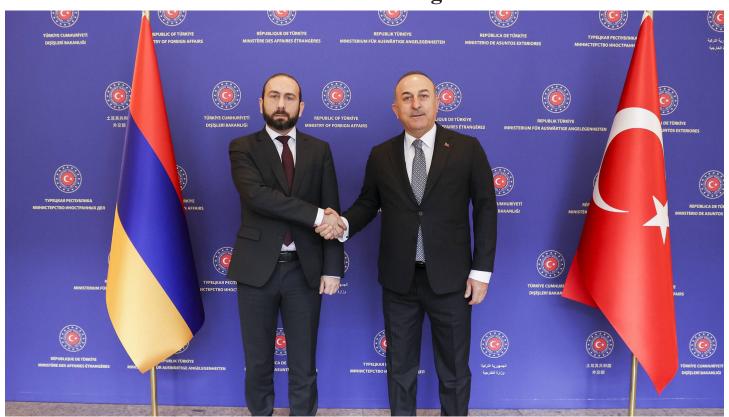
### Armenia, Turkey agree to take steps to facilitate border opening at historic meeting



Turkey - Foreign Ministers Mevlut Cavusoglu of Turkey and Ararat Mirzoyan of Armenia meet in Ankara, February 15, 2023.

Armenia's assistance to victims of the devastating earthquake in Turkey could facilitate the normalization of relations between the two neighboring states, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said after holding talks with his visiting Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan on February 15.

Mirzoyan flew to Ankara hours after Turkey again opened a border crossing with Armenia to receive a second batch of humanitarian aid sent by Yerevan.

A convoy of Armenian trucks loaded with food, medicine and other relief supplies headed to the southeastern Turkish city of Adiyaman where a 27-strong Armenian rescue team has been searching for possible survivors of the quake that killed at least 35,000 people.

Mirzoyan visited Adiyaman and spoke with the Armenian rescuers later on Wednesday.

"Armenia has extended its hand of friendship, showed solidarity and cooperation with us in this difficult time ... We need to continue this solidarity," Cavusoglu told a joint news conference in Ankara with Mirzoyan.

"The normalization process in the South Caucasus region is going on. We believe that our cooperation in the humanitarian field will support this process," he added, according to Reuters.

In that regard, Cavusoglu pointed not only to ongoing efforts to improve Turkish-Armenian relations but page 3

Japan is determined to cooperate with Armenia in solving Armenian-Azerbaijani problems. Ambassador

Germany to participate in EU mission to be deployed in Armenia on February 20 Armenia conveys proposals around peace treaty to Azerbaijan

"Democracy is irreversible in Armenia" - Council of Europe Action Plan 2023-2026 officially launched in

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### Japan is determined to cooperate with Armenia in solving Armenian-Azerbaijani problems. Ambassador

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Armenia Fukushima Masanori highlights the unresolved issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the signing of the peace treaty and the blockade of the Lachin Corridor. The Ambassador assures that Japan, as a member of the international community, is determined to cooperate with Armenia in solving these problems, ARMENPRESS reports, the Ambassador announced at the reception on the occasion of the birthday of Japanese Emperor Naruhito.

He noted that Armenia faced serious challenges, such as the fight against

Covid-19 and early parliamentary elections. "I think that the Armenian people have properly solved these problems. However, on the other hand, parallel to the negotiation process, there are unresolved issues in the relations with Azerbaijan, including the signing of the peace treaty and the blockade of the Lachin Corridor," said the Ambassador.

The Ambassador expressed confidence that the Armenian people, with their prudence, will solve these issues in a peaceful way. "As a member of the international community, Japan is determined to cooperate with Armenia in solving these



problems," he said.

The Ambassador also sent congratulatory words to His Majesty the Emperor, wishing further development of friendly relations between Japan and Armenia and building real peace in this region.

### Pashinyan, Aliyev, Blinken hold trilateral meeting in Munich



Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev held a trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

We believe that Armenia and Azerbaijan have a genuinely historic opportunity to secure an enduring peace after more than 30 years of conflict, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said at a meeting.

"The parties themselves have renewed their focus on a peace process, including through direct conversation as well as with the EU and ourselves. The United States is committed to doing anything we can to support these efforts, whether it's directly with our friends, whether it's in a trilateral format such as this, or with other international partners," Blinken said.

At the meeting, reference was made to the progress of work on the draft peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the unblocking of regional transport infrastructure and the implementation of delimitation between the two countries in line with the agreement reached in Prague.

Prime Minister Pashinyan reaffirmed the determination of the Armenian side to achieve a treaty that will truly guarantee long-term peace and stability in the region.



At the same time, Nikol Pashinyan emphasized the fact of Azerbaijan's illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor and the resulting humanitarian, environmental and energy crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Ensuring the continuity of the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan was emphasized.

### Armenian FM, OSCE's Kasprzyk discuss ongoing blockade of Artsakh

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan received Andrzej Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

Issues on regional security and stability were discussed during the meeting.

The interlocutors touched upon the



process of normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, developments on the draft peace treaty.

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh resulting from the blockade of the Lachin corridor by Azerbaijan was also discussed.

### We will continue to stand by Armenia and my friend Nikol Pashinyan. Emmanuel Macron

In his speech at the Munich Security Conference, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he will continue to stand by Armenia and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

ARMENPRESS reports, the main part of Macron's speech was related to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, but the leader of France also referred to the situation in the South Caucasus.

"In a few days it will be the anniversary of the illegal Russian aggression against Ukraine, and although we cannot make final conclusions, we can



summarize this year and share certain perspectives. Naturally, the core of my speech will be the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine, but I must mention that we do not forget the ongoing wars in the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa, the fight against terrorism, nuclear security and other issues.

