consequences, because yes, 106 years have passed, but when the most powerful country of the world recognizes the genocide, it has some impact in the world and that's a very important fact. I can say why. I hear the will of the USA behind this statement to restore their right place in the Minsk Group Co-chairs' platform, I mean again re-starting the Minsk Group Co-chairs' format as the sole platform for the peace process. Apart from those developments, there is also the fact that President Macron called President Putin and they had a direct conversation on very important issues, particularly about Armenia and the developments taking place here. This is another evidence that all the sides have the willingness to re-start the Minsk Group Co-chairs' format aimed at the resumption of the negotiation process not only for securing the security of the people living in Artsakh, but also to ensure the security of Armenia. I think that great powers start to understand little by little the nature of the situation, and it's in their interests to establish long-term and sustainable peace in this region. This issue should be solved at the UN level and I see no reasons why the UN should assist this or

that country but should not help Armenia. I think everything should be done at the UN level to re-establish peace here. I witnessed the courage of the Armenian people during the last days and I think Armenia deserves to be supported.

**- Azerbaijan continues keeping the Armenian POWs in violation of the trilateral declaration. What can France do as an OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair country to contribute to the return of the POWs, and not only France, what's the role of the international community?**

- There are laws regulating wars, there are laws forcing to return the POWs immediately. There is a law that requires a prisoner of war to return to his family. Armenia has done it and France, which is a country of rule of law, demands and will very strongly demand that right to be implemented.



A while ago I put a draft law on the table of the President of the National Assembly of France. It will have a status of law, to take all possible measures to force Azerbaijan to return the Armenian POWs. I think that the European community will take similar measures. I think that separate European states will do the same.

*Interview by Anna Grigoryan*

## French lawmakers visit Yerablur military cemetery in Yerevan



French lawmakers François Pupponi, Erablur Xavier Breton, Guy Teissier, Valérie Boyer and Marguerite Deprez-Audebert visited the Yerablur military cemetery in Yerevan.

"I realized how many soldiers fell in the recent conflict in Artsakh and how young they were. I want to show all the Armenian people, their families and loved ones

all my support. I will never forget their sacrifice and suffering and I will always remain committed to the Armenian cause," François Pupponi said in a Facebook post.

"The fight they waged at the risk of their lives was a fight for their freedom but it was also one to protect us Europeans against obscurantism and Turkish-Azeri hegemony.



## Erdogan Avoids Escalating Genocide Dispute with Biden

(REUTERS) - Despite its fury with the United States for calling the Ottoman massacre of Armenians a genocide, Turkey is for now avoiding a showdown which could hurt its fragile economy and scupper hopes of better ties with U.S.-allied Arab states.



President Tayyip Erdogan angrily condemned Joe Biden's characterization of the killings a century ago, saying the U.S. president should "look in the mirror" and examine the fate of Native Americans wiped out by settlers who founded his country.

But the usually combative Turkish leader, who has often used foreign disputes to rally domestic support, is more focused on reviving a battered economy which is key to his long-term reelection prospects.

In a largely restrained response, he has taken no concrete retaliatory steps, and addressed the issue just once since Biden's historic declaration on Saturday.

In the same televised speech in which he lashed out at Biden's "baseless, unjust and untrue remarks", Erdogan stressed that the two leaders could forge a new start when they meet in June for the first time since Biden took office.

That softer tone reflects the delicate path Erdogan is treading between fury over the genocide designation and fear of the damage which could be done by a deeper rift with Washington.

It is also consistent with Turkey's broader goal since late last year of mending frayed ties with Western and Arab states, after years of military interventions and assertive foreign policy which increased Ankara's hard power but left it largely isolated in the east Mediterranean and Middle East.

Relations with Washington were already strained by Turkey's purchase of Russian air defenses and U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish fighters Ankara says are inextricably linked to militants waging a decades old insurgency in Turkey.

In contrast to his predecessor Donald Trump, who spoke to Erdogan regularly and was largely sympathetic to the Turkish president, Biden has kept his distance and his administration has criticized Ankara's human rights record. Three months after taking office, Biden had not spoken to Erdogan until last Friday, when he called the Turkish leader to give him advance notice of his genocide declaration.

"Certainly it was not something pleasant," a senior Turkish official with knowledge of the call told Reuters. "Doing this in his first year was a stance that put relations in jeopardy".

At the same time, the official said the phone call "laid the foundations" for the two NATO partners to cooperate in future. "Developments will show how relations will evolve, but it still appears that it can be overcome."

