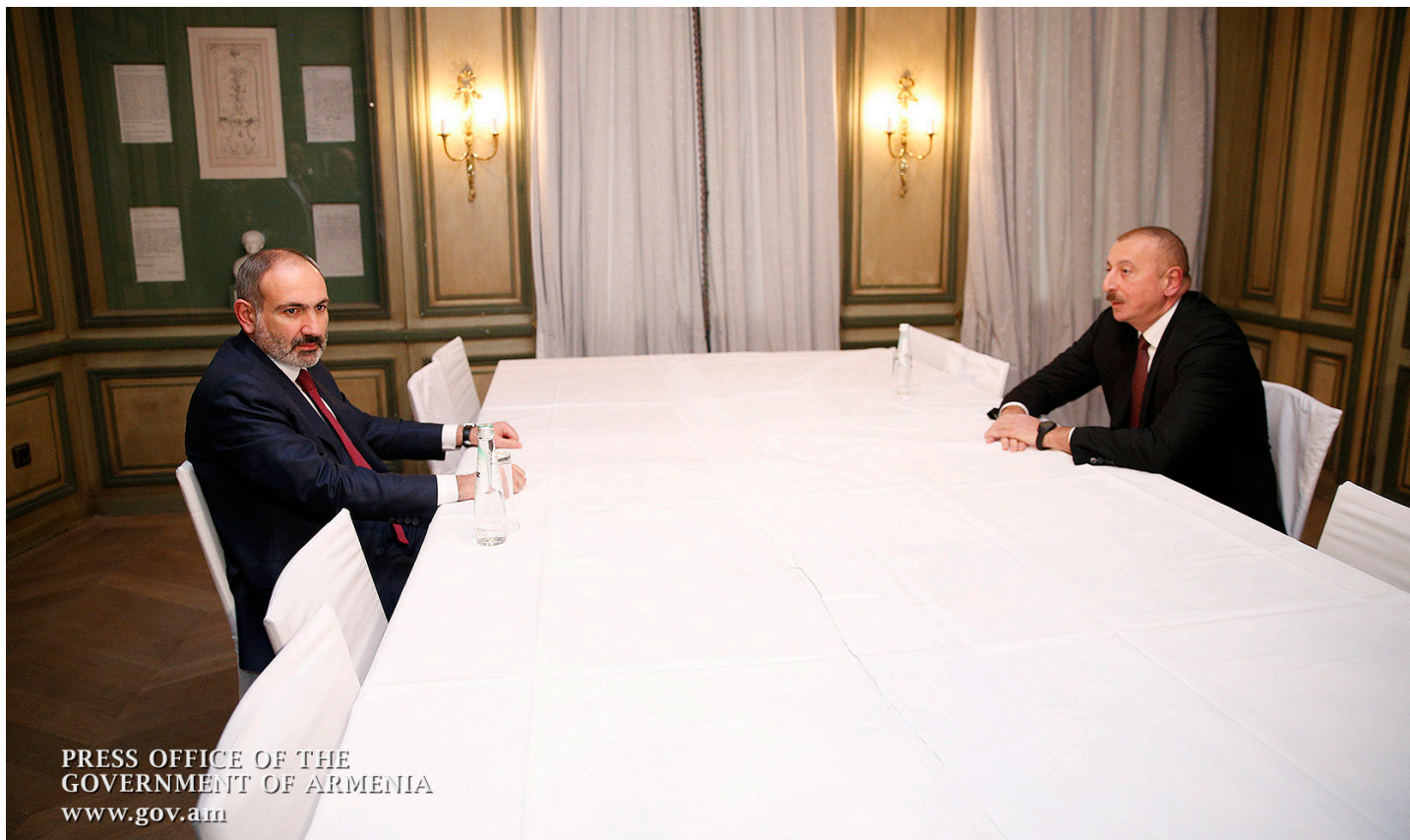


Armenian PM, Azerbaijani President to meet in Moscow



Russian President Vladimir Putin will host talks between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan on January 11 two months after brokering a ceasefire agreement that stopped the war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Kremlin said on Sunday that Putin, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev will discuss in Moscow the agreement’s implementation and “further steps aimed at resolving existing problems in the region.”

“Special attention will be paid to providing assistance to residents of areas that suffered as a result of the hostilities and unblocking and developing trade and transport links,” it said, adding that Putin will also hold separate meetings with Pashinyan and Aliyev.

Putin discussed the Karabakh conflict with Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and three top security officials in a video conference held later on Sunday. No details of the discussion were made public.

Meanwhile, Pashinyan’s press secretary, Mane Gevorgyan,

emphasized the “economic character” of the upcoming trilateral meeting, saying that it will focus on the opening of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border envisaged by the November 9 agreement.

The truce agreement specifically commits Yerevan to opening a transport link between the Nakhichevan exclave and the rest of Azerbaijan, which would presumably pass through Armenia’s southeastern Syunik province.

Gevorgyan again insisted that that it will not serve as a permanent “corridor” and that Armenia will be able, for its part, to use Azerbaijani territory as a transit route for cargo shipments to and from Russia and Iran.

She also reiterated that the opening of the transport links will be conditional on Baku releasing dozens of Armenians remaining in Azerbaijani captivity and facilitating the ongoing search for other soldiers and civilians who went missing during the six-week war. “Without a solution to or major progress on these issues it will be extremely difficult to discuss the economic agenda,” she wrote on Facebook.

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Nikol Pashinyan holds phone conversation with Emmanuel Macron

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had a telephone conversation with President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron.