Our task today is to explain, to make it clear that Russia is a force that spreads instability and chaos, which it does not only in Ukraine, but also in the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa.

How can we believe that the challenges of the Caucasus can be overcome by the

neo-colonial Russia that I described a moment ago? I am saying this in the presence of my friend, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, with whom we will continue to stand and act," Macron said.

### West never imposed anything on Armenia – Secretary of Security Council reacts to Russia's criticism

The West hasn't imposed anything on Armenia, Secretary of the Security Council Armen Grigoryan told reporters when asked to comment on Russia's criticism on the deployment of the EU monitoring mission in Armenia.

"No one can impose anything on us. In this context, the West hasn't imposed anything on us. The deployment of that mission was the Armenian side's decision. I can say that the arrival of that mission is interrelated also with our experience. I mean that

in May and November of 2021 an attack against the sovereign territory of Armenia took place, a large-scale attack took place

also in September last year. And given the experience that the existing security guarantees aren't functioning, Armenia invited the EU civilian mission with the purpose of creating some security guarantees," Grigoryan said.

"Naturally we are regularly speaking with our Russian partners on all existing issues, and we are presenting the Armenian side's approaches, explaining why we've made these steps," Grigoryan said.

page 1 also Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks.

The two ministers said they discussed their governments' efforts to normalize bilateral relations. In Mirzoyan's words, they reached understandings on rebuilding a medieval bridge on the Turkish-Armenian border and transport infrastructure "in advance of a full opening of the border."

He gave no details.

Turkey has for decades made the opening of the border and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Armenia conditional on an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal acceptable to Azerbaijan. Turkish leaders have repeatedly reaffirmed this precondition since the start of the normalization talks with Yerevan in January 2022.

Turkish and Armenian officials held four rounds of negotiations before announcing in July that the border will be opened for citizens of third countries. Mirzoyan reiterated Yerevan's hopes for the "full normalization of relations" and "complete opening of the border between Armenia and Turkey."

### Armenia, Azerbaijan need to find a way to de-escalate tensions – Ned Price

We welcome countries around the world stepping up and showing up for the people of Turkey, for the people of Syria who have been devastated by these massive earthquakes that struck on February 6th, US State Department Spokesman Ned Price said at a daily briefing, commenting on Armenian Foreign Minister's visit to Turkey.

"A number of countries have demonstrated a generosity of spirit that will be necessary if we are going to be able to address the full consequences and implications of these massive earthquakes. The United States has attempted to lead by example. So far, we have already contributed



or announced \$85 million in support from the U.S. Government to the response in Turkey and in Syria," the Spokesman said.

Speaking about Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization, Price said: "Our message to both Armenia and Azerbaijan, to the parties themselves, but also to the entire

region is the need to find a way to de-escalate tensions to put this back on a path towards a comprehensive and lasting peace."

"We have been engaged in that effort; we've been engaged in that effort bilaterally, we've been engaged in that effort multilaterally, and we'll continue to do everything we can as the United States directly with the parties, through multilateral institutions and groupings, to advance that cause. It is our hope that other countries will send precisely the same message, but I'm not in a position to speak to the messages that other countries are sending," the Spokesperson said.

## Germany to participate in EU mission to be deployed in Armenia on February 20

Germany will participate in the EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA). The German government made the decision on February 15.

The aim of the mission, which is initially mandated for two years, is to contribute to stability in the border areas of Armenia and thus create the conditions for normalizing relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. That is why the federal government is sending police officers to monitor the existing ceasefire with Azerbaijan. In addition, Germany has offered to send civilian experts to Armenia.

At Armenia's request, EUMA will carry out routine patrols and report on the

situation. The situation has worsened in recent weeks due to the obstruction of traffic on the Lachin corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

"The Federal Government, together with its partners in the EU, is closely monitoring the situation and, together with the European Union, is trying to find a peaceful solution to the conflict," the German Government said.

On February 20, 2023, EUMA will start its work as a civilian, non-executive and unarmed CSDP mission in Armenia. The decision was made on January 23, 2023 by the Council of the European Union based on an invitation from the Armenian

government. The mission will include a total of 100 people, of whom a maximum of 15 will be German civil servants.

The German government has strongly supported the establishment of the mission. It played an active role in the planning process, as the mission shows that the EU has an effective and flexible security policy instrument in civilian CSDP that can make a substantial contribution to solving crises and conflicts in its neighborhood. With the federal police officer Dr. Markus Ritter, the Federal Republic of Germany also provides the head of the mission.

### Moving to see animosity set aside to help people in need: Samantha Power on Armenian aid to Turkey

So moving to see decades of animosity set aside to help people in desperate need, USAID Administrator

"For the first time in 35 years, a border crossing between Armenia and Turkey has been opened so aid can reach earthquake victims. Armenia is sending through 100 tons of supplies, and a search and rescue team," Power tweeted.

On February 11 Armenia sent 100 tons of humanitarian aid Turkey via the Margara Bridge on the border between the

two countries.

The border gate between Turkey and Armenia opened for the first time in 30 years to allow aid for victims of the devastating earthquakes in southern Turkey.

Turkey's special envoy for Armenia, Serdar Kilic, tweeted photos of trucks passing through the checkpoint.

""I will always remember the generous aid sent by the people of Armenia to help alleviate the sufferings of our people in the earthquake stricken region in Turkey,"



Kilic said, thanking Armenian officials.

### "Democracy is irreversible in Armenia" - Council of Europe Action Plan 2023-2026 officially launched in

The Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026 was officially launched on February 16 in Yerevan.

