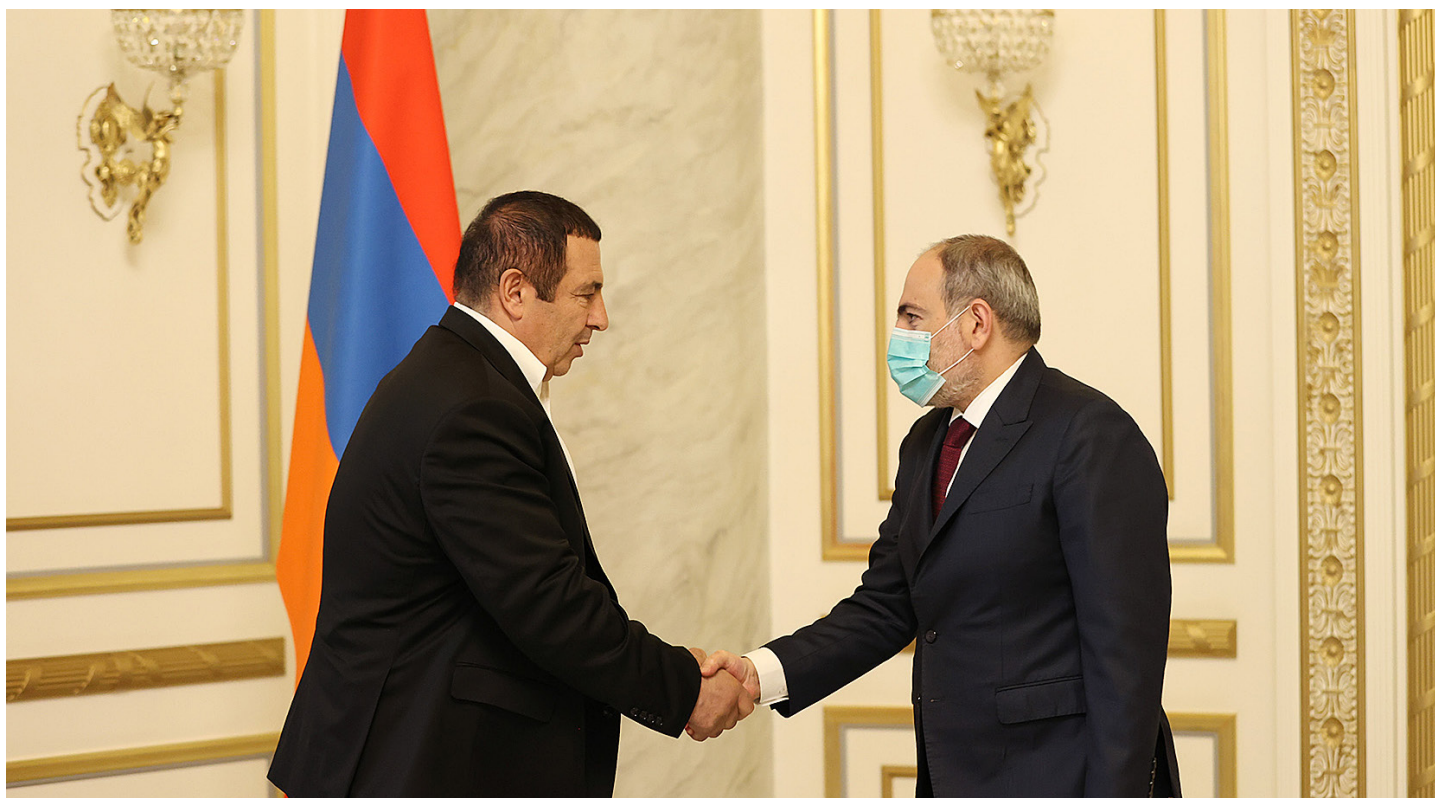


Armenian PM announces early parliamentary elections in June



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (R) and leader of the Prosperous Armenia party Gagik Tsarukyan during their meeting on March 18, 2021

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan says that early general elections will be held in the country on June 20, following talks with the leader of the opposition parliamentary faction Prosperous Armenia.

He and Gagik Tsarukyan acknowledged during their meeting on March 18 that the snap elections were “the best way out” of the ongoing political crisis, Pashinyan wrote on his Facebook account on March 18.

“Taking into account my discussions with President [Armen Sarkissian], the My Step faction, the leader of the Bright Armenia faction Edmon Marukyan, early parliamentary elections will be held in the Republic of Armenia on June 20,” he said.

Marukyan said that he had a telephone conversation with Pash-

inyan and that holding early elections on June 20 was acceptable to his party.

The opposition has been pushing for Pashinyan to resign after the defeat suffered by Armenian forces last year against Azerbaijan in fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh.

A coalition of opposition parties has been holding anti-government demonstrations in Yerevan and other parts of the country in a bid to force Pashinyan to hand over power to an interim government.

Pashinyan, whose My Step faction dominates parliament, has refused to step down but had hinted at accepting early parliamentary elections under certain conditions.

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Armenian FM briefs UN's Human Rights Commissioner on humanitarian situation in Artsakh

Armenia's Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian had a video conversation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet.

During the conversation, the sides stressed hailed the close cooperation between Armenia and the UN Office for Human Rights. In this regard, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights praised the role of Armenia, a member of the UN Human Rights Council, in advancing the human rights agenda.

One of the main topics on the agenda



was the protection of human rights in conflict situations. The Foreign Minister briefed the High Commissioner on the humanitarian situation in Artsakh and the

steps taken to address the urgent issues. The interlocutors expressed concern over the politicization of the humanitarian assistance process and the creation of artificial obstacles.

The parties stressed the need to exclude continuing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. In this context, Minister Aivazian condemned the deliberate violations of its humanitarian obligations by Azerbaijan, in particular, in terms of failure to repatriate Armenian prisoners of war and hostages.

Armenian, Iranian officials stress the need for withdrawal of terrorists from the region



Armenian-Iranian consultations were held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 18.

During the meeting between Armenia's Deputy Foreign Minister Armen Ghevondyan and the Deputy Foreign Minister of

Iran for International Legal Affairs Mohsen Baharvand, the issues of strengthening and expanding the existing legal framework between Armenia and Iran were touched upon.

Issues related to the advancement of work on draft documents, as well as the modernization of existing agreements were discussed.

The parties referred to regional issues of mutual interest, stressed the inadmissibility of the presence of terrorists, emphasizing the need for their immediate withdrawal from the region.

Reference was made to the prospects of

developing cooperation between the two countries within the framework of international organizations.

A wide range of issues related to human rights, cultural cooperation, joint work within international organizations, the fight against terrorism were discussed.

The parties especially highly assessed the effective cooperation between Armenia and Iran in the UNESCO platform, which is based on the Armenian-Iranian cultural and civilizational ties. The interlocutors also touched upon a number of issues on the international political agenda.