Two other officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, also said Turkey would seek to avoid escalating the dispute with Washington - at least for now. Erdogan's spokesman and national security adviser, Ibrahim Kalin, told Reuters the day after Biden's announcement that Turkey would respond in various ways in the coming months.

After 18 years in power, support for Erdogan's Islamist-rooted AK Party has eroded as Turkey's once vibrant economic growth has stalled and it grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic. Facing elections in 2023, the centenary of the modern Turkish state, Erdogan's chances of heading into a third decade in office rest on his ability to revive the country's fortunes.

Opposition parties say the government

mismanaged COVID-19 and erred in selling off \$128 billion in foreign currency to stem losses in the lira.

Biden's statement showed Erdogan was too weak to give the U.S. president the response he deserved, said Meral Aksener, head of the centrist nationalist Iyi Party, mocking what she said was Erdogan's uncharacteristic deference.

"The world leader who takes pride in shunning those who upset him has become a very polite, very cute, little darling Mr Erdogan," she said in a speech to party members on Wednesday.

But with the lira not far off a record low against the dollar and COVID-19 rates still perilously high, officials say Erdogan's priority is to avoid further harm. Ankara is trying to rebuild bridges with the European Union, as well as U.S. allies including Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

"We will act within the framework of the economic conditions during the pandemic and the approach the president signaled to in November about opting for better ties with the European Union, Gulf nations or other problematic regions," a senior security official said. He said Turkey's policy would be one of 'wait-and-see', until the presidents meet in June.

Sinan Ulgen, head of the Istanbul-based Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies think tank, said those talks would be crucial to shaping Turkey's relationship with Biden.

"The fact that the reaction has been muted until now does not mean it will remain as such in the future," he said.

Nevertheless, the measured response suggested Ankara was avoiding a "conflict-prone foreign policy" which has hurt the economy by putting off foreign investors.

"It's the beginning of a sea change," he said. "It remains to be seen whether this will be sustainable and constitute the main thrust of Turkish foreign policy in the years to come."

## President Biden reportedly waives section 907, paving the way for US assistance to Azerbaijan



President Joe Biden – who pointedly called on his predecessor to fully implement Section 907 sanctions against Azerbaijan – has reportedly moved to waive this Congressional sanction, clearing the way for Biden-Harris Administration assistance to the oil-rich and anti-Armenian Aliyev regime, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

“American recognition of the Armenian Genocide comes with responsibilities, among them not arming or abetting Azerbaijan’s drive to complete this crime,” said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. “Any action by President Biden that greenlights U.S. aid to the Aliyev regime would run counter to the letter of his clear stand during the campaign and, more pro-

foundly, the spirit of his recent recognition of the Armenian Genocide.”

In October of last year, amid a major Azerbaijani attack on Artsakh, then-candidate Biden said: “The [Trump] administration must fully implement and not waive requirements under Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act to stop the flow of military equipment to Azerbaijan.”

The ANCA has long held that Administrations – Democratic and Republican – should refrain from waiving Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, a statute prohibiting U.S. aid to the government of Azerbaijan until “the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The ANCA has also called upon Congress to roll back its Section 907 waiver authority, requiring Azerbaijan to meet the original terms of this law in order to be eligible for U.S. assistance.

Section 907, enacted in 1992, estab-

lishes statutory restrictions on U.S. assistance to the Government of Azerbaijan “until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.” The Congress included a Section 907 waiver in the FY2002 Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act. The Section 907 waiver and subsequent annual extensions require a number of certifications, including that granting the waiver “will not undermine or hamper ongoing efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan or be used for offensive purposes against Armenia.” The White House – exercising this waiver authority – has provided U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan ever since, including, during the Trump Administration, high levels (nearly \$120 million) of military and security aid. This assistance has been provided without clear and consistent Congressional notifications.

## Billboard in Massachusetts thanks President Biden for recognizing Armenian Genocide

The Peace of Art, Inc. has displayed an electronic billboard erected on one of the busy highways in the state of Massachusetts to thank President Joe Biden for recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The billboard presents two alternating screens. On the first screen the organization thanks President Biden for recognizing the Armenian Genocide, and on the second, it quotes President Biden’s statement on the occasion of Armenian Remembrance Day: “The American people honor the memory of all Armenians who fell victim to the genocide 106 years ago today.” President Joe Biden, April 24, 2021.”

In March 2021, on the eve of the 106th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide Peace of Art, Inc. launched



its annual education campaign by displaying electronic billboards in the state of Massachusetts, USA. The message on this year’s billboards asks, “Mr. President, with honor, dignity and courage recognize the Armenian Genocide.”