The main beneficiaries of the program are citizens of Armenia. It is aimed at priority sectors such as the protection of rights of women and children and other vulnerable groups, protection of human rights in the armed forces, fight against corruption, judicial reforms and others.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Bjørn Berge participated in the event.

"The action plan is a key instrument in the ambitious reforms agenda of the Armenian government aimed at the further development of democratic institutions in line with European standards, establishment of an independent judiciary and strengthening of anti-corruption institutions," Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan said at the event.

The Foreign Minister said the positive reaction from stakeholders on the previous actions plans is "promising, and at the same time obligating" in terms of setting a higher bar for the implementation of this action plan. In this regard the Foreign Minister reaffirmed the Armenian government's unconditional commitment to the principles and values of the Council of Europe, which are stipulated in the



Armenian government's program.

"The commitment and political will of the government are of key importance for reforms. At the same time, cooperation with international partners is highly important for having sustainable success and tangible results," FM Mirzoyan said, expressing gratitude to Armenia's friends and colleagues who united their efforts to support the Armenian government's ambitious reforms agenda.

FM Mirzoyan emphasized that Armenia highly appreciates the voluntary investments by traditional partners, the EU, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, Denmark, also Austria, Germany, Belgium and Romania and other countries and organizations, who supplement the institutional capabilities and experience of the Council of Europe.

"We are pleased to note that the positive experience in implementing the previous action plans developed the conviction among our partners that the main beneficiaries of these programs are the citizens of Armenia, programs which are aimed at priority sectors such as social justice, the rights of women and children and other vulnerable groups, human rights protection in the armed forces, the fight against corruption, judicial reforms, de-centralization and promotion of local self-government," the FM said.

Mirzoyan emphasized the high level of cooperation between the Armenian government and the Council of Europe and the flexibility displayed in matching the action plan with the needs and priorities of the government.

Mentioning the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno Karabakh resulting from the Azerbaijani blockade of Lachin corridor, and Azerbaijani occupation of sovereign territories of Armenia, FM Mirzoyan emphasized that despite those actions aimed against Armenia and its democracy and the existing difficult challenges, Armenia remains committed to its values and continues strengthening democratic institutions in cooperation with the Council of Europe. "Democracy is irreversible in Armenia," the FM said.

Before the event, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Bjørn Berge held a meeting to discuss the broad range of issues of the cooperation agenda.

Continuation on page 9

## PM Pashinyan, EU's Charles Michel meet in Germany, discuss regional security

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with President of the European Council Charles Michel in Munich, Germany.

PM Pashinyan is visiting Munich to participate in the opening of the Munich

 $Security\ Conference\ 2023.$ 

"Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who is in Munich on a working visit, had an informal meeting with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel," the Prime Minister's Office said.

According to the read-out, PM Pashinyan and Charles Michel discussed "issues related to regional security and stability, as well as Armenia-EU cooperation."



### DigiTec 2022: Yerevan to host the region's largest tech expo and conference in March

On March 10-12, Yerevan will host DigiTec 2022 – the region's largest technological exhibition and conference. The event will be organized by the Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises (UATE).

Around 120 local and international, experienced and start-up companies are set to participate in the DigiTec exhibition this year and more than 60,000 visitors are expected. Traditionally, the exhibition is free for visitors. Optional online registration will be launched this year.

DigiTec Summit will consist of a series of keynote panel discussions and presentations, and will be distinguished by the



participation and lively exchange of views and experiences by leading entrepreneurs, executives, researchers, academicians and policy makers.

This year's speakers include Razmik Hovaghimian (Graph Ventures), Suvi Linden (Former Minister of Transport and Communications of Finland), Nir Chinsky (Regional Managing Director, Google Cloud), Pierre Hennes (Granatus Ventures), Davit Baghdasaryan (Krisp), Anu Nurma (Estonian Research Council), Tony Safoyan (SADA Systems), and Andrei Zdravkovic (AMD), as well as a number of other industry leaders from around the world.

The discussions during the DigiTec 2022 summit will focus on "Ambitious Tech: Enabling open economies to be more resilient in an increasingly unstable world."

## iGorts 2023: Armenia invites Diaspora specialists to work at government agencies

The Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of Armenia has begun accepting applications for the "iGorts-2023" program, which gives Diaspora professionals the opportunity to work in more than twenty Armenian state agencies for one year. Diaspora specialists who have a Bachelor's degree and a minimum of five years of work experience or a Master's degree (equivalent or higher) and three years of professional work experience are eligible to apply for the program.

Applications for 2023 will be open until April 5 in Armenian, English and Russian. Professionals who successfully pass the final round of interviews will start working in their respective agencies from



September 1, 2023.

Program participants will be provided with an air ticket (to and from Armenia), a monthly salary of 336,000 drams during the programme, health insurance and payment of a residence permit for one year.

Candidates can complete their application on the website of the Office of the

High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs.

The "iGorts" program is being implemented for the 4th time. It is the first programme in the history of the Republic of Armenia to engage Armenian specialists from the Diaspora to work for the Armenian government and other agencies at the state level. One hundred fifty specialists from Diaspora have already been employed in Armenian and Artsakh governmental agencies within the framework of this program. After completing the program, more than 60% of our participants have permanently established themselves in Armenia, and some work in senior positions.

# First Armenian-French economic summit will take place at the end of February

At the end of February, the first France-Armenia economic summit will be held in Paris, in which the delegation headed by the Armenian Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan will participate. The Armenian delegation will also be present at the SIA international agricultural exhibition. The decision to send the delegation to France was made by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.





### Nearly 1,000 businesses shut down, others work in partial capacity in Artsakh due to blockade

A number of industrial sectors in Artsakh are facing very serious problems as a result of the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor by Azerbaijan.