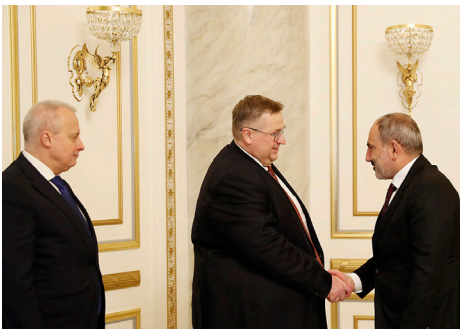
The parties discussed the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh following the aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan and the ways of overcoming the challenges. The Premier thanked the French President for his



thoughtfulness and support provided during these challenging times for the Armenian people.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Emmanuel Macron referred to a number of issues related to the agenda of the Armenian-French relations and the development of economic cooperation.

PM Pashinyan receives RF Deputy Prime Minister: Armenian-Russian cooperation agenda, situation in Artsakh discussed



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received RF Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk. Greeting the guest, PM Pashinyan congratulated the Russian Deputy Premier on the New Year and noted the importance of his visit in the context of Armenian-Russian cooperation and the situation in Artsakh.

The Armenian Prime Minister highlighted the role that the Russian Federation played in the cessation of hostilities in Na-

gorno-Karabakh and the establishment of the ceasefire, noting that the presence of the Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh is an important factor and a guarantee of security. Nikol Pashinyan praised President Vladimir Putin's efforts and Russia's constructive role in stabilizing the situation in Artsakh.

Congratulating the Armenian Prime Minister on New Year and Christmas holidays, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister conveyed warm greetings on behalf of RF Premier Mikhail Mishustin. He noted that Russia confirms its support to the friendly Armenian people during this difficult period and is interested in continuing the programs aimed at the development of the Armenian-Russian strategic cooperation.

Nikol Pashinyan and Alexey Overchuk discussed issues related to the current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, humanitarian

assistance to Artsakh, the exchange of prisoners and the bodies of the dead, as well as a wide range of issues on the agenda of Armenian-Russian relations. Consistency in the prisoner exchange efforts was emphasized during the meeting.

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation referred to cooperation between the two states in various fields, including the economy, energy, development of transport infrastructure and the fight against COVID-19.



President Sarkissian tests positive for Covid

President Armen Sarkissian has tested positive for the coronavirus, his office said on January 5.

A statement released by the office said Sarkissian, 67, took the test after showing symptoms of COVID-19 following foot surgery which he underwent in London on Sunday.

"President Sarkissian has self-isolated and will temporarily work remotely," added the statement. It did not say whether he remains in hospital.

Armenia has been hit hard by the coro-



navirus pandemic, with more than 160,000 cases and at least 2,878 deaths officially confirmed in the country of about 3 million to date. The real number of cases is believed to be much higher.

The Armenian authorities largely stopped enforcing safety and hygiene rules, aimed at containing the pandemic, following the September 27 outbreak of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The daily number of new COVID-19 infections reported by them grew rapidly as a result. But it has been steadily falling since mid-November.

According to the Ministry of Health, there were 9850 active coronavirus cases in Armenia as of Friday morning, sharply down from 22,850 cases reported on December 1.

page 1 ➡ Gevorgyan went on to dismiss Armenian opposition claims that Pashinyan could agree to more Armenian territorial concessions to Azerbaijan during his talks with Aliyev. “No document on resolving the Karabakh conflict or any territorial issue is due to be signed in Moscow,” she said.

An alliance of over a dozen Armenian opposition parties seeking to oust Pashinyan has expressed serious concern over the upcoming Armenian-Azerbaijani talks.

One of its leaders, Vazgen Manukyan, demanded an urgent meeting with Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan, National Security Service Director Armen Abazyan and Armenia’s top army general, Onik Gasparyan.

Ayvazyan met with Manukyan and two other opposition leaders on Saturday.

“Armen Abazyan and Onik Gasparyan avoided a meeting, which only deepened our concerns and suspicions,” Manukyan said in a statement issued on Sunday.

“The [opposition] Homeland Salvation

Movement states that any decision [to be made in Moscow] against the interests of Armenia and Artsakh will be ... rejected by the Armenian people and invalidated after regime change,” he warned.

The opposition forces blame Pashinyan for Armenia’s defeat in the six-week war and want him to hand over power to an interim government that would hold snap parliamentary elections within a year. The prime minister has rejected the opposition demands.

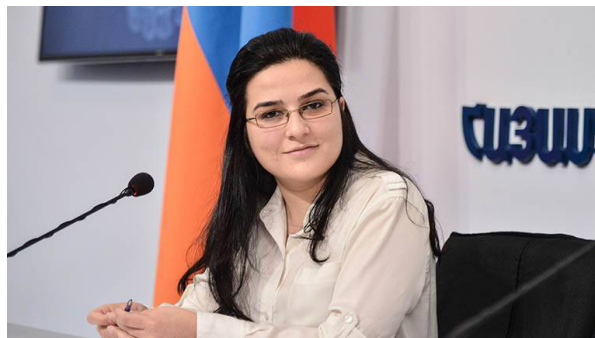
The status of Artsakh should be determined as a result of a peace process – Armenian MFA Spox

The November 9 statement does not impose any restrictions on relations between Armenia and Artsakh at different levels, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Anna Naghdalyan told Interfax.

The comments come after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan issued a statement stating that the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia to Artsakh is a violation of the commitments undertaken by the November 9 statement.

“The November 9 trilateral statement aimed at establishing a ceasefire and deploying Russian peacekeepers in Artsakh does not indicate any agreement on Artsakh’s status. And from that point of view, all the claims that changes have taken place in the status of Artsakh do not correspond to reality,” Naghdalyan said.