For the past twenty-five years Peace of Art, Inc., has continuously called on America to recognize the Armenian Genocide. On April 24, 2021, President Biden honored his promise and recognized the Armenian Genocide.

## Operation Koltso one of the bloodiest deportations – Artsakh MFA



30 years ago, on April 30, 1991, the Azerbaijani authorities launched the operation Koltso (Ring), which can rightfully be called one of the bloodiest and most inhuman operations on the deportation of peoples from their historical lands.

As a result of the operation, in the course of which tanks, combat helicopters and artillery were employed against civilians for the first time, hundreds of Arme-

nian villages in Northern Artsakh, as well as Shahumyan, Hadrut and Shushi regions were devastated and destroyed, tens of thousands of people were deported, hundreds were killed and taken hostages. The fate of many of them remains unknown so far.

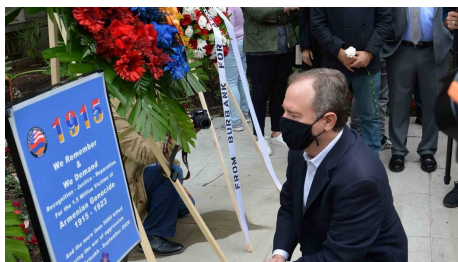
“The operation Koltso became yet another manifestation of Azerbaijan’s genocidal policy and the continuation of a series of Armenian pogroms and ethnic cleansing committed in Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad and other Armenian-populated cities and regions of Azerbaijan, as well as in the settlements of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region and Northern Artsakh in 1988-1991,” Artsakh’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The operation Koltso transferred the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict to a military domain and led to the subsequent full-scale aggression of Azerbaijan against the Republic of Artsakh, which continues up today

“The war crimes and gross violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Azerbaijani armed forces during the operation Koltso, the 4-day war in April 2016 and the 44-day war in the fall of 2020 imposed on Artsakh by Azerbaijan with the support of Turkey and the participation of mercenaries from various terrorist groups testify that indifference and impunity for crimes against humanity lead to their recurrence,” the Ministry stated.

## I will always stand with the Armenian community as we demand independence for Artsakh – Rep. Schiff

I will always stand with the Armenian community to honor the martyred saints of the Armenian Genocide, and our work goes on as we continue the fight for justice and reparations, Member of the House of Representatives Adam Schiff said in a Facebook post.



“I will always stand with the Armenian community as we demand peace and independence for Artsakh,” he said.

“I will always stand with the Armenian community as we strengthen our ties to Armenia,” Rep. Schiff added.

## The Economist on infamous “macabre” Azeri park

Both past and present haunt relations between Turkey and Armenia, The Economist’s editorial board wrote in an article, stating that the two countries don’t show any sign of reconciling.

“A century ago, Ottoman troops committed an Armenian genocide. A few months ago, Turkey helped Azerbaijan defeat Armenia in a war,” the article says.

Noting that despite some Turkish official circles have been talking about a possible “new-era” in the Armenia-Turkey relations, their actions prove otherwise.

The Economist quoted Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan’s earlier interview where

he said that the re-opening of the borders with Armenia from the Turkish side would de-escalate tension. He had also noted that Armenia is ready to establish relations with Turkey without preconditions.

Nevertheless, The Economist writes that the actions of Turkey and Azerbaijan prove otherwise.

“Turkey and Azerbaijan were not really reassuring. During this victory parade in Azerbaijan, Erdogan praised Enver Pasha, one of the architects of the genocide. Mr. Aliyev recently presided over the opening of a macabre “Spoils of War” theme park, featuring mannequins of

wounded Armenian soldiers with hooked noses and grotesque faces, and neatly tidy helmets of Armenians killed in the war. How to reconcile such displays with Azerbaijan’s peace offers is a guess. What MM. Erdogan and Aliyev, Armenia looks less like an olive branch and more like the short end of the stick.”



## US Senators reintroduce legislation demanding sanctions against Turkish officials

Senators Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) have announced the reintroduction of the *Turkey Human Rights Promotion Act of 2021*.

This legislation condemns human rights abuses carried out by the Government of Turkey, which intensified after a 2016 coup attempt. The Government of Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has engaged in a brazen campaign to silence journalists, political opponents, dissidents, civil society activists, and minorities throughout Turkish society, as well as targeting Turkish citizens outside of its borders.

This legislation makes it clear that the United States should use its considerable leverage with this NATO ally to prevent a further erosion of hard-fought democratic progress in Turkey. Senators Markey and Wyden first introduced the *Turkey Human Rights Promotion Act* in 2017, and again in 2019.