The normal operations of SMEs are disrupted, all companies are experiencing major problems regarding raw materials and other materials, import of goods and exports of output, the official Operational Headquarters of the government of Artsakh said in response to a query from ARMENPRESS.

"And this all in turn leads to inflation, unemployment, shortages of food products, poverty, decline in industrial outpost and turnover, decline in tax revenue and several other problems," the Operational Headquarters said.

Tax revenues dropped after businesses started shutting down, and due to related layoffs.

Preliminary data shows that in January of 2023 alone the tax revenues (including



state duties) were over 32% less than projected.

"The collected revenues were underperformed around 29% compared to the same period of the previous year. Given the situation, the government initiated a number of business support projects which are primarily aimed at maintaining the jobs and payment of salaries."

As of the latest data, approximately 1,000 corporate taxpayers (businesses) have suspended operations. But this isn't

the whole picture because most of the companies who are still working are working only at partial capacity.

In response to question about the problems in the food sector, the authorities said that the frequent gas and power disruptions are negatively affecting agriculture, by disrupting the work of the greenhouses, which leads to harvest damage from frost. Furthermore, because of shortages of fuel all agricultural works are proceeding in several times lesser volumes, and in some

cases are entirely suspended. "As a solution the government is providing a certain quantity of fuel to agriculture business operators to mitigate the negative impact of the situation to some extent," the Operational Headquarters said, adding that they are trying to fill the gap at the expense of reserves because it is impossible to import the agricultural seeds and other required products, including harvest protection measures.

Van Novikov

## Armenia sent humanitarian aid worth over 157,000,000 drams to Syria and Turkey

The government allocated more than 157,000,000 drams from the reserve fund to the Ministry of Emergency Situations to compensate the expenditures of the humanitarian aid sent to the countries affected by the earthquake.

"The humanitarian cargo was sent



twice by air to Syria and twice by land to Turkey," Minister of Emergency Situations Armen Pambukhchyan said at the Cabinet meeting.

The rescuers who were sent to Syria have already returned, while those sent to Turkey are now on their way back.

### Armenian wines to be showcased at Detrop exhibition in Thessaloniki

At the initiative of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Greece, Armenia will participate for the first time in the Detrop exhibition in Thessaloniki, one of the most important wine-related events in Greece.

At the exhibition "Quality Wines" company will present the unique products of



ArArAt, Zorah, Karas, ArmAs, Hin Areni, Oshin, Orran, Armenia Wine, Kilikia, Jermuk and Noyan

The exhibition will take place on February 18-20.

A special presentation of the wine history of Armenia will take place on February 19.



## Two months in blockade: Artsakh President calls for international action to open the road of life

For two months now, Azerbaijan, resorting to criminal and terroristic actions, has been keeping around 120,000 people of the Republic of Artsakh under blockade, aiming at carrying out ethnic cleansing in Artsakh, Artsakh's President Arayik Harutunyan said in a statement.

"This illegal blockade contradicts all the norms of international law and the obligations assumed by Azerbaijan, including those within the framework of the tripartite statement of November 9, 2020," he stressed.

"The blockade, based on the Azerbaijani state policy of racial hatred against Armenians, is all-encompassing: it deprives
120,000 citizens of Artsakh of natural access to food, energy, healthcare and other
vital goods and services, and is, therefore,
a serious, deliberate and massive attack
on the right to life and other rights of our
compatriots," the President said.

"Since January 20, in order to solve the acute food shortage caused by the blockade, the Artsakh government has been forced to restrict access to food by introducing rationing: one kilogram of rice, buckwheat, pasta, sugar and vegetable oil per person per month, the scope of which will be increased in the near future," he continued.

"Azerbaijan exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Artsakh by disrupting the electricity and gas supplies in harsh winter conditions. Due to problems with heating and food, all kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in the country have been closed, depriving about 20,000



children and adolescents of the country of the opportunity to receive education. The work of many economic enterprises has also been suspended, leaving thousands of citizens unemployed. The construction of about 3,700 apartments and houses intended for people forcibly displaced from the territories occupied by Azerbaijan, as well as other construction works, have been halted. Scheduled surgeries in medical institutions have been cancelled, jeopardizing the health and lives of around 600 citizens," Arayuk Harutyunyan said.

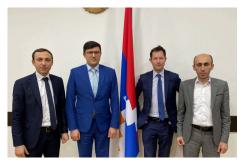
He expressed gratitude to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Russian peacekeeping mission for their efforts to ensure the transfer of about 90 persons in critical health conditions to Armenia, to reunite dozens of separated families and to transport the minimum amount of food to Artsakh that allows us to prevent famine in the country. However, the President said, the situation remains unbearable amid severe shortage of food, medicine and other essentials, continuous disruption of gas and electricity supplies, separation of thousands of families, collapse of the economy and other crisis conditions.

"We welcome the clear appeals of the executive and legislative authorities of many countries, as well as international organizations, to Azerbaijan to immediately and unconditionally lift the blockade. Those demands and positions, however, are ineffective in the conditions of Azerbaijan's fanatical and hateful intransigence. This is why the international community must act, as it has done in other regions when there are early warning signs of genocide," President Harutyunyan said.

"We appeal primarily to Russia, the USA and France, which co-chair the OSCE Minsk Group, as well as to all members of the international community, to jointly or individually take effective measures to open Artsakh's road of life and prevent new crimes. In that context, we urge them to impose sanctions against all perpetrators and supporters of crimes against the people of Artsakh, and the state of Azerbaijan, among other sanctions, by banning them from entering their own territories and freezing their movable and immovable properties in their countries," he continued.