Failure to release Armenian POWs undermines implementation of trilateral statement – MFA

Keeping Armenian captives hostage undermines the implementation of the agreements set out in the tripartite statement, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Anna Naghdalyan said in a statement.

The comments come after Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Ceyhan Bayramov said after Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Ceyhan Bayramov said after Azerbaijani with OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Ann Linde that Azerbaijan, in accordance with its obligations, had handed over to the Armenian side all prisoners of war.

"This is another lie of the Azerbaijani side on this urgent humanitarian issue. The statement of the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister contradicts the other relevant bodies of that country, which have confirmed the fact of presence of dozens of Armenian prison-

ers of war in Azerbaijan, both during the hostilities and after the establishment of the ceasefire," Anna Naghdalyan said.

"Azerbaijan fails to provide information on Armenian prisoners of war to the European Court of Human Rights, which deals with this issue within the framework of the 'Armenia v. Azerbaijan' interstate case. The court recently decided to notify the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in this regard, emphasizing that Azerbaijan has repeatedly violated the deadlines set by the European Court and has not provided complete information. Currently, interim measures are being taken against Azerbaijan with regard to 188 Armenian captives. I must emphasize that non-implementation of interim measures is tantamount to a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights," she



said, adding that failure to comply with interim measures would amount to a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Spokesperson added that Paragraph 8 of the November 9, 2020 statement applies to all prisoners of war and other hostages, and noted that with such statements the Azerbaijani side shows that it deliberately does not fulfill this tripartite statement.

Armenian PM receives OSCE Chair, stresses the need for Artsakh's self-determination

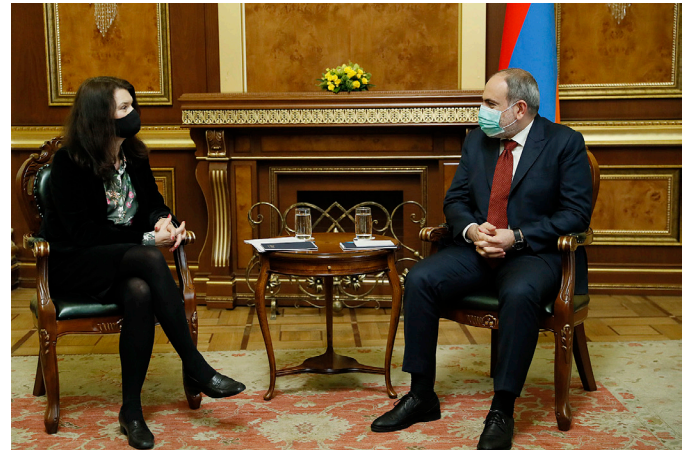
Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received the delegation led by Swedish Foreign Minister, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Ann Linde.

First, the Prime Minister and Mrs. Linde had a private conversation, then the meeting continued in an expanded format.

The Prime Minister welcomed the visit of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office to Armenia, congratulated her and wished her fruitful activity in this responsible mission. Nikol Pashinyan stressed the importance of close cooperation with the OSCE in ensuring stability and security.

The Prime Minister stressed that the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is possible only within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, in this context the need to intensify the activities of the Minsk Group in the resumption of the peace process and a comprehensive settlement. In this regard, the Prime Minister stressed the need to clarify the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and realize the right of Artsakh Armenians to self-determination.

According to Nikol Pashinyan, only through constructive efforts and the creation of an appropriate environment will it be possible to establish stability and long-lasting peace in the region, but the ongoing aggressive and destructive statements by the President of Azerbaijan do not contribute to that. The Prime Minister stressed that many issues remain unresolved, including the status of Nagorno Karabakh, humanitarian issues, protection of the rights of the Armenians of Artsakh, and the identity of cultural heritage, noting the important role of the OSCE in this regard.



Prime Minister Pashinyan stressed that the return of prisoners of war and civilians remains a top priority.

As OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Ann Linden attached importance to the work of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement and the efforts of her personal representative for a lasting solution and the establishment of peace.

According to her, the OSCE and the international community as a whole have a role to play in addressing the current situation helping the parties find ways to resolve the issue. At the same time, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office stressed the importance of respecting international humanitarian law and resolving humanitarian issues, which will also contribute to building an atmosphere of mutual trust.

During the meeting the interlocutors discussed the regional situation and other issues related to further cooperation.

All Armenian POWs must be returned, French Ambassador says



All prisoners of war and other detainees must be returned, French Ambassador to Armenia Jonathan Lacôte told a press conference on March 17.

ference on March 17.

“My stance on the issue is clear—all captives must be returned based not only on the statement of November 9, but also international conventions,” the Ambassador said.

He said the OSCE Minsk Group remains the only format where discussions, negotiations can be held with a view of finding a diplomatic solution to the issue.

“When we talk about the OSCE Minsk Group, we must understand that we are dealing with a negotiating body that is ready to mediate and help both sides. During her visit to Armenia the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office also mentioned that the OSCE Minsk Group is the only mediation format. The Minsk Group Co-Chairs are currently in talks to pay a working visit to the region,” Ambassador Lacôte stated.

Armenian Opposition set to continue street protests despite announced early elections



The Homeland Salvation Movement maintains that the solution to the current situation in the country is the implementation of their roadmap. One of the leaders of the movement, the ARF member Ishkhan Saghatelyan, says that the prime minister's announcement on snap polls is only partly satisfying their demands.

"We find that snap parliamentary elections are a necessary condition for getting out of the current situation, but if Pashinyan continues to act as prime minister during the election cycle, there is a great risk that the elections will not be competitive and that [election participants] will not be on equal footing. And there is a great chance that such elections will be rigged. In that case, instead of becoming a way out of the current crisis, these elections may trigger a

new crisis," Saghatelyan explained.

The opposition leader said that the road map proposed by Pashinyan is the wrong course to bring the country out of the current crisis, insisting that the road map proposed by the Homeland Salvation Movement is the best solution.

Saghatelyan said that Pashinyan's announcement to hold snap elections was "an achievement" and the direct result of the Movement's efforts and the pressure it and its supporters put on the authorities. He added that if Pashinyan were honest, he would resign right away. However, Saghatelyan said, Pashinyan made the announcement in order to slow down the momentum of the movement "so he can turn around and say that there is no popular demand for snap parliamentary elections."

Of the 17 parties and organizations that make up the Homeland Salvations Movement, two parties have announced that they will take part in the June 20 elections. Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia Party, which is represented in parliament and the Homeland Party, founded by former National Security Service chief Artur Vanetsyan.

"I find it very normal that Prosperous

Armenia and Homeland parties have announced that they would take part in the elections organized by Pashinyan," said Saghatelyan, emphasizing that while there are differences of approach by the various parties making up the Homeland Salvation Movement, there is 100 percent consensus that Pashinyan must resign. He explained that some in the movement believe that the fastest way to achieve Pashinyan's ouster is by taking part in his proposed elections, and other believe that they can't take part in elections organized by the prime minister.