“President Erdogan’s free pass from the Trump White House to commit abuses has officially expired,” said **Senator Markey, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**. “The United States will once again speak out forcefully and take steps to hold the Erdogan government accountable for its campaign to silence opposition by censoring social media, clamping down on free speech, and locking away critics. This legislation makes clear that President Biden must use all diplomatic tools to signal – unmistakably – that the United States comes down on the side of journalists, activists, and civil society leaders, and will stand up in opposition to Turkish officials who direct or carry out systematic human rights abuses.”

“Turkey’s authoritarian government has trampled on the rights of journalists, political rivals and regular citizens who dare to voice criticism of President Erdogan,” said **Senator Wyden**. “Senators Markey, Merkley and I are renewing our call for accountability because America cannot stand by while partners and allies systematically violate basic freedoms.”

“President Erdogan’s track record of democratic backsliding and politically-motivated detentions of journalists, civil society leaders, members of the political opposition, and others threatens some of



the most basic human rights of freedom of expression and due process,” said **Senator Merkley, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**. “The United States cannot stay silent in the face of this disturbing behavior. We must use the diplomatic levers available to us to ensure that Turkey’s political prisoners are released, and that dangerous anti-terrorism laws are repealed.”

A copy of the legislation can be found [HERE](#).

The Government of Turkey has dismissed or suspended more than 60,000 police and military personnel, 125,000 civil servants, one-third of the judiciary, arrested or imprisoned more than 90,000 citizens, and closed more than 1,500 nongovernmental organizations on sham charges.

This legislation *specifically*:

- Directs the Secretary of State to provide assistance to civil society organizations in Turkey that work to secure the release of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Turkey.
- Makes it a Statement of Policy for the United States to support democracy, peace, and prosperity in Turkey and to oppose the Government of Turkey’s attack on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.
- Expresses the Sense of Senate that the Government of Turkey must –
  - Take steps to significantly improve the dire climate for journalists and those supporting the journalism profession;
  - Cease its ongoing crackdown on free expression on the internet, including by repealing or amending laws that allow the government to block a website or remove content from the website; and
  - Halt its indiscriminate detention and prosecution of lawyers, judges, and prosecutors, and fulfill its obligations under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) European

Convention on Human Rights, and Turkey’s other international human rights obligations.

- Expresses the Sense of the Senate that, if the Government of Turkey does not take effective steps to address its human rights violations,
  - The President should impose sanctions pursuant to the *Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act* with respect to officials of the Government of Turkey found responsible for the detention of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, politically motivated detention of journalists, restricting freedom of expression through social media, and other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights;

– The Secretary of State should impose visa restrictions under the so-called “Khashoggi Ban” for those engaged in serious extraterritorial counter-dissident activities, as the Government of Turkey is reported to have done; and

– The Treasury Secretary should direct United States executive directors of key international financial institutions to oppose any loans, grants, policies, or strategies determined to be enabling the Government of Turkey to violate human rights of its citizens.

“This bill offers a glimmer of hope for the thousands of innocent victims in Turkey being denied basic human rights. I’ve spent my life fighting for justice in my homeland,” said **Portland Trailblazers player and human rights activist Enes Kanter**. “Thousands of journalists, professors, lawyers, and many others are locked in Turkish prisons simply for speaking up against the lawless dictator Erdogan. Even my own father was a political prisoner, and I am personally facing political charges, all for speaking the truth about an oppressive, corrupt government. This bill brings us a step closer to justice, rule of law, and freedom.”

“As Turkey’s human rights record continues to deteriorate at alarming speed, this legislation serves as an important record of the Turkish government’s abuses and calls on the Biden administration to take steps to support the victims of this oppression,” said **Merve Tahiroglu, Turkey Program Coordinator at Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)**.

## Iran's Khamenei notes 'common Interests' with Armenia



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has reaffirmed support for closer relations with Armenia sought by the Islamic Republic.

Khamenei wrote to President Armen Sarkissian on April 28 in response to the latter's recent message congratulating him on Nowruz, the ancient Persian New Year.

"common interests."

Visiting Yerevan in late January, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif likewise reaffirmed Tehran's desire to continue seeking closer relations with neighboring Yerevan after the autumn war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Zarif expressed strong support for

According to Sarkissian's office, Khamenei said he hopes that the two neighboring states will deepen their "long-standing" relationship for the sake of stability in the region, "global justice" and other

Armenia's territorial integrity when he discussed regional security and bilateral ties with his Armenian counterpart Ara Ayvazian. The two countries are concerned about the "presence of terrorists and foreign fighters" in the region, he said, seemingly alluding to the widely documented participation of Middle Eastern mercenaries in the six-week war on Azerbaijan's side.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Khamenei during an official visit to Tehran in February 2019.