"Azerbaijan's attempted ethnic cleansing of the people of Artsakh complies with the legal concept of crimes against humanity (erga omnes). Its prevention is a moral, legal and political obligation binding on all signatories of the United Nations Charter. Therefore, it is the duty of every member of the international community to do their best to protect the people of Artsakh and their dignified life in their own homeland," he concluded.

## Artsakh officials discuss ongoing crisis with MEP François-Xavier Bellamy



Artsakh's Deputy Foreign Minister Felix Khachatryan, Advisor to the Minister

of State Artak Beglaryan, and Human Rights Defender Gegham Stepanyan held a meeting with Member of the European Parliament François-Xavier Bellamy.

The meeting took place at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Artsakh in Armenia.

The Artsakh officials expressed gratitude to Mr. Bellamy for supporting the adoption of the European Parliament resolution on the humanitarian crisis in

Artsakh resulting from blocking of the Goris-Stepanakert highway (the Lachin Corridor) and for the constant support shown to the rights, freedoms and security of the people of Artsakh.

The interlocutors discussed the humanitarian issues that have arisen as a result of the blockade and ways to overcome them, as well as various actions to counter Azerbaijan's criminal policy.



## Action plan, proactive approach of Armenia are great samples of what must be done all over Europe – CoE's Berge

Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Bjørn Berge said the launch of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026 is yet another step in the positive journey that Armenia and the Council of Europe are taking together.

Berge was speaking at the event launching the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026 in Yerevan.

The Council of Europe is very much appreciating the excellent cooperation with Armenia, Berge said.

"The action plan we are launching today and the proactive approach of the Armenian authorities are very great samples of what must be done in practice all over Europe. Of course, the action plan is only a part, but a very important part of the overall cooperation between the Council of Europe and Armenia," the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe said.

He said that Armenia has been a member of the Council of Europe for more than two decades and has continually made important contributions in the organization, and at the same time benefited



from the organization's expertise and joint cooperation.

He said it has been interesting to follow the evolution of the relationship and new initiatives over the years, including major reforms.

"The Council of Europe has very much appreciated the excellent cooperation with Armenia and the progress made in several areas, at least through the most recent joint action plan which concluded last year. What has been achieved within that framework is substantial and significant," Berge added, noting the new, improved Judicial Code and Criminal Code, the anti-corruption strategy and other reforms

of key importance. "The new action plan we are launching today is designed to help Armenia take further steps forward in dealing with them."

The action plan includes new areas of cooperation in the plan, such as freedom of expression, also for the media, measures to protect personal data, social and labor rights, environment, good governance, local government reforms, joint fight against cybercrime and other areas.

"Overall it is intended to make life better for the people of this great country, underpinned by the commitment from the Armenian authorities and with the support and cooperation of the Council of Europe. Looking back, much has been achieved in this country in recent times, but together we can achieve yet more. I am very grateful to the Armenian authorities for their firm determination and political commitment, as well as to the EU and all the partners and donors who are providing the financial support required," Berge said.

## EU called on Azerbaijan to take measures to ensure freedom, security of movement along Lachin corridor – Borrell

The EU has been closely following the developments along and around the Lachin corridor and their humanitarian implications, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell said in his <a href="mailto:answer">answer</a> on behalf of the European Commission to Member of the European Parliament Demetris Papadakis' written questions.

"Since the beginning of December 2022, the EU has been closely following the developments along and around the Lachin corridor and their humanitarian implications.

The EU remains seriously concerned about the distress the ongoing restrictions to freedom of movement and to the supply of vital goods are causing for the

local population.

High Representative/Vice-President Borrell, supported by EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, Toivo Klaar, remains in close contact with both sides.

The EU has called on Azerbaijan to take the measures that are within its jurisdiction to ensure freedom and security of movement along the corridor, in line with its obligations deriving from the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020.

The responsibility of Russia, whose peacekeeping contingent is in control of the Lachin corridor, as per the same trilateral statement, should also be highlighted.

The EU's humanitarian funding mobilised to address the consequences of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict amounts to EUR 3.6 million for 2022. It has been



entirely allocated to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which is the only international humanitarian organisation able to operate on the ground along the Lachin corridor.

Since the escalation of the conflict in 2020, the EU has provided close to EUR 27 million in humanitarian aid and early recovery to support the most vulnerable populations affected by the hostilities," reads the answer given by Borrell.



## Armenian, Latvian leaders discuss issues on bilateral agenda, regional developments

Armenian Prime Minister had a meeting with the President of Latvia Egils Levits on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

The interlocutors discussed Armenian-Latvian relations, as well as various issues of bilateral interest.

PM Pashinyan referred to the institutional reforms being carried out in Arme-

nia and highlighted the importance of the European Union's continuous support for



their effective implementation. The Prime Minister noted that the development and

strengthening of democracy is of strategic importance for the Armenian government.

Nikol Pashinyan and Egils Levits also exchanged thoughts on the processes taking place in the South Caucasus region, referred to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

The activity of the civil mission of the European Union in our country was highlighted.

The parties expressed hope that

it would contribute to stability and peace.

### **Drug Trafficking Soars in Armenia**

(RFE/RL) - Armenia -- A photo released by the State Revenue Committee on March 3, 2021 shows an Armenian customs officer and a sniffer dog searching through boxes which authorities say contained heroin smuggled from Iran.

Drug trafficking cases registered by Armenian law-enforcement authorities nearly doubled last year, raising serious concerns in a country not accustomed to widespread drug abuse.

The sharp increase is widely blamed on increasingly accessible synthetic drugs mainly sold through the internet and, in particular, social media platforms such as Telegram.