"We are going to fight for the agenda that we have set forth. Even if we are left alone, we are going to fight so Pashinyan will leave as soon as possible," said Saghatelyan referring to the ARF, which he said will make its decision about participating in the elections if the elections actually take place.

Saghatelyan vowed that the Homeland Salvation Movement will continue its civil disobedience efforts, but there may be "tactical changes" in its approach. "But at this moment to speak about snap parliamentary elections, which for all intents and purposes doesn't exist—there's just an announcement—would be futile," said Saghatelyan.

New bill gives more powers to top judicial body

The Armenian parliament on March 19 voted to amend the current laws related to the judiciary to give more powers to the Supreme Justice Council.

Eighty-one lawmakers, including representatives of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's majority My Step alliance and several deputies not affiliated with any faction, voted in favor of the bill, with 15 lawmakers representing the opposition rejecting it in the second and final reading.

The parliament discussed the draft amendments submitted by My Step during a special session convened today.

My Step MP Vladimir Vardanyan, who co-authored the bill, said the amendments will ensure "a reasonable examination of judicial processes" by giving additional powers to the Supreme Judicial Council



that guarantees the independence of judges. In particular, the pro-government lawmaker said that the body will be able take a case from one judge and assign it to another, examine the reasons for protracted trials, etc.

With the adopted changes, a citizen will be entitled to lodge a complaint with the Supreme Judicial Council about the judge examining his or her case. Also, the amendments limit the number of petitions that parties to the trial can submit.

"Courts should be independent of the executive, other bodies, of any kind of external pressure, but not of the law. A judge must be guided by his or her own conviction and by law," Vardanyan said.

The opposition Bright Armenia faction, however, claimed that the amendments create opportunities for the government to influence judges.

"If they see, for example, that some judge wants to administer justice by passing a ruling in favor of a citizen [against the government], they will be able to replace that judge with someone who will pass a ruling [suitable for the government]," Edmon Marukyan, the leader of Bright Armenia, said, stressing that he could not vote for a bill that also restrict the rights of lawyers.

French public and political figures appeal for release of Armenian POWs

Four months after the statement on ceasefire of November 9, 2020 signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, the Baku regime still refuses to apply one of its main humanitarian clauses: the release of prisoners of war.

French public and political figures have signed an appeal ask France, co-chair of the Minsk Group, in charge of negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, to use all its authority to obtain the release of the Armenian prisoners of war, Le Point reports.

“If this group mandated by the OSCE has not been able to prevent war or defend the victims, let it at least ensure that this humanitarian clause of the ceasefire is respected,” the signatories say.

They remind that during a press con-



ference on February 26, President Ilham Aliyev declared that he considered the detainees to be “terrorists” on the grounds that their arrest took place after November 9. However, these soldiers were at that date trapped in the outskirts of Hadrut, one of the main fronts during the conflict.

“The Azerbaijani President is committing a gross violation of his obligations. This non-respect for a signed document shatters all hope of a return to

normal life for Armenian people on their ancestral lands, one hundred years after the genocide of 1915. It can only be interpreted as an additional manifestation of hatred towards this entity that President Aliyev had promised to “hunt like dogs.” And this, after 44 days of military aggression, bombardments and abuses which resulted in the death of 3,500 Armenian conscripts, most of them in their twenties, and the flight of tens of thousands of refugees,” the signatories say.

They call the return of Armenian POWs “an issue that appears to be the prerequisite for the establishment of a negotiated peace, a condition for the rule of law over violence in this region which must not be abandoned to the law of totalitarianism, pan-Turkism and barbarism.”

Canada’s Foreign Minister urged to ban arms sales to Turkey and Azerbaijan



The Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC) sent a letter to Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Marc Garneau, urging the Minister to expeditiously release the results of the WESCAM investigation, uphold the current arms suspensions and move to enforce a full arm ban on Turkey and Azerbaijan.

On Friday, March 12, 2021, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development released heavily redacted documents, revealing important information surrounding the decisions made regarding arms exemptions given to Turkey in May 2020.

It was revealed that through intensive lobbying efforts, Turkey gave delusive and misleading assurances that the WESCAM target acquisition sensors will be used for their operations in Syria. However, Turkey then illegally diverted the sensors to

Azerbaijan, which the latter used in its aggression against the Republic of Artsakh, killing scores of Armenians and forcing 90,000 individuals to flee their homes.

“What is more egregious is the fact that these exemptions were justified using the same reasoning upon which Ottawa placed an arms moratorium on Turkey in the first place,” wrote ANCC Co-Presidents, Hrag Tarakdjian and Shahan Mirakian in the letter sent on March 18.

Through ongoing research and analysis, members of the ANCC have also learned that aside from the WESCAM exemptions, in June and July of 2020, three exemptions were also granted to Telemus Inc., an Ontario-based company selling electronic receiver components to the Turkish Aerospace Industries Inc.,” stated the co-chairs of the ANCC.

There are presently several WESCAM permit requests going via Turkey directly to the Azerbaijani Air Force. The permits are currently “under review” as per the documents released on March 12.

“The Canadian government has a moral duty to categorically deny these permits, sending a clear message to both Ankara and Baku that Ottawa will not fall into the same

trap and become once again complicit in their destabilizing and aggressive agenda.”

“Any such sales to Turkey and Azerbaijan will be seen as efforts to exacerbate the conflict in Artsakh and will directly contradict Canada’s long-standing position on the issue,” added Tarakdjian and Mirakian.

The documents also revealed that during the preliminary investigation conducted by Global Affairs Canada (GAC), officials from WESCAM confirmed that the evidence surfaced during the war did indeed correspond with their product, while Turkish officials hardly cooperated with Canadian diplomats on the investigation.

“Using its expedient membership in NATO, Turkey effectively lied to the Canadian government and abused Canada’s arms export regime. This is not how a supposed ally should behave,” read a part of the letter.

“To create and maintain a robust arms control regime, Canada must be firm and principled and not allow corporate interests and the interests of unrepentant dictatorships such as Turkey and Azerbaijan override our values and our obligations under international law,” concluded Tarakdjian and Mirakian.

Armenia's tourism potential presented at MITT Moscow exhibition



Armenia presented its tourism potential at the MITT Moscow tourism exhibition held on March 16-18. With the support of the Tourism Committee of the Armenian Ministry of Economy, 20 tourism companies from Armenia participated in the exhibition.

A total of 1,500 organizations from 229 countries participated in the largest tourism exhibition of Russia.

One of the first visitors to the Armenian pavilion was Zarina Doguzova, head

of Rostourism, who met with Alfred Kocharyan, acting chairman of the Tourism Committee, to discuss the scope and prospects of bilateral cooperation.

The Armenian pavilion, through the joint efforts of Armenian tourism companies and the Tourism Committee, managed to attract the attention of Russian visitors and colleagues, highlighting the diversity of tourism offers – adventure tourism, gastronomic tours, wine destinations, festivals in Yerevan and regions, etc. The Armenian Embassy in Russia took part in the formation and unique presentation of the Armenian pavilion.