The status of Artsakh should be determined as a result of a peace process, based on the principles proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, the right of peoples to self-determination, she added.



Assessing the implementation of the trilateral agreement by Azerbaijan, the Spokesperson said: “The November 9 statement stopped large-scale hostilities, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed in Artsakh. At the same time, the Azerbaijani side has violated and continues to violate a number of key provisions of the trilateral statement.”

Thus, she added, according to the first point of the trilateral statement, the parties must stop on their positions occupied as of November 10 and end the hostilities.

“Meanwhile, more than a month after the ceasefire was established, the Azer-

baijani side carried out military operations in the direction of Hin Tagher and Khtsaber settlements in Artsakh’s Hadrut region, causing human losses and capturing Armenian servicemen on the spot. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to that gross violation of the statement in its December 13 statement,” the Spokesperson said.

“To date, the Azerbaijani side has not fully complied with Article 8 of the trilateral statement, according to which prisoners of war, hostages and other detainees should be exchanged. As a result, Armenian prisoners of war and hostages are not released. Moreover, the Azerbaijani side is prosecuting Armenian prisoners of war, presenting them as terrorists at the highest level, trying to prevent the full implementation of the November 9 trilateral statement,” she added.

The Spokesperson added that cessation of violations of the November 9 statement by Azerbaijan is necessary for its full implementation.

Putin, Macron discuss upcoming trilateral meeting of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian leaders

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke on the phone with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, the parties discussed issues related to the meeting of Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, which will be held in Moscow on January 11, Kremlin said.

“Taking into account the consistent implementation of the joint Statement of November 9, 2020 and the stabilization of the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh, it was noted that, first of all, at this



meeting it is meant to consider further steps to establish a peaceful life in the region,” the Kremlin said.

The French President supported Russia’s efforts to promote the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement.

“The emphasis was placed on the importance of urgent humanitarian assistance to the population affected by the clashes, including through specialized international organizations,” the press service said.

There is no mention of “Nakhijevan corridor” in the trilateral statement – PM’s Spokesperson

There is no mention of a corridor connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhijevan in the November 10 statement, Prime Minister’s Spokesperson Mane Gevorgyan told Arəmenpress.

The comments come in the wake of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s statement about “Nakhijevan corridor,” claiming that it would open soon, citing the November 10 joint statement of the Prime Minister of Armenia, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia.

“Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly drawn the attention to the fact that there is no talk about a corridor connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhijevan in the November 10 statement. Point 9 of the statement is about unblocking the transportation and economic infrastructure of the region and in this context about establishing a transport connection between the eastern part of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic,” the Spokesperson said.



“Armenia, of course, is interested in the possibility of transporting Armenian cargoes through the territory of Azerbaijan to Russia and Iran and the opposite direction. We are interested in the possibility of the transfer of the Armenian cargo through road and rail transportation to Russia, and to Iran especially through railway transportation. In this context Armenia, naturally, is ready to ensure communication between the Eastern part of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic,” she added.

However, she said, the discussion of all these issues would be difficult without the complete fulfillment of point 8 of the November 10 joint statement which en-

visages exchange of captives, hostages, other detained persons and the bodies of the dead. The Armenian side also attaches importance to expanding the scale of ongoing search-rescue operations in the battle zones. The recent statements made by Azerbaijan on this topic are puzzling and question Baku’s commitment to implement the agreements of the November 10 statement. There are still Armenian captives in Baku, there are numerous evidences on ill treatment shown against the Armenian POWs. There is evidence on executions of the captives, and all these evidences must be investigated in detail, including in the international platforms.

“At the same time, the anti-Armenian propaganda of the past decade still continues in Azerbaijan. In order to establish stability and peace in the region, it is necessary to put an end to the provocative actions and statements,” Mane Gevorgyan concluded.

Armenia, Artsakh FMs stress the need for immediate withdrawal of terrorist fighters from Karabakh conflict zone

On a working visit to Artsakh, Armenia’s Foreign Minister Ara Aivazyan had a meeting with Artsakh’s Foreign Minister Davit Babayan.

During the meeting the foreign ministers discussed the situation in Artsakh and the conflict zone created as a result of the September 27 armed aggression of Azerbaijan with the support of Turkey and the involvement of foreign terrorist fighters as well as diplomatic means to overcome it.

In this context, David Babayan noted that international recognition of the Republic of Artsakh, expansion of its international cooperation and peaceful, political settlement of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship based on the recognition of Artsakh people’s right to self-determination remained a priority for the foreign policy of the Republic of Artsakh.

David Babayan also stressed the need to



end the military occupation of a large part of Artsakh’s territory by the Azerbaijani armed forces, to restore the territorial integrity of the republic, and to create conditions for the return of the displaced population of Artsakh to their homes.

The ministers also exchanged views on the measures taken to overcome the humanitarian crisis created by the Azerbaijani-Turkish aggression and noted the need for the involvement of specialized international organizations to ensure comprehensive solutions. In this context, the interlocutors emphasized the need to recover

the bodies from the territories under the control of Azerbaijan, and the early release of prisoners of war and hostages without preconditions, which is a requirement of international humanitarian law and stems from the obligations assumed by the Azerbaijani side in the statement signed on November 9.

The need for the immediate withdrawal of foreign terrorist fighters from the conflict zone was also emphasized.

During the meeting, the foreign ministers signed a plan of consultations for 2021 between the Foreign Ministries of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh.

Further, the meeting continued in an expanded format with the participation of the senior staff of the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Artsakh, during which a wide range of issues related to the interaction of the relevant departments of the two ministries was discussed.