The Armenian police reported a total of 743 trafficking cases in 2022. Gevorg Sargsyan, a prosecutor dealing with illegal drug trade, downplayed the figure on Tuesday, saying that it also reflects an increased number of cases detected and solved by the police and other law-enforcement bodies.

Sargsvan claimed that his foreign

colleagues are impressed with the success of Armenia's fight against such crimes.

"The law-enforcement bodies of countries with much greater capacities have the same difficulties as the Armenian law-enforcement bodies do," he told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Critics, notably relatives of Armenians suffering from drug addiction, are unconvinced by these assurances, pointing to the rapid spread of banned substances in the country.

The walls of residential buildings and other public areas across Yerevan now have inscriptions showing the links to Telegram channels selling drugs. A young woman who asked not to be identified said her brother was one of their regular clients before ending up in a psychiatric hospital.

"People can buy everything on those Telegram channels," she complained.

Sargsian insisted that the authorities are cracking down on the illegal online trade. In his words, over the last three

years they have identified and charged over two dozen members of four criminal associations that old several million dollars' worth of narcotics through social media. Two such individuals are now standing trial on relevant charges, added the prosecutor.

Gayane Vartazaryan, a deputy director of Armenia's main narcology clinic, said she is especially concerned about the growing number of juveniles and women using narcotics. She said the number of women who applied to the clinic rose from 76 in 2021 to 116 in 2022.

"I wouldn't say that these numbers are catastrophic," she told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "But these are large numbers and they are rising."

Some critics of the Armenian government link the alarming trend with recent years' increase in Armenia's overall crime rate, saying that the country is not as safe as it used to be. The total number of various crimes registered by the police rose by over 24 percent in 2022.



### Aid from Armenia to Turkey Generates Heated Debate Among Armenians

### By Harut Sassounian

The Armenian government's decision to send massive humanitarian aid and dozens of rescuers to Turkey following the powerful earthquake generated much controversy among Armenians.

The Turkish government is not a friend of Armenia or Armenians. Turkey is a mortal enemy having committed the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and continuing its denials until today. More recently, the Turkish military and imported Islamic terrorists supported Azerbaijan during the 2020 Artsakh War, causing the deaths of thousands of Armenian soldiers. Last week, Pres. Recep Tayyip Erdogan acknowledged that Azerbaijan was reciprocating for Turkey's support during the 2020 war by sending several hundred rescuers to the earthquake zone. Erdogan then added his often repeated mantra, "Azerbaijan and Turkey are one nation, two states." Furthermore, a week ago, while Armenia was providing humanitarian aid to Turkey, the Turkish government, in the midst of the disastrous earthquake, found the time to condemn the Mexican Senate for recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

Armenia's sending 27 rescuers and 100 tons of food, medicines and other relief supplies to Turkey was controversial because the aid was provided not only to an unrepentant enemy and on the heels of the Armenian losses inflicted by Turkey during the 2020 War, but during the current humanitarian crisis in Artsakh due to Azeri blockade of the Lachin Corridor, which is supported by Turkey. While 120,000 Armenians in Artsakh are slowly starving to death being deprived of food and medicines for over 60 days, Armenia's Prime Minister, President and Speaker

of the Parliament, ignoring Armenian sensitivities, announced sending aid to Turkey. They naively insisted that their humanitarian action will help bring peace between Armenia and Turkey.

Naturally, when a major disaster happens anywhere in the world, most countries rush to the rescue of those afflicted. Armenia could not remain indifferent. However, Armenian leaders could have softened the public's backlash if they had issued a more delicately-worded announcement regarding the aid to Turkey while acknowledging that they are mindful of the plight of Artsakh Armenians due to the blockade of the Lachin Corridor.

It is important that Armenians distinguish between the Turkish government and Turkish people. Armenia and Armenians have a justified demand from the Turkish government for the Armenian losses suffered during the Genocide, but they should not antagonize individual Turks who played no part in the Genocide, since they were not even born at that time. However, if a Turk denies the Genocide and insults the memory of the Armenian martyrs, he or she should be condemned just as the denialist Turkish government.

One of the consequences of the disastrous earthquake in Turkey is the collapse of Erdogan's already low political rating. There are claims by the Turkish opposition that Erdogan has unfairly dispatched most of the Turkish rescuers to the earthquake regions inhabited by his supporters who had voted for him in the past. He has been subjected to harsh criticisms due to the Turkish government's slow actions to rescue the large number of victims of the earthquake. Tens of thousands of Turkish citizens died due to the collapse of

poorly constructed hundreds of high-rise apartment buildings, as a result of Erdogan government's corrupt practices. Many buildings that were properly constructed did not collapse.

The Presidential election in Turkey is scheduled for May 14, 2023, three months from now. Knowing that his chances of winning re-election fairly is low, Pres. Erdogan will probably delay the election, giving him time to come up with various schemes to boost his rating. Getting re-elected is a must for Erdogan because if he loses the election, he will not just lose the presidency. He risks ending up in jail for the rest of his life because of his and his family's massive corruption.

Therefore, Erdogan will do everything possible to remain in power. Even though he has no legal right to postpone the election, he will order the judiciary to rule that given the emergency situation in the country, delaying the election is legal and justified.

Erdogan is already making lavish promises to his potential voters. He has promised to millions of homeless Turkish survivors of the earthquake that the government will give them free apartments in one year. Erdogan is forgetting that he has no right to make such a promise because a year from now he may not be the President of Turkey.

Erdogan will also provide large amounts of money to the public to win over their votes. To rebuild the devastated areas of Turkey, foreign countries and international financial institutions will donate billions of dollars which Erdogan will distribute lavishly to the voters to get re-elected.