On March 17, the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Russia, headed by Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Vardan Toghanyan, hosted representatives of the Tourism Committee and the Armenian tourism sector. The Ambassador attached importance to presenting Armenia's tourism potential in Russia in the

current difficult times, the further strengthening of the Armenian-Russian ties.

During the reception, Ambassador Toghanyan handed a souvenir to Alfred Kocharyan, acting chairman of the Tourism Committee. Representatives of Russia's tourism business were also invited to the meeting.

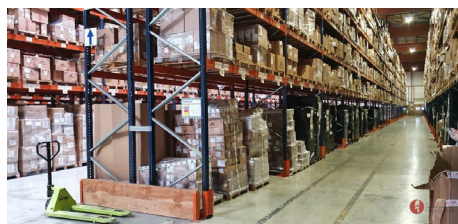


Aznavour Foundation receives 105 tons of humanitarian aid for war-affected population of Artsakh

On March 18, the Aznavour Foundation received about 105 tons of humanitarian aid for the population affected by the second war in Artsakh.

With the support of the Crisis and Support Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, this new batch of aid was sent to Armenia by sea freights, then transported to Yerevan by land. The customs clearance of humanitarian cargo was carried out by the Aznavour Foundation in accordance with the applicable legislation. This batch of humanitarian aid includes medical supplies, in particular functional medical beds, as well as clothing and hygiene items.

In total, over 175 tons of humanitarian aid was collected at 19 reception points in France and Switzerland through the Aznavour Foundation and its partner organi-



zations. This unprecedented mobilization was possible thanks to the hard work of more than 50 organizations and 100 donors, solidarity and perseverance. The first batch of collected aid – 70 tons – was sent to Armenia from November to January by special flights.

The Aznavour Foundation coordinates the initial storage and further distribution of humanitarian aid in Armenia. Part of the aid sent in November, December and January was directly transferred to the final recipients in Armenia, the rest was distributed by the Aznavour Foundation to the affected

population. To date (March 18, 2021), the Foundation has provided 15,663 refugees with basic necessities (clothing, hygiene items, blankets) through more than 20 local organizations and individuals working with Artsakh families.

Since the early days of the war, the Aznavour Foundation mobilized all its resources and capacities to provide targeted assistance to thousands of families affected by war by securing them with first aid items: food packages, clothes, hygiene items. Large scale support was also provided to the healthcare system. Notably, 35 hospitals received much needed medical equipment and supplies: 200+ rehabilitation supplies (wheelchairs, walkers, crutches), 200+ medical beds, 135.000 protection masks (K95); as well as 1000 first aid kits for civil security.

Russia to help extend Armenian nuclear station's life until 2036

Russia will help Armenia extend the life of its nuclear power plant for another 10 years until 2036, according to the director of the station.

Addressing a conference on the development of nuclear energy in Armenia in Yerevan on March 18, Movses Vardanyan said that a working group is being set up jointly with the Russian Rosatom Corporation for that purpose.

The plant's sole functioning reactor went into service in 1980 and was due to be decommissioned by 2017. Armenia's government decided to extend the life of the 420-megawatt reactor by 10 years after failing to attract billions of dollars in funding for its ambitious plans to build a new and safer nuclear facility.

In 2015, the Russian government provided Yerevan with a \$270 million loan and a \$30 million grant for major safety upgrades at Metsamor. The modernization work is expected to be completed in 2023.

The Soviet-built plant located in Metsamor, 35 kilometers west of Yerevan, generates roughly 40 percent of Armenia's electricity.

"At the initiative of Rosatom and the Armenian nuclear power plant (NPP), we are currently setting up a new technical working group to work on extending the life of the [Armenian NPP] beyond 2026. Rusatom Service will mainly be involved



from the Russian side," Vardanyan said.

He said the extension will add 10 more years to the life of the station.

Yuri Sviridenko, the Russian head of the project, said that the Armenian nuclear power plant "can definitely work after 2026."

"Preliminary estimates have been made, according to which the station can be operated until 2036. But these, I repeat, are preliminary estimates that still need to undergo an examination and receive approval from the Nuclear Safety Regulatory Commission. We are now at this stage," he said, citing the example of several European countries where the operation of nuclear plants using the same reactor has been extended.

According to Tigran Melkonyan, the head of the Energy Department of Armenia's Ministry of Local Government and Infrastructure, the extension of the operating life of the existing nuclear power plant

does not mean that the Armenian government does not intend to start building a new nuclear station.

"The government will make a decision taking into account the reliability of the energy system, the rates and regimes of export, the amount of funding and sources. Before that, a program will be developed on what capacity the reactor will have and in what timeframe and with what funding it will be built. In any case, this is the goal, and we are adjusting our work, which includes the extension of the life of the existing nuclear reactor and its future replacement with a new one," Melkonyan said.

Ara Marjanyan, a United Nations expert on energy in Armenia, said that the nuclear power plant is of key importance for the energy security of the country, and, therefore, the preservation of the nuclear power plant and the construction of a new one is among the priority tasks of ensuring the national security of Armenia.

"We have only two facilities that guarantee [the country's] energy security. These are the Vortan Cascade hydro-power plant and the Armenian NPP. It is not without reason that the new strategy states that Armenia must have a harmonious three-component [energy] generation system, and nuclear energy is an integral part of our energy security strategy," the expert said.

USCIRF highlights destruction of Armenian monuments in new report on Azerbaijan

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has released a country update on religious freedom conditions in Azerbaijan, recommending that the U.S. Department of State place Azerbaijan on its Special Watch List (SWL) for its ongoing and systematic religious freedom violations.

The report evaluates trends relevant to freedom of religion or be-



lief in Azerbaijan since USCIRF commissioners and staff traveled to the country in early 2020. In re-

cent years, Azerbaijan has implemented some changes that have marked an improvement in conditions for religious freedom, such as ending law enforcement raids on religious communities and reportedly pardoning many religious activists. However, religious freedom in Azerbaijan remains severely impeded by problematic legislation, particularly

the country's 2009 law "On Freedom of Reli-

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Four months after the end of hostilities, Azerbaijan continues to violate international humanitarian law – Armenian FM

The use of force by Azerbaijan in the context of the conflict was a gross violation of OSCE commitments, including the Helsinki Final Act, Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian told reporters after talks with OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde.

“Throughout the war, the Azerbaijani armed forces, with the active support of Turkey, committed mass atrocities, including ethnic cleansing, and war crimes against the Armenians of Artsakh, with blatant violations of international humanitarian law, deliberately targeting civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and civilian infrastructure and objects,” the Foreign Minister stated.

Moreover, he said, even four months after the end of hostilities, Azerbaijan continues to violate international humanitarian law, including the holding of Armenian prisoners of war and other detainees.