Khamenei reportedly urged Pashinyan at the time to strengthen Armenian-Iranian relations "contrary to what the United States desires." "Iran and Armenia have never had any problems with each other," he said.

## The Big Book of Armenian Letters: Western Armenian alphabet workbook for children ages 4+ published

ArmenianEasy, LLC, a publishing house established in 2019 by Armenian-American sisters Cathy Jacobs Brito and Jenny Jacobs Mullen, announces the publication of their first book: "The Big Book Of Armenian Letters," a first-of-its-kind Western Armenian alphabet workbook for children ages four and up, *Asbarez* reports.

ArmenianEasy's goal is to provide Western Armenian educational materials that facilitate Armenian language learning (speaking, reading, and writing) for all, including those who may not have the benefit of hearing Armenian spoken in their homes. They have several more books planned for the near future.

The [website](#) and their alphabet workbook were created to fill an educational need. As a homeschooling mother of four, Jenny was trying to find an Armenian workbook to teach her oldest child Armenian letters. She was looking for preschool/kindergarten level activities



that would help teach the Armenian letters, without progressing too quickly. "I wanted something like 'The Everything Book of Preschool Letters', but in Armenian. So, I turned to my wonderful artist-of-a-sister, Cathy," explained Jenny.

Artist and designer Cathy, began creating activity pages for Jenny's children. The little "side project" quickly blossomed into "The Big Book Of Armenian Letters," a beautifully illustrated, 328 page, black and white book filled with activities that introduce children to the 38 letters of the Aypoupen (Armenian alphabet). The activities include mazes, coloring pages, matching, 240 Armenian words, six songs,

one Bible verse in Western Armenian, and much more. ArmenianEasy Publishes The Big Book Of Armenian Letters

Their Armenian mother, Hourig Toukhanian Jacobs, laid the groundwork for this endeavor. Hourig was a true master in the realm of teaching Armenian to non-native speakers. As a teacher for the Detroit area ARS schools and as an independent educator, she taught Armenian language to learners of all levels and backgrounds for more than 40 years, usually creating her own curricula from scratch. As a teenager, Cathy began making ink drawings to illustrate her mother's weekly lessons. It was in observing her mother's classes and in the long-animated discussions with her mother after classes, that she learned the effectiveness of using simple repetitive exercises and games to teach students the building blocks of language. This knowledge informed ArmenianEasy's philosophy for creating teaching materials, "Make learning Armenian simple and fun."

## Kim Kardashian responds to President Sarkissian’s letter, pledges continued support to Armenia

American-Armenian TV personality and entrepreneur Kim Kardashian has responded to President Armen Sarkissian’s letter, commending her contribution to the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

“Thank you, President Sarkissian for always taking the time to educate me further on Armenia,” Kardashian said in a Twitter post.

She thanked the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and all Armenian groups along with every Armenian who fought for this day of recognition.

“I’m happy I could help raise aware-



University of California, producer of the Armenian Genocide film “The Promise” Eric Esrailian, American-Armenian TV star Kim Kardashian and renowned pop singer Cher (Cherilyn Sarkisian).

In a letter to Kim Kardashian, President Sarkissian noted: “You and your family have a huge impact not only in the US but also worldwide, and it was fantastic to see how

your influence and actions played an important role in an international recognition of the Genocide. Thanks, you for your tireless efforts, sincere devotion and commitment.”

ness and will always continue to support this beautiful country,” Kim added.  
On Friday President Armen Sarkissian sent letters of thanks to renowned American-Armenian physician, co-director of the David Geffen Medical Center of the

## Iraqi lawmakers visit Armenian Genocide Memorial



The delegation of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations of the

Iraqi Parliament visited the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial in Yerevan on May 1.

The Iraqi lawmakers laid flowers at the eternal fire commemorating the victims of the Armenian Genocide, and observed a minute of silence in memory of the Holy Martyrs.

At the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, the guests were introduced to the documents and evidences of the first



## Armenians in The Hague join silent protest to demand release of POWs

Armenians in The Hague, Netherlands joined Global Silent Protests to demand immediate release of all Armenian prisoners of war and other detainees illegally held by Azerbaijan, reports the Federation of Armenian Organizations in The Netherlands.

Armenians worldwide held a second global silent protests



on April 30th demanding the release of Armenian prisoners of war.

Armenian communities from different Los Angeles, Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Yerevan, Osijek, Leipzig, Rome, London, Berlin, Zagreb, Prague, New York and Paris joined the protest.

The first Global silent protest was held on April 15th.

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