Parts of Syunik's Shurnukh Village Surrendered to Azerbaijan

The surrender of key parts of Armenia's Syunik Province to Azerbaijan continued on January 5 with the hand over of parts of the Shurnukh Village, with locals reporting that they came face to face with Azerbaijani soldiers as early as Sunday, days before the January 5 deadline for residents to evacuate.

This is the latest concession of Armenian territories to Azerbaijan since the signing of the November 9 agreement that while ending the military hostilities in Karabakh, it forced the surrender of lands in Armenia and Artsakh.

Late Monday night local time, residents living in 11 houses in Shurnukh left their homes and moved elsewhere and according to the mayor of Shurnukh negotiations were underway to determine where the troops would be stationed.

The administrative head of Shurnukh Hagop Arshakyan stated this in a conversation with "Tert.am"

"There are 11 families, the 12th house was on the side of the road, and the residents of that house also left," Shurnukh mayor Hagop Arshakyan told Tert.am. "They left the beehives and took what they could. Now the Azerbaijanis are moving in and raising their flag. My house is also left



in the part handed over to Azerbaijan. Our family settled in the village administration building, while others moved into vacant houses of the village, some moved to Goris, Kapan and Yerevan."

"Now a highway divides the Armenian and Azerbaijani borders. Nothing is known now. As a result of today's talks, it will probably be clarified who will stand where and what will happen," Arshakyan said.

The now familiar scenes of Armenians burning their houses and belongings became the order of the day on Monday, with Arshakyan having to apologize to his fellow villages for this unfathomable predicament.

"Today I am burning the house I defended with my own hands and I am doing the right thing," Shurnukh resident Ararat Aghabekyan wrote on his Facebook page.

"This is temporary. I will place the stones again. Let them uproot it. I will build my house with the same stone again. I will take your pain, everyone should do the same, I will prove that the people of Syunik remain in Syunik," said Aghabekyan.

"I set my house on fire. My children ran around in this house and now I am completely destroying it. I will build it from scratch in a new place. It was a matter of my honor to prevent a Turk [Azeri] from writing a word in Turkish on the wall of my house," added Aghabekyan.

"The Azerbaijanis gave us until January 5 to leave and transfer the lands to them and said anyone, including animals passing through that territory after January 5 will be theirs," the Shurnukh Mayor Arshakyan said on Sunday.

The leader of the village added that he had shown the map of the USSR showing Shurnukh as an Armenian village to a Russian army general and peacekeepers.

"We were told that it's not up to them and that the decision has already been made. Now the villagers and I are trying to find documents from the archives in order to retrieve our lands," Arshakyan told News.am on Sunday.

Turkey arrests two ex-civil servants over Hrant Dink murder

An Istanbul court on January 6 ordered that two former intelligence officers be remanded in custody over the 2007 killing of prominent Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, Turkish media report.

Heavy Penal Court no.14 in Istanbul issued interlocutory order and found former civil servants Volkan Sahin and Veysal Sahin guilty of knowing the murder of Hrant Dink beforehand.

Dink, then editor-in-chief of the Arme-



nian-Turkish newspaper Agos, was killed outside his office on Jan. 19, 2007.

Dink, 52, frequently spoke out on the

Armenian genocide and Armenian rights in Turkey, and he was prosecuted a number of times for "denigrating Turkey" and "insulting Turkish identity."

A 17-year-old unemployed youth, Ogun Samast, confessed to the murder and was sentenced to almost 23 years in jail in 2011.

An investigation into the killing revealed that security forces had been aware of a plot to kill Dink, but failed to act.

World Bank forecasts 3.1 percent GDP growth in Armenia in 2021

The World Bank forecasts a 3.1 percent GDP growth in Armenia in 2021 and expects it to raise to 4.5 percent in 2022.

“Growth in the South Caucasus is projected to rise to 2.5 percent in 2021, as the shocks related to the pandemic and conflict dissipate, and as tourism recovers alongside improving consumer and business confidence,” WB said in a new report on Global Economic Prospects.

The World Bank believes the peace statement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is expected to help alleviate geopolitical tensions in the region.

Economic activity in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) is estimated to have con-



tracted 2.9 percent in 2020 in the wake of disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is expected to erase at least five years of per capita income gains in about a fifth of the region's economies and raise the poverty headcount.

Economies with strong trade or financial linkages to the euro area and those

heavily dependent on services and tourism have been hardest hit.

Due to a resurgence of COVID-19, the pace of recovery in 2021 is projected to be slower than originally anticipated, at 3.3 percent.

Growth is then expected to rise to 3.9 percent in 2022, as the effects of the pandemic gradually wane and the recovery in trade and investment gathers momentum.

The outlook remains highly uncertain, however, and growth could be weaker than envisioned if the pandemic takes longer than expected to fade, external financing conditions tighten, or geopolitical tensions escalate again.

Russia Allocates \$12 Million For Karabakh Refugees



Russia has allocated 10 million euros (\$12.2 million) in financial assistance to thousands of ethnic Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh who fled to Armenia during the recent war.

The office of Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan reported this week that the sum will co-finance the Armenian government's ongoing aid programs for the refugees remaining in Armenia nearly two months after Moscow brokered an Armenian-Azerbaijani agreement to stop the war.

The government has helped the refugees both during and after the six-week hostilities that displaced the majority of

Karabakh's population. According to Grigoryan's office, the government has spent about 15 billion drams (\$29 million) for that purpose since November 16.

The aid has included compensations of between 250,000 and 300,000 drams (\$480-580) paid to those Karabakh families whose homes were destroyed by shelling or who lived in areas occupied by Azerbaijani forces. On December 17, the government also decided to create temporary jobs for refugees, finance paid internships for them and pay monthly benefits to families in Armenia hosting them.