“The transfer of thousands of foreign armed terrorists, mercenaries from the Middle East, led by Turkey, to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, and their involvement in hostilities against the Armenians of Artsakh was not only a violation of international law, but also a violation of OSCE commitments. It set two dangerous precedents: the attempt to resolve the con-



flict by force through mass atrocities, and the mass transfer of armed terrorists from other regions into the OSCE area of responsibility, which should be unequivocally condemned,” Minister Aivazian stated.

“With the tripartite statement signed to stop the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression, the conflict entered a new phase with the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Artsakh. We consider the tripartite statement as a document aimed at restoring the ceasefire and reaffirming security. Although it contains some provisions related to the peaceful settlement, it does not address its key elements, the first of which is the issue of the status of Artsakh, based on the right of the Artsakh Armenians to self-determination. A final political solution to the conflict is possible only within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs,” the Armenian Foreign Minister added.

According to him, the recent developments in the region have underscored

the need for a strong OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship, which will be able to lead the peace process on the basis of principles and elements developed over the years.

“We also need a strong, united OSCE as a body responsible for regional security and peace. In this context, we consider the role of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, including the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office,” he added.

“Armenia, the Armenian people, have always sincerely delivered a message of peace. As a nation that survived the first genocide of the 20th century, we know the value of peace and security. At all stages of the Karabakh conflict, Armenia has been in favor of an exclusively peaceful settlement of the issue. Today, too, we are fully aware of the possibilities that peace and real reconciliation can bring to our region, but peace is not just a nice word. The peace built on the basis of the destruction of the peaceful settlements of Artsakh, including the Hadrut region, the destruction of the Armenian population, and the creation of Azerbaijani settlements instead, cannot be lasting. We will continue our struggle for a just and dignified peace, working closely with our international partners,” the Foreign Minister stated.

page 7 ➡ religious Beliefs,” which the government has shown little interest in revising. T

The country update also details the many obstacles posed by mandatory registration and other restrictions on religious communities, the continued imprisonment of religious activists, and recent violations committed in the context of the renewed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

In its 2020 Annual Report, US-CIRF recommended that the U.S. Department of State place Azerbaijan on its Special Watch List (SWL) for its ongoing and systematic religious freedom violations.

The report notes that during the

renewed conflict in Nagorno Karabakh in 2020, the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi was hit twice by Azerbaijani forces. In December, Human Rights Watch concluded that the attack was intentional, constituting a war crime that should be investigated and prosecuted.

“The announcement of a ceasefire in early November formalized the territorial gains Azerbaijan had made militarily, and it set a staggered timeline for the cession of additional territories to Azerbaijan—raising concerns about the protection of various churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and other religious and cultural sites scattered

throughout the region,” the report reads.

President Aliyev reportedly gave assurances to Russian President Vladimir Putin that the country would protect Christian churches in these areas; however, some sites, such as a cemetery situated alongside an Armenian church in Hadrut, have already been vandalized. In late November, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization reiterated a call for the protection of heritage sites in the area, and it proposed dispatching a preliminary field mission to produce an inventory of such sites “as a prerequisite for effective protection of the region’s heritage.”

Azerbaijani President's aggressive rhetoric complicates constructive cooperation – Luxembourg FM

Foreign Minister of Luxembourg Jean Asselborn commented on the questions of the head of the Alternative Democratic Reforms (ADR) faction of the Parliament relating to the current uncertainty around the future of Nagorno Karabakh after the ceasefire.

Armenpress presents the FM's responses to the questions:

Question: "What is the European Union's approach to the legal status of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) from the perspective of international public law? The final recognition? What do you think?"

Answer: EU hopes the sides will manage to find a lasting solution through negotiations which will define the legal status of Nagorno Karabakh with the consent of all parties. In this sense, EU supports the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and her Personal Representative.

Question: How does Luxembourg assess the approaches of Armenia and Azerbaijan over the requirements of N2357 resolution of the PACE adopted on January 25? Does the government think that the sides have implemented all the provisions of the resolution, if not, where does Luxembourg see difference in approaches in particular in the following formulations of the resolution: "to refuse from statements escalating the situation which can block the political dialogue, ensure the implementation of the humanitarian obligations assumed by the trilateral statement, such as the return of all prisoners of war and other detained persons, the bodies of the dead, the preservation of cultural heritage"?"

Answer: The exchange of POWs is one of the points of the ceasefire statement which is the most problematic till now. Armenia has returned all detained persons, however, a lot of Armenian POWs are still held captive in Azerbaijan. The aggressive rhetoric between the two countries, which



is especially being constantly inflamed by the Azerbaijani President, complicates the constructive cooperation. The preservation of cultural heritage of the region also remains one of the contentious issues for the sides.

Question: In the past Azerbaijan has criticized the EU and its member states for many times. On January 31 the foreign ministry of that country issued a statement, calling EU's approaches as one-sided and based on double standards, which, it said, could damage the relations with Azerbaijan. Moreover, on December 24 Ilham Aliyev called French, Belgian and Dutch politicians as hypocrites, calling on them to open their eyes and look at the reality. What was the impact of these statements on the Luxembourg-Azerbaijan relations? Given these realities and the meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council on December 18 last year, to what extent is it appropriate to have such cooperation with Azerbaijan, also within the Eastern Partnership?

Answer: Azerbaijan is a participant of the EU's Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, which allows the EU and its member states to engage not only in the constructive, but also criticizing dialogue with Azerbaijan. In this way EU can become an important role-player in the context of respecting the international law and human rights by the Azerbaijani authorities.

Question: On November 19, 2020, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy made a statement over the situation in Nagorno Karabakh. Since this statement did the Luxembourg gov-

ernment see concrete developments in the region in terms of EU's calls. If not, what problems still exist and who is responsible for them?

Answer: The ceasefire regime is being observed up to now since the November 10 statement, with exceptions to some incidents, however, the aggressive rhetoric has not been eliminated, and the issue of the exchange of POWs is in the deadlock. There is also no investigation of the military crimes, the humanitarian situation in Nagorno Karabakh remains tense, the entry of international organizations to the region is blocked by Azerbaijan, there are still no signs for the lasting solution to the conflict.

Question: Is the EU going to provide assistance to the population of the region aimed at preventing the humanitarian disaster in Artsakh?

Answer: The EU has provided humanitarian support to the region since the crisis days which comprised 6.9 million Euros.

Question: Did the situation in Nagorno Karabakh and the aggressive rhetoric of the Azerbaijani authorities towards the EU have an impact on the European visa policy towards that country, especially for the Azerbaijani diplomatic passport holders?

Answer: The visa policy is regulated by the visa facilitation and readmission agreements signed with Azerbaijan in 2014, and nothing has changed in this respect.

Question: Does Luxembourg support the possibility of deploying observers by the OSCE in Nagorno Karabakh? Can the OSCE play a role in the process of investigating the military crimes in the region?