### Director-General of International Labor Organization offers Armenia to be part of Global Coalition for Social Justice

Armenian Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Narek Mkrtchyan met with the Director-General of the International Labor Organization Gilbert Houngbo during a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

Mkrtchyan and Houngbo discussed the reforms in the labor and employment sector, the development of the employment strategy, and the possible introduction of an unemployment insurance system and extrajudicial settlement of labor disputes in Armenia, the ministry said in a read-out.

Mkrtchyan thanked the Director-General of the International Labor Organization for the close and productive cooperation, as well as supporting the sectoral reforms. The Armenian minister said that



cooperating with the International Labor Organization contributes to increasing the level of protection of rights of employees and employers and strengthening cooperation of social partners.

Gilbert Houngbo, concurring with the Armenian ministry's priorities, reaffirmed

readiness to invest necessary resources and efforts aimed at sectoral cooperation.

Houngbo introduced his initiative – the Global Coalition for Social Justice – and offered Armenia to be part of it. Mkrtchyan and Houngbo also discussed the possibility of holding a sectoral conference in Armenia in the end of the year with participation of the Director-General of the International Labor Organization.

Mkrtchyan then briefed Gilbert Houngbo on the situation in Nagorno Karabakh resulting from Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin corridor. Mkrtchyan had briefed Houngbo on the blockade earlier in his official correspondence as well.

### Armenian media executives decide to launch regional forums, Lebanon chosen as inaugural host

The Coordination Council of the Pan-Armenian Forum of Journalists held a session at the head office of the Noyan Tapan news agency.

Participants of the session included ARMENPRESS Director Narine Nazaryan and former Director Aram Ananyan, the President of the Union of Journalists of Armenia and Editor-in-chief of 168 Hours newspaper Satik Seyranyan, the Lebanon-based Aztag newspaper's Editor-in-chief Shahan Kandaharian, Zartonk newspaper's Editor-in-chief Sevak Hakobyan, President of the Pan-Armenian Media Association Mikayel Hatchean, Azg newspaper founder Hakob Asatryan and Noyan Tapan Director Tigran Harutyunyan.



The media executives and editors underscored the importance of daily coverage of the blockade of Artsakh, particularly foreign language coverage to inform the international community on the developments and to expose Azerbaijan's policy of ethnic cleansing.

The participants of the meeting also attached importance to revaluing media cooperation in the present-day conditions and the targeted launch of the media network system. It was decided to restore the in-person meeting format of the council in the post-pandemic period and re-organize the working platforms.

The issue of organizing regional forums was discussed. The first regional forum will take place in Lebanon. The details on the forum covering the Middle East will be published soon. The council will continue holding both in-person and online meetings. The editors of media outlets are encouraged to contact the council to submit proposals.

### Ex-defense minister declared fugitive from justice

Former Minister of Defense Vigen Sargsyan is wanted by law enforcement agencies, the Prosecutor-General's Office said.

Sargsyan, who was Defense Minister from 2016 to 2018, is suspected of violating the rules and regulations of the military housing program during his tenure and ordering respective officials to include 26 handpicked servicemembers, as well as three other individuals in the program who were otherwise either ineligible or

behind the waiting list.

The Prosecutor-General's office had earlier said that Sargsyan's actions "caused significant damage to the rights and legal interests of persons, as well as the legal interests of the state, by negligently causing grave consequences."

Five members of the Defense Ministry's Central Housing Commission are also facing indictments in the case.

Sargsyan is charged with abuse of power. A court issued an arrest warrant for

Sargsyan on February 10. He denies wrongdoing.



### Education Minister of Armenia, Czech Ambassador discuss measures to strengthen cooperation

Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia Zhanna Andreasyan and Deputy Minister Artur Martirosyan met with the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Armenia Petr Pirunčík to discuss the steps aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation and development opportunities.

As the Ministry of Education informs, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, Zhanna Andreasyan, welcoming the Ambassador, noted that the meeting is a good opportunity to outline future actions within the framework of cooperation between the two countries.

According to the minister, there is considerable progress in the direction of a number of joint projects, in particular, the activities stipulated in the agreement "On



cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Czech Republic in the fields of culture, education, youth, science and sports" continue to be implemented.

The minister also informed that the draft of the extension of the agreement "On cooperation in the fields of education and science between the Ministry of

Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic" was developed and transferred to the Czech side, with which the bilateral cooperation will continue with a development perspective.

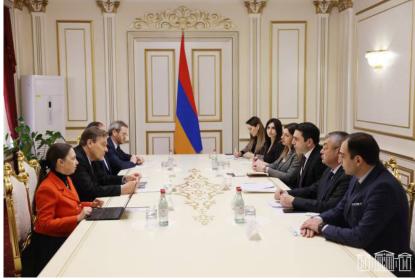
The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Czech Republic to Armenia also emphasized the importance of interaction between the two countries and universities, assured that they are ready to support their strengthening and expansion.

The parties referred to the programs of student exchange, interstate scholarships, and other issues of bilateral interest.

## PACE co-rapporteurs visit Armenia to get to know Lachin corridor crisis on the ground

Speaker of Parliament of Armenia Alen Simonyan held a meeting on February 17 with visiting co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Monitoring Committee Kimmo Kiljunen and Boriana Åberg.

Kimmo Kiljunen (Finland, SOC) and Boriana Åberg (Sweden, EPP/CD), co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the monitoring of obligations and commitments by Armenia, are visiting the country on a fact-finding trip from 17 to 20 February 2023.



"Speaker Simonyan attached importance to the co-rapporteurs' visit, the purpose of which is to get to know the situation resulting from the illegal blockade of Lachin corridor," the Armenian parliament's press service said in a read-out.

The Speaker highlighted the need

of the co-rapporteurs' planned visit to border provinces, as well as meetings with the Armenians of Artsakh who are now sheltered in Armenia.