According to Artsakh officials, at least 90,000 civilians making up around 60 percent of Artsakh's population fled their homes during the war that broke out on September 27. Most of them took refuge in

Armenia. At least 47,000 Karabakh Armenians have reportedly returned home since the November 10 truce.

Later in November, the Russian government opened in Stepanakert a "center for humanitarian reaction." The center coordinates ongoing Russian-led demining operations in Artsakh and is also tasked with helping to rebuild homes and public infrastructure destroyed or seriously damaged during the hostilities.

Russia's Ministry of Civil Defense and Emergencies says that it has sent more than 1,500 tons of construction materials, household appliances and other relief supplies to Artsakh so far.



Tehran says Armenia's market a new opportunity for Iranian producers

Armenia's market is a new opportunity for Iranian producers, says Ali Shariati, board member of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Teheran Times reports.

Iran now has the advantage of exporting goods such as sweets and chocolates, ceramic tiles, detergents, shoes, flooring and carpets and textile and clothing to Armenia, in addition to the previously traded items, he told ILNA on Tuesday.



"We may not have been able to make good use of regional agreements in the past, but this is an opportunity for us to enter the Armenian market with full force," Ali Shariati said.

riati said.

Armenia has imposed a six-month ban on Turkish products and is planning to replace 2,250 Turkish commodity items with Iran-made products, Director-General of the Asia-Pacific Department of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mojtaba Mousavian said last week.

Iranian producers are now presented with a great opportunity to showcase the quality of their products and benefit from the huge capacities of the market.

Iranian army holds first-ever drone drill



and tested as part of a two-day event held in the northern province of Semnan.

According to Mahmoud Mousavi, deputy chief of army operations, the drill included aerial targeting and destruction of objectives using air-to-air missiles, hitting land targets using bombs and missiles, and employing loitering munitions –

Iran's military on January 5 kicked off its first-ever drill for locally made unmanned aerial vehicles, IRNA reports.

Hundreds of drones were showcased

also known as "kamikaze drones."

"Flying the army's naval force drones

over vessels in the country's southern waters and flying precision loitering munition to destroy long-distance high-value targets deep in enemy territory will be among other drill objectives," he said.

Announcing the drill, a day earlier, deputy chief of the Iranian army, Brigadier General Mohammad Hossein Dadras, said Iran has managed to produce a variety of unnamed aerial vehicles despite United States sanctions.

"Army forces will prove they are ready to respond to any threats," he said.

Fifth plane with humanitarian aid from France arrives in Yerevan

On January 5th the 5th plane carrying humanitarian aid arrived from France to Armenia, Aznavour Foundation informs.

The Aznavour Foundation expresses gratitude to all the involved organizations, parties and individuals that took part in collecting and transferring it.

Once the aid arrives at the Aznavour Center, the team will start



its distribution between organizations that

work with the affected population of Artsakh.

This plane was initiated by Youri and Denis Djorkaeffs and provided by the French Government. Youri Djorkaeff together with the group of doctors from France came to Armenia to continue the humanitarian mission and support Armenians affected by the war in Artsakh.

Turkish Generals Led War on Artsakh: This was a Turkish, not Azeri, Victory

By Harut Sassounian

Exiled Turkish journalist Cevheri Guven disclosed in a video report the names and activities of three Turkish Generals who had a decisive role in leading Azerbaijan's war on Artsakh, starting on Sept. 27 2020. It is already known that modern drones and missiles purchased by Azerbaijan from Israel, Turkey and Russia had a devastating effect on Armenia and Artsakh. It is also known that 200 Turkish military advisors and several thousand Syrian mercenaries participated in the war on behalf of Azerbaijan. However, this is the first time that a detailed report is made public about the presence of these Turkish Generals in Azerbaijan during the war.

One of the Turkish military leaders is Lieutenant General Sheref Ongay. The second is Major General Bahtiyar Ersay, and the third is Major General Goksel Kahya. The presence of these Turkish Generals in Baku is linked to the dismissal before the Artsakh War of Colonel General Nejmeddin Sadikov, Azerbaijan's First Deputy Minister of Defense and Chief of General Staff who had been at his post for 27 years. He was accused of treason and cooperation with the Russian military intelligence, according to Russian and dissident Azeri sources. Sadikov was reportedly arrested after his dismissal which was denied by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense. However, he has not been seen in public since his dismissal. Sadikov was reportedly born in Derbent, Dagestan, and is of Lezgin origin. He has a poor knowledge of the Azerbaijani language. It is also alleged that his cousin is serving in the Russian Army in Gumri, Armenia.

Sadikov was educated in Russia. It is important to note that a large number of Azeri soldiers were sent to Turkey to get their military education. Sadikov did not allow those returning from Turkey to serve in critical military positions. He was op-



Turkish forces stationed in Azerbaijan (Kommersant Photo)

posed to Turkish dominance in the leadership of the Azerbaijan's Armed Forces. As a result, Turkey asked for Sadikov's dismissal after which those trained in Turkey were given leading posts.

Returning to the three Turkish Generals, Sheref Ongay is the Commander of the Turkish Third Army, deployed in Erzingan. He was in control of the Artsakh War. Ongay graduated from the military academy in Ankara in 1982 and served in various units of the ground forces. In 2014, he was appointed Commander of the 9th Army Corps. He was for a while the head of the infantry school in Tuzla.