Answer: The deployment of OSCE observer mission is possible in case of receiving such a request with the consent of all sides. Luxembourg supports that proposal and the OSCE efforts. The OSCE's function is to prevent and solve conflicts. It has no tool to deal with the investigation of military crimes.

Armenian POWs abused in Azerbaijani custody – Human Rights Watch

Azerbaijani forces abused Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) from the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, subjecting them to cruel and degrading treatment and torture either when they were captured, during their transfer, or while in custody at various detention facilities, Human Rights Watch said today.

HRW said Azerbaijani authorities should investigate all allegations of ill-treatment and hold those responsible to account. “Azerbaijan should also immediately release all remaining POWs and civilian detainees and provide information on the whereabouts of servicemen and civilians whose situation is unknown but were last seen in Azerbaijani custody.”

“The abuse, including torture of detained Armenian soldiers, is abhorrent and a war crime,” said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “It is also deeply disturbing that a number of missing Armenian soldiers were last seen in Azerbaijan’s custody and it has failed to account for them.”

Human Rights Watch interviewed four former POWs who detailed their ill-treatment in custody as well as the ill-treatment of other POWs with whom they were captured or shared cells. They all described prolonged and repeated beatings. One described being prodded with a sharp metal rod, and another said he was subjected to electric shocks, and one was repeatedly burned with a cigarette lighter. The men were held in degrading conditions, given very little water and little to no food in the initial days of their detention.

Scores of videos showing scenes in which Azerbaijani officers can be seen apparently ill-treating Armenian POWs have been posted to social media. Human Rights Watch closely examined and verified more than 20 of these videos, including through



interviews with recently repatriated POWs and family members of servicemen who appear in the videos but have not yet returned. Human Rights Watch also reviewed medical documents.

The accounts of torture and ill-treatment raise concerns that Armenian POWs still in Azerbaijani custody are at risk of further abuse, Human Rights Watch said. Azerbaijani authorities should ensure that Armenian POWs and other detainees still in custody have all the protections to which they are entitled under international human rights and humanitarian law, including freedom from torture and ill-treatment.

The armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh escalated on September 27, when Azerbaijan began a military offensive. Hostilities ended on November 10 with a Russia-negotiated truce. The peace agreement provided, among other things, for “an exchange of prisoners of war and other detained persons and bodies of the dead.”

The number of Armenian POWs still in custody remains unclear. By the end of February 2021, Armenia’s Representative Office at the European Court of Human Rights had asked the court to intervene with Azerbaijan regarding 240 cases of alleged prisoners of war and civilian detainees. In approximately 90 percent of those cases, the office said, they had provided

photo and/or video evidence confirming that Azerbaijani forces had taken these people into custody.

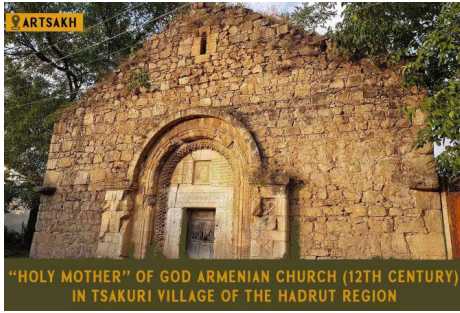
An Armenian Foreign Ministry representative in Yerevan told Human Rights Watch on February 24 that families are “increasingly desperate” to find their loved ones, especially in light of numerous credible reports of prisoner abuse.

All four former POWs who spoke with Human Rights Watch had been wounded before their capture. In one case, Human Rights Watch documented, an Azerbaijani officer provided first aid to a wounded Armenian soldier shortly after capturing him. Another Azerbaijani officer gave pain medication to another POW. One former POW said the commanding officer told his subordinates not to hit the POWs but that as soon as the commanding officer was no longer present, the soldiers would abuse them.

International humanitarian law, or the law of armed conflict, requires parties to an international armed conflict to treat POWs humanely in all circumstances. The third Geneva Convention protects POWs “particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.” Azerbaijan is also bound by the absolute prohibition on torture and other degrading or inhuman treatment in international law as articulated in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), to which it is a party.

“We heard accounts and viewed images of prolonged and repeated beatings of Armenian prisoners of war, designed, it seems, solely to humiliate and punish them,” Williamson said. “Torture and ill-treatment of prisoners of war constitute war crimes for which accountability is urgently needed.”

What is this, if not ethnic-religious based hatred?' – Tatoyan on Aliyev's visit to Armenian church



Human Rights Defender of Armenia Arman Tatoyan has released facts on the policy of spreading ethnic-religious based hatred by the top leadership of Azerbaijan.

"We publish only facts and questions arising from those facts. What is this, if not ethnic-religious based hatred at the highest level of government; what is this, if not evidence of the policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide in Artsakh; what is this, if not fascism?

The words of the President of Azerbaijan in literal translation during his visit of the XII century Surb Astvatsatsin Armenian Church in the village of Tsakuri, in the Hadrut region of Artsakh: "This is an Albanian church. The Armenians tried to Armenianize this church, they wrote inscriptions in

Armenian here, but they did not succeed. This is our ancient temple, the temple of our oudi brothers, they too will come here. Just as our mosques were desecrated, so were the ancient Albanian temples desecrated by the Armenians. But we will restore, all these writings are false. These are the posts added later. They have created a false story for themselves. Meanwhile, they did not succeed. (...) Is a Turkish mosque. They falsified everything and turned it into a garbage dump. "Look at what they've done to place, and then they say it is Armenian."

The 12th century Surb Astvatsatsin church in Tsakuri village is the former monastery complex of the village "Tsaghkavank", from which the "Surb Astvatsatsin" church has been preserved. According to the khachkars, it dates back to 1198 and differs by its round door. The church is a masterpiece of medieval architecture and culture of Artsakh.

A few days ago, it was confirmed that the church of St. John the Baptist, popularly known as "Green Hour" in the Azerbaijani-controlled town of Shushi, had been destroyed. Moreover, the church was destroyed not during

the war, not during the armed attacks, but afterwards.

These facts have been recorded by the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its March 18, 2021 statement", the Ombudsman said in a statement, adding that he will send the records of these facts to the relevant international bodies.

"But we especially note that for years in Azerbaijan hatred and enmity towards Armenians has been sown in this way at the highest state level, and it is not only hatred based on ethnicity, but it is also religious hatred.

The facts published by this statement clearly prove that in during the September-November war in Artsakh, the Azerbaijani authorities carried out ethnic cleansing and a policy of genocide; and, that policy continues today.

These same speeches and words of the President of Azerbaijan inspired the Azerbaijani soldiers to torture and behead, dismember bodies and commit other atrocities against Armenian servicemen and civilians in the April 2016 April and during the September-November 2020 war", Arman Tatoyan stated.