The Speaker appreciated the work of the assembly and the co-rapporteurs. "I know that you issued a statement during the very first days of the blockade of Lachin corridor," Speaker Simonyan

added, valuing the Humanitarian Consequences of the Blockade in Lachin Corridor report which is being prepared by the PACE migration committee.

Details on the crisis in Lachin corridor and its consequences were presented during the meeting.

### Tahar Rahim set to play Charles Aznavour in biopic

Tahar Rahim is set to play Charles Aznavour in *Monsieur Aznavour*, the Charles Aznavour biopic slated for release in 2024, the *Armenian Film Society* informs.

Monsieur Aznavour will chart Charles Aznavour's rise to stardom in the 1950s and his friendships with many artists, including Edith Piaf, who took him with her on a tour of France and the United States. The film will be directed by singer-turned-filmmakers Mehdi Idir and Grand Corps Malade, and will be produced by Jean-Rachid Kallouche's Kallouche Cinema and Mandarin & Compagnie.

Tahar Rahim is a French actor of Algerian descent who starred as Nazaret Manoogian in Fatih Akın's THE CUT. The



film, which was written by Mardik Martin, is about the life and experience of a young Armenian in the light of the Armenian Genocide and its repercussions in different parts of the world. The actor is a two-time César Award-winner and has earned BAFTA and Golden Globe nominations throughout his career, and is known for

his work on projects such as the Academy Award-nominated A PROPHET, THE PAST, THE SERPENT, THE MAURITANIAN, and can next be seen in Ridley Scott's NAPOLEON.

Producer Jean-Rachid Kallouche, who is married to Katia Aznavour, the daughter of Charles Aznavour, says the late singer gave him his blessing to produce his biopic before his passing in 2018, and that it was his idea to have the film focus on the first part of his life— "from zero to fame."

Filming is set to kick off this summer for an estimated release in 2024 to mark Charles Aznavour's centenary.

## Famous cosmonaut refused to participate in international congress in Azerbaijan, urges others to do the same

The famous American astronaut Garrett Reisman refused to participate in the International Astronautical Congress being held in Azerbaijan, citing that country's military aggression against Armenia, ARMENPRESS reports the cosmonaut made wrote in his "Twitter" microblog.

"Why is the International Astronautical Congress (IAC) being held in Azerbaijan, a country that is guilty of recent military aggression against its neighbor Armenia? Azerbaijan is one of the most corrupt countries; it has one of the worst



not go, and if you are planning to go, please reconsider," Raisman wrote.

He also reminded that Azerbaijan's military aggression against Armenia started in September of last year, which was condemned by the European Parliament.

In his Twitter microblog, the astronaut also shared the reports and assessments of a number of international organizations, for example, the 2021 index of corruption perception of "Transparent International", where Azerbaijan is in a bad position; it is 128th among 180 countries.

# Dubbed the "Shazam for fashion", Armenian HopShop advances to Global Finals of Entrepreneurship World Cup

HopShop, an Armenian AI-based startup, has advanced to the Global Finals of the Entrepreneurship World Cup 2022, one of the most prestigious startup competitions in the world.

"We're thrilled to announce that HopShop has advanced to the Global Finals of the Entrepreneurship World Cup 2022, one of the most prestigious startup competitions in the world. Out of 30,000 companies from around the world, we are one of the top 100 finalists competing for a share of the US\$1 million prize pool, which will take place on 9-13 March in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia," the company

announced on social media.

"HopShop is Shazam for fashion. It's an AI-based visual search application that simplifies the process of finding and buying clothing items, shoes, and accessories. With our innovative technology, users can take a photo of an item or upload an existing photo, and the app will identify similar items and provide purchasing options. Our goal is to provide a convenient and efficient shopping experience for our customers.

Participating in the Entrepreneurship World Cup is a significant accomplishment for us, and it provides us with an opportunity to connect with potential investors, partners, and customers from around the world. We're grateful for this experience and excited to showcase the innovation and creativity that our team brings to the table.

We want to thank our customers, partners, and supporters for their ongoing support and encouragement. It is because of you that we have been able to achieve this milestone, and we look forward to your continued support as we enter the global finals of the Entrepreneurship World Cup 2022," HopShop added.

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The goal of the Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) non-profit organization is to unify Armenians worldwide in a common platform so that through contacts, queries and referenda they can express their views and positions regarding issues of general interest to Armenians around the world and issues of particular interest to Armenian communities in various countries.

Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) also makes it possible to establish business networks, the cardholder can participate in various charitable projects, and can obtain discounts from Armenian and non-Armenian businesses all over the world. Armenians should feel themselves to be full-fledged "citizens" of a reborn Armenia and the Armenian Identity Card is the «passport» for all Armenians.

The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) network is an effective environment where Armenians can implement various projects and pan-Armenian programs. At the heart of HyeID is the creation of an Armenian database which will become the reliable and objective basis to realize the potential of all Armenians around the world. Based on that database, it will be possible to implement various permanent and temporary initiatives through the Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) organization.

• The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) worldwide network enables cardholders to elect and get elected to the leadership of The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) network struc-

• The Armenian Identity Card (Hye-ID) cardholders can benefit from the

possibility of discounts intended for HyeID cardholders when shopping for products and services in various countries of the world.

- The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) cardholders can participate in queries and referenda initiated by the Hye-ID network and vote on issues of national interest to Armenians.
- Ensure the security

and privacy of The Armenian Identification Card (HyeID) cardholders. The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) cardholders who live in the Diaspora intend to utilize the possibilities made available through HyeID to form a Diaspora representative body — Diaspora Armenian Parliament — through democratic elections.

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