The second Turkish military leader in Azerbaijan, Major General Bahtiyar Ersay, was earlier jailed for being involved in a scandal (Operation Sledgehammer). However, he was pardoned and released, possibly because he made a plea bargain with the authorities, disclosing the names of the other participants in the conspiracy. He was subsequently promoted to the rank of Brigadier General becoming in charge of the 2nd Commando Brigade which fought with great brutality against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Eastern Turkey. He is now the Chief of Operations at the Command of Turkish Land Forces. He stayed in Baku throughout the Artsakh War and personally managed the operations. Before the start of the war, two satellite communication centers were built in Baku and at the military airport of Gabala to contact the soldiers on the ground and the headquarters in Turkey. Both centers were managed

exclusively by the Turkish Army. The Azerbaijani military was ordered to obey all commands of the Turkish superiors and not argue with or contradict them. Ersay was in charge of the Syrian mercenaries who had earlier fought in Syria and Libya on behalf of Turkey. Furthermore, Ersay managed the highly technical military equipment provided by Turkey to Azerbaijan.

The third Turkish military man is Major General Goksel Kahya who was in Azerbaijan since July of this year. He is close to the Defense Minister of Turkey. Previously, he was Deputy Undersecretary in the Ministry of Defense. While taking part in the war in Libya on behalf of Turkey, he was captured by the opposition Libyan forces and then released. Kahya was in charge of the Turkish drones operating in Libya which gave him valuable experience in managing the drone war against Artsakh.

Since the end of the Artsakh War, the Azeri public has expressed its unhappiness that Russian peacekeepers are located on the territory of Karabakh. Some analysts have described the Russian presence in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia as a defeat for Turkey and the United States, and a victory for Russia, having located its forces "under the nose of NATO member Turkey." As Russian online newspaper Vzglyad concluded: Artsakh War's "plan was Turkish, the Generals were Turkish, and the drones were made in Turkey.... Baku can celebrate victory, but in terms of command and control, Turkish Generals can celebrate victory."

Retired Lieutenant Colonel of the Azerbaijani Army Oleg Guliyev, now living in Moscow, told the Vzglyad newspaper: "Azerbaijan must fully reclaim Karabakh. This is correct and fair. But we must reclaim Karabakh ourselves. If we reclaim it on a Turkish leash, then we will reclaim only Karabakh, and we will lose the rest of our country."

Online maps show parts of Kapan Airport, where Azerbaijani forces are stationed, as Armenian territory – Ombudsman



Armenia's Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan and his staff carried out inspection of the areas of the runway and administrative building of Kapan airport, in the immediate vicinity of deployment of Azerbaijani forces.

Studies show that not only the Kapan airport, but also the traffic on Kapan-Yerevan (M2) highway and a number of residential areas in the city of Kapan are endangered, the Ombudsman said in a Facebook post.

"During the visit to Kapan's airport and a number of villages, the Google map and several other online maps showed different results. In some cases, the road from Kapan to Chakaten village, as well as the Kapan airport road, and the sections of Kapan airport where the Azerbaijani forces are stationed, were presented as part of territory of the Republic of Armenia," the Human Rights Defender said.

"Human Rights Defender's visits to

Kapan and surrounding villages show that as a result of the approaches used so far, and especially the mechanical application of Global Positioning System (GPS) or Google maps, pose a serious threat to the right to life and security of border residents, their physical or mental inviolability and other rights of vital importance guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia. The security of the Armenian state borders is endangered," the Ombudsman's Office said.

"In particular, with the mechanical application of this principle, various sections of the road from Kapan to Chakaten and other villages came under Azerbaijani control, which put the movement of civilians in real danger. At the same time, it must be taken into account that this road is absolutely necessary for the security of the villages of Chakaten, Shikahogh, Srashen, Nerkin Hand, Tsav and the vital rights of the inhabitants," the Office said.



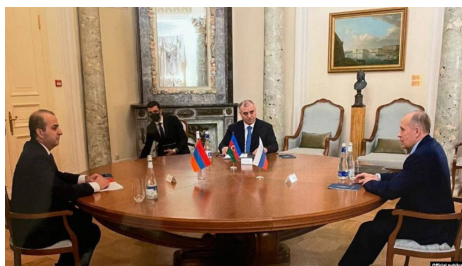
Armenian, Azeri security chiefs meet again

The heads of Armenia's and Azerbaijan's main security services met again on January 9 to discuss the implementation of the Russian-brokered agreement to stop the war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In a short statement, Armenia's National Security Service (NSS) said the meeting took place in no-man's-land at a section of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border about 70 kilometers south of Yerevan.

The statement said NSS Director Armen Abazyan and the chief of Azerbaijan's State Security Service, Ali Nagiyev, discussed "the exchange of prisoners and the search for missing persons." "Contacts on these topics are continuing," it added without elaborating.

Abazyan and Nagiyev already discussed these issues late last month at a meeting in



Moscow hosted by Alexander Bortnikov, the head of Russia's Federal Security Service. The NSS said afterwards that they reached unspecified "understandings."

The ceasefire deal brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin on November 9 calls for the exchange of all prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians held by the conflicting sides. So far 54 Armenians have been freed and returned home. Dozens of others remain in Azerbaijani captivity.

They include 62 Armenian soldiers

who were taken prisoner in early December when Azerbaijani forces seized the last two Armenian-controlled villages in Karabakh's Hadrut district occupied by them during the six-week war.

In a letter to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres publicized earlier this week, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov branded the soldiers as "saboteurs" and indicated the Azerbaijani authorities' intention to prosecute them on relevant charges.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry on Saturday condemned Baku's plans as a gross violation of international law and the Karabakh truce agreement. It accused the Azerbaijani side of "using Armenian prisoners of war as hostages to advance its political agenda."