Artsakh slams Aliyev's order to remove medieval Armenian inscriptions from church walls

In a blatant disrespect for the continuous efforts to find a lasting solution to the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, accompanied by his wife and Vice President of Azerbaijan, Mehriban Aliyeva and other high-ranking state officials, visited the occupied Hadrut region of the Republic of Artsakh, and, by doing so, reaffirmed Baku's militaristic and outright provocative position which was further reinforced by accompanying inflammatory and war-mongering remarks, Artsakh's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"Such official visits and fueling of anti-Armenian sentiments are nothing but Azerbaijan's targeted attempts to reinforce the situation that emerged as a result of



the war and are utterly unacceptable," the Ministry said.

"The Armenian side has alerted the international community on numerous occasions of the cultural terrorism carried out by Azerbaijan manifested in its state-orchestrated attempts of erasing Armenian cultural heritage in territories that are under its military occupation further ad-

vancing its genocidal expansionist policy. In a culmination of this despicable policy, President Aliyev personally instructed accompanying officials to have medieval Armenian inscriptions removed from the walls of churches and monuments in the occupied territories," the statement reads.

According to the Foreign Ministry, "this genocidal policy is a crime against humanity, a gross violation of international norms, conventions, resolutions and agreements, and is a threat to the entire civilized world."

The Ministry calls on the relevant international organizations to take all the necessary measures to prevent the eradication of the Armenian cultural heritage.

37 Senators join Menendez in calling on President Biden to recognize Armenian Genocide



U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on March 19 led 37 of his Senate colleagues in requesting the Biden administration join the U.S. Congress in officially recognizing the Ottoman Empire's genocide against the Armenian people, the aforesaid committee noted in a statement.

To date, no U.S. president has made it U.S. policy to affirm the historical facts of the Armenian Genocide, which lasted from

1915 to 1923 and resulted in the forced deportation of around 2 million Armenians, 1.5 million of whom were brutally killed.

"We join the Armenian community in the United States and around the world in honoring the memory of these victims, and we stand firmly against attempts to pretend that this intentional, organized effort to destroy the Armenian people was anything other than a genocide," the Senators wrote in a letter to President Biden. "You have correctly stated that American diplomacy and foreign policy must be rooted in our values, including respect for universal rights. Those values require us to acknowledge the truth and do what we can to prevent future genocides and other crimes against humanity."

Beyond recognizing the facts of the Ot-

toman Empire's systematic extermination of Armenians, the Senators stressed that the move would rectify the executive branch's position regarding the Genocide by aligning it with congressional consensus as well as President Biden's previous remarks.

"Administrations of both parties have been silent on the truth of the Armenian Genocide. We urge you to break this pattern of complicity by officially recognizing that the Armenian Genocide was a genocide," added the Senators.

On December 12, 2019, the Senate unanimously passed Menendez's Senate Resolution affirming the historical facts of the Armenian Genocide, making clear that U.S. policy must reject efforts to deny the truth of this tragedy.

Armenian Ambassador chairs meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

On 15 March, the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations Mher Margaryan chaired the opening meeting of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65).

In his opening remarks, the Permanent Representative of Armenia reflected on the issues of representation of women in all aspects of decision making and full participation in public life.

"In many countries, including in my own country Armenia, the potential of women's equal and meaningful participation in public life is yet to be fully realized. We need to recommit ourselves to creating a conducive environment for empowerment of women in decision-making processes, including in political leadership," Mher Margaryan noted.

He highlighted the crucial importance of the support of the international community in ensuring that women and girls are protected in conflict settings and in situations of humanitarian crises as they are the ones disproportionately affected and continue to be at increased risk of injustice and inequality, including in terms of access to essential services, resilience and livelihood



opportunities.

Ambassador Margaryan stressed that CSW65 provides an opportunity to come up with strong action-oriented policy recommendations and ensure building back better towards a future that is more equal, resilient and sustainable.

"This can only be achieved if all stakeholders are united in taking the bold steps required to make gender equality a reality by 2030. Let us all work together for a meaningful outcome that will make a tangible difference for the world's women and girls, now and for generations to come", Mher Margaryan concluded his remarks.

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, presidents

of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UN General Assembly also delivered introductory remarks.

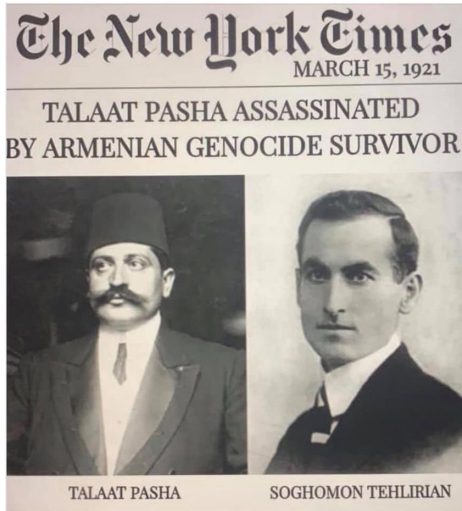
The CSW is the principal intergovernmental policy-making body in the areas of women's rights, gender equality and empowerment of women comprising of 45 member states elected for four-year term.

Armenia was elected as a member of the Commission for the period of 2019-2023. On 22 March 2019, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Armenia to the UN Mr. Mher Margaryan was elected as a Chair of the 64th and 65th sessions of the CSW.

The 65th session of the CSW runs from 15 to 26 March, and will mostly involve virtual sessions, including four Ministerial roundtables and events organized by UN Women, the United Nations agency which works to accelerate gender equality globally, in collaboration with other agencies, organizations and civil society.

On 18 March the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the UN will hold a virtual discussion on the margins of the CSW65 entitled "Between War and Pandemic: Voices from the Field".

I have killed a man, but I am not a murderer: Soghomon Tehlirian assassinated Talaat Pasha 100 years ago.



Soghomon Tehlirian assassinated Mehmet Talaat Pasha, the architect of the Armenian Genocide, 100 years ago on March 15.

The assassination was part of Operation Nemesis, a revenge plan for the Armenian Genocide orchestrated by the Ottoman Imperial Government during World War I.

Talaat Pasha had been convicted and sentenced to death in absentia in the Turkish courts-martial of 1919–20, and was viewed as the main orchestrator of the genocide. After a two-day trial Tehlirian was found not guilty by the German court, and freed.

Tehlirian joined Operation Nemesis in 1921. His main target was Talaat Pasha, who was a member of the military triumvirate known as the “Three Pashas” who controlled the Ottoman Empire. He was the former Minister of the Interior and Grand Vizier (an office equivalent to that of a prime minister), and was noted for his prominent role in the Armenian Genocide.

As soon as he found Talaat Pasha’s address on 4 Hardenbergstraße, in the Charlottenburg district of Berlin, Tehlirian

rented an apartment near his house so that he could study his everyday routine.

Tehlirian shadowed Talaat as he left his house on Hardenbergstraße on the morning of March 15, 1921. He crossed the street to view him from the opposite sidewalk, then crossed it once again to walk past him to confirm his identity. He then turned around and pointed his gun to shoot him in the nape of the neck.