“The Origins of the 44-Day War,” an article authored by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

04.01.2021

The larger part of our society is probably asking the following question: why did the 44-day war break out and why it was impossible to avoid it? The most direct answer to this question can be formulated as follows: the time had come when some developments were to take place in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. What is this statement based on?

Over the past ten years there have been several key milestones in the negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The first was the Kazan process, which envisaged that territories were to be handed over to Azerbaijan according to the 5+2 formula, Artsakh was to be given an interim status, and the final status was to be determined through a referendum after the return of refugees.

However, something unpredictable happened: On June 24, 2011, Ilham Aliyev refused to sign the Kazan document, which caused bewilderment to Serzh Sargsyan, who in an interview with the Rossiya TV channel on November 17, 2017 stated that Armenia was ready to transfer 7 regions to Azerbaijan, but Azerbaijan wanted more... It appears that Armenia was ready to transfer 7 regions in 2011, but Azerbaijan wanted more. What could be more? Without signing the Kazan document, Ilham Aliyev answered this question: first of all, the status of Karabakh, that is, ruling out any status of Karabakh outside of Azerbaijan. This was back in 2011. After that, Azerbaijan's appetite was fueled even more, as evidenced by the unprecedented escalation of the situation on the contact line and on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border since 2013.

Tensions on the border increased in 2014 and 2015, and this occurred in a “favorable” geopolitical environment. Relations between Russia and the West were strained due to developments in Syria and Ukraine, and Russia found itself under sanctions. While before that the main hotspot for Russia was the South Caucasus, Crimea, Donbass and Syria became such hotspots in 2015. Russia's responsibility has been growing in all of the aforementioned regions, and no matter how much of a superpower it may be, the fact is that Russia's capabilities are not limitless.

Azerbaijan used this opportunity and declared more loudly its intentions to resolve the Karabakh conflict by military means. Under these conditions, Russia finds itself in rather a difficult situation, realizing the need to reconsider the instruments for maintaining stability in the South Caucasus. In 2013, the now well-known



Russian proposals appeared and were finalized in 2015, which provided for the return of 7 regions to Azerbaijan according to the 5 + 2 formula, the return of refugees and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers.

The package of proposals has no mention of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, it bypasses this issue. The proposals were submitted to the Armenian side in January 2016. The Armenian side rejected them, and in April 2016 the Four-Day April War broke out. A few months later, Serzh Sargsyan publicly talked about weapons made in the 80s, and a year and a half later he publicly admitted that Armenia was prepared to give up those 7 regions in 2011, but Azerbaijan wanted more.

Formally, after 2016 the negotiation process continued on the basis of the Madrid principles or their configuration, but there were Russian proposals, they existed and their presence was seen everywhere, at least in the logic that by 2018 the transfer of 7 regions had been the main, if not the only negotiated topic.

As regards the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs had already accepted the logic that this issue was subject to discussion as much as it was acceptable for Azerbaijan. The Co-Chairs resigned themselves to this idea, and the Russian proposals in fact began to be considered as the proposals of the Co-Chairs.

Turkey was adding fuel to the fire, whose arms had become longer after the failure of football diplomacy, and it considered the transfer of 7 regions to be the only prerequisite for stability in the region. Azerbaijan, in turn, continued to declare that no status of Nagorno-Karabakh outside of Azerbaijan could be discussed, and after the appearance of the Russian proposals, Azerbaijan toughened its position: no status of Nagorno-Karabakh can be discussed at this stage. Let the next generations tackle the problem. We, in fact, inherited that very situation in the negotiations over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

Surrender or not?

Familiarization with the essence and nuances of the negotiation process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in my capacity of Prime Minister led me to the following idea: the negotiation process had become a process of serious deviation from the point of signing the May 12, 1994 cease-fire document. This is a sad statement, but the Armenian side has not made any progress in the whole negotiation process, which is a long history of failures. There are several key moments in this story: firstly, it is the 1996 Lisbon summit, where it was recorded that we are alone in the world; then - the exclusion of the representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh from the negotiation process, which gradually placed the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the logic of a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan; furthermore, the establishment of such a negotiating logic, according to which the handover of 7 regions to Azerbaijan was considered the main goal of the negotiation process; further, Azerbaijan's refusal to discuss the status of Nagorno-Karabakh; and after that - the Russian proposals, the key problem of which is the exclusion of Artsakh's status from the agenda of the negotiations.

Time was the only asset the Armenian side had all the way through the 23-year-long negotiation process, which of course would have led to significant achievements if it had been used in our favor. But the April 2016 war, when it was recorded that 22 years after the Victory, the Armenian Army was fighting with weaponry dating back to the 80s, put an end to the era of stalling for time. Not because of this fact, of course, but because, in the context of a worsening international situation, Russia had had enough of those accusations that it actually was not in favor of a settlement as it dragged out the issue.

Under such conditions, we faced a simple choice, namely to fit into the logic described above and proceed to the transfer of territories, which was conventionally called “substantive negotiations,” or try to change the logic of negotiations.

Since 2018, our actions have been aimed at solving this very problem, and this process reached its climax on March 12, 2019 at a joint meeting of the Security Councils of Armenia and Artsakh in Stepanakert, where I made a keynote speech agreed with the Artsakh authorities.

The theses of that speech were as follows: the issue of Artsakh representatives' participation in the negotiation process must be on our agenda; the Madrid princi-

page 10 ➡ ples should be given a unified interpretation, because Azerbaijan interpreted them in its own way, Armenia in its own way, which made the process ineffective; the public on either side had to be prepared for peace and any solution of the Karabakh issue should be acceptable to the people of Armenia, the people of Artsakh, and the people of Azerbaijan.