The assassination took place in broad daylight and led to the German police immediately arresting Tehlirian. He had been told by his handlers, Armen Garo and Shahan Natalie, not to run from the crime scene.

Tehlirian was tried for murder, but was eventually acquitted by the twelve-man jury. The trial examined not only Tehlirian’s actions but also Tehlirian’s conviction that Talaat was the main author of the Ar-

menian deportation and mass killings. in 1915 and had been deported along with his family and personally witnessed their murder. When asked by the judge if he felt any sort of guilt, Tehlirian remarked, “I do not consider myself guilty because my conscience is clear...I have killed a man. But I am not a murderer.”

It took the jury slightly over an hour to render a verdict of “not guilty.”

After the trial, Tehlirian moved to Cleveland in the United States. He then moved to Marseille and then Yugoslavia and eventually married Anahit Tatikian who was also from Erzincan. She was 15 when they first met in 1917.

The couple moved to Belgrade and lived there until 1950, when they moved first to Casablanca, then to Paris, and finally to San Francisco. There he worked as a postal clerk and lived under the name Saro Melikian.

Tehlirian died in 1960 of a cerebral hemorrhage, and is buried at the Ararat Cemetery in Fresno, California.

His trial for murder influenced Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who later reflected on the trial, “Tehlirian acted as the self-appointed legal officer for the conscience of mankind. But can a man appoint himself to mete out justice? Will not passion sway such a type of justice and rather make a travesty of it?”

As a result, Lemkin was inspired to campaign for a law allowing genocide to be prosecuted under universal jurisdiction, reasoning that state sovereignty “cannot be conceived as the right to kill millions of innocent people.”



menian deportation and mass killings.

The defense attorneys made no attempt to deny the fact that Tehlirian had killed a man, and instead focused on the influence of the Armenian Genocide on Tehlirian’s mental state. Tehlirian claimed during the trial that he had been present in Erzincan

Armenian Church appoints new Abbot to Dadivank Monastery



By Pontifical Order of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, new appointments have been made for the clergy of the Mother See of Holy Ethemiadzin.

Rev. Fr. Mkhitar Grigoryan has been temporally appointed to serve as an Abbot of Dadivank Monastery in the Diocese of Artsakh.

Rev. Fr. Nerses Harutyunyan, complet-

ing his duties in the Armenian Diocese of Egypt, has been appointed to serve in the Diocese of Artsakh, and at the same time, will serve as a spiritual pastor in Dadivank Monastery.

Deacon Manvel Sargsyan will also continue his service in Dadivank Monastery, completing his duties in the RA Army Chaplaincy

Statue to actor and clown Leonid Yengibaryan unveiled in Yerevan

A statue to actor and clown Leonid Yengibaryan (Yengibarov) was unveiled next to the Yerevan Circus on his 86th birthday.

Leonid Yengibaryan was a Soviet clown and actor. Born in Moscow to an Armenian father and a Russian mother, he started his career as a boxer. In 1955 he joined the State School of Circus Art and graduated it with skills in juggling, acrobatics, and hand balancing. In 1959 he moved to Yerevan and joined the Armenian state circus.

He was one of the first Soviet clowns to create the poetic, intellectual clownery,



which made spectators think, not only laugh. Leonid Yengibaryan, ‘the clown with sad eyes,’ revolutionized the art of clownery by introducing lyrical tones into traditional buffoonery and grotesque sequences.

After initial incomprehension, his popularity grew immensely. After that he was invited to work in cinema. His first film, *A Path to the Arena*, was in fact about himself.

By the end of the 1960s he was known as one of the best clowns in the country and in the countries of the Eastern bloc, where he was permitted to travel.

He created a Pantomime Theatre instead. He managed to stage only a single piece, ‘*Star Rain*’ before his untimely death from a heart attack in 1972.

Serj Tankian highlights Armenian protests in ‘Electric Yerevan’ video

Serj Tankian has shared a music video for his song ‘Electric Yerevan,’ which looks back at a series of Armenian protests, the Rolling Stone reports.

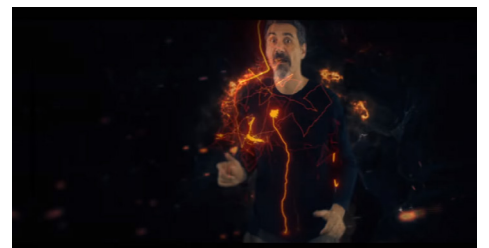
The clip, directed by Garin Hovannisian, offers a visual timeline of the events leading up to the 2015 protests and the ensuing 2018 Velvet Revolution. It also reveals the importance of peaceful protests around the world.

‘The song was inspired by the successful Electric Yerevan protests in Armenia in the summer of 2015 where people protested

against proposed hikes in utility prices,’ Tankian said in a statement. ‘My writing from that time is inscribed word for word in the song.’

The song appears on Tankian’s new *Elasticity* EP, out now. The EP marks the System of a Down singer’s first solo release since 2013’s *Orca*. The musician previously shared a music video for the title track in February.

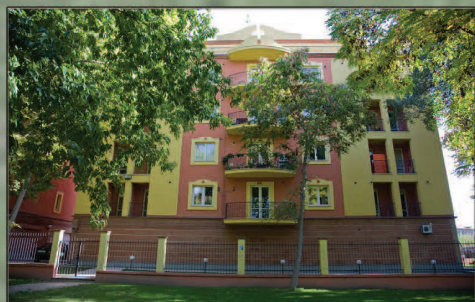
‘When I conceived possibly doing another record with the guys from System of



a Down a few years back, I started working on a set of songs that I arranged in rock format for that purpose,’ Tankian said of the EP in a statement. ‘As we weren’t able to see eye to eye on the vision going forward with a SOAD album, I decided to release these songs under my moniker.’

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The publisher: NT Holding LTD
Լրատվական գործունեություն իրականացնող
ԼՏ Հոլդինգ ՍՊԸ

Ծավալը՝ 2.25 մամուլ, տպաքանակը՝ 1500
Circulation: 1500 print copies and
15600 copies by e-mail list in PDF format

Weekly Newspaper, Since May 4, 1993

President of the NT Media Holding:

TIGRAN HARUTYUNYAN

Editor-in-Chief of the Media Holding:

GAYANEH ARAKELYAN

Director of the weekly:

MARINA HARUTYUNYAN

Chief Correspondent: **GOURGEN KHAZHAKIAN**

Computer Design: **Ashot Khalapyan**

Համարի թող. պատ.՝ Մ.Հարությունյան

ISSN 1829-0604

Գրանցման վկայականի համար՝
03ԱՑՑՑ68, տրված 11.01.2013թ.
Registration certificate and the date:
273.110.00512, 15.12.1995

E-mail: contact@nt.am

URL: www.nt.am

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