The proposed agenda, however, was by no means a precondition for continuing the negotiation process, but an expression of our ideas on how to make it effective. All these points were of fundamental importance. The exclusion of Artsakh from the negotiation process and the transfer of negotiations to the Armenia-Azerbaijan plane posed a threat, first of all, to Armenia, since thereby Azerbaijan could well apply the label of an occupier on Armenia. Moreover, this format itself distorted the essence of the Karabakh issue, placing it in the logic of a territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

This was Armenia's biggest and most catastrophic diplomatic mistake in the second half of the 1990s, which, incidentally, could have been avoided. At that time, yes, Armenia could refuse to negotiate without Karabakh, because Azerbaijan was not ready for war, had not recovered from the shock of defeat, and even the suspension of the negotiation process could not pose a serious threat to Armenia and Artsakh.

By driving out Nagorno-Karabakh's representatives from the negotiation process, we did not even realize that we were reducing the chances of self-determination of Artsakh due to the fact that the self-determination of an "occupied territory" is nonsense a priori. This was also the reason why in the first half of the 2000s the negotiations culminated in the concept of "exchange of territories," for example, Meghri in exchange for Karabakh...

No less important was the clarification of the Madrid principles. True, after the rejection of the Kazan format, Azerbaijan derailed the Madrid Principles but formally they still existed. Azerbaijan interpreted that the Madrid Principles implied that the Armenians of Artsakh could only self-determine within Azerbaijan. Armenia argued the opposite, which meant that the Madrid Principles were not a formula for solving the issue, but something incomprehensible. And then, in terms of public discourse, I put forward quite a constructive formula, publicly insisting that any solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must also be acceptable to the people of Azerbaijan. The aim of all this was to take the negotiation process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict out of the primitive logic of transferring territory. But there was a failure, because

it turned out that the train of 2016 could not be stopped. Many now say that the train could have been stopped by pro-Russian steps and pro-Russian policies, and supposedly our government did exactly the opposite. However, the reality is completely different, and those who say so do not notice such a turning point as the decision made by the Armenian government in 2019 to send field engineers and doctors to Syria.

Presumption of Reasonableness

It is, of course, a matter of principle how reasonable it is to try to oppose a "moving" and gaining speed "train." What was counterintuitive? Nasty would have been the surrender of territories in return for essentially nothing. Now, of course, in hindsight we can say that it would have been better than what we have now, at least we would have saved thousands of lives. But this is in retrospect.

In retrospect, we can say that the same could have been done in 1997, 2004, 2011, and finally in 2016. Yes, it could be done in 2020 as well. However, with what arguments would we convince ourselves? That we were going to lose the war? There was such an argument, indeed, but the July battles of 2020 influenced the assessment of the situation. True, the scale of hostilities was very small as compared to the war that followed: Azerbaijan's elite units, Israeli drones were used in the July warfare. Nevertheless, we did not have a single loss on the battlefield. Instead, we had losses in the rear. The July battles, of course, played a negative role in the sense that Azerbaijan, realizing that it could not succeed militarily on its own, decided to involve Turkey and Syrian mercenaries. That was the decisive moment when we had to decide on unilateral concessions. Even before the July events, Azerbaijan's ever-hardening rhetoric left no other option.

By the way, Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian propaganda is the only factor that has existed over the past 15 years. Hatred of Armenians, unconditional recognition of Karabakh as Azerbaijan's territory, incessant propaganda about resolving the issue by force had reached their climax by that time. Even against that backdrop, the negotiation process continued as far as the pandemic allowed. Our foreign minister was in close touch with the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. But, in fact, Azerbaijan did not enter into negotiations, clearly showing that its purpose in the negotiations was the transfer of territories without preconditions.

If we had said we agreed, of course war would have been averted. We could have stopped the war under such conditions as I stated on the first day of the war at a special meeting of the National Assembly as we declared martial law. But this option was

not only unacceptable to me, but in those days I did not hear a single opinion that it should have been done.

Of course, there is a well-known counterargument to this: others, the public did not or could not have the information that the Prime Minister had, and, therefore, the Prime Minister had to make a decision based on the information he had. This is a correct argument, and the information that I had was that de-escalation of the situation or ending the war was impossible without catastrophic consequences for Artsakh and Armenia. And therefore, the decision was made to fight against such disastrous consequences. Maybe, the result is as much disastrous. However, now we can talk about the scale of that catastrophe only theoretically. Now we do not know what that other catastrophe would have been in practice, just as we did not know the practical parameters of this catastrophe back then. We only know that according to all possible scenarios there would definitely have been "lives" by the head of Shurnukh community, because the Kubatly region would be handed over to Azerbaijan according to all the scenarios described above, similarly there would be a border dispute over 20 houses in Shurnukh and Vorotan. But now we know that we fought for every inch of land before we reached the borders of Shurnukh.

Would we fight according to the scenario of a peaceful transfer? This means that the war should have started not at the approach to Horadiz, but at the approach to Shurnukh. According to this scenario, the war on the outskirts of Shurnukh is at least over, although now some are sparing no effort, doing everything possible and impossible for the war to start again on the outskirts of Shurnukh.

I know that this part of the article will give a fairly plausible argument in favor of the fact that in the case of a peaceful transfer of land through negotiations, our position in the negotiations would be much stronger, because we would act from the position of a winner and could get more. Well, we could have done so earlier, when Azerbaijan was much weaker in military terms. We had a winning position, but we have never used that winning position in the entire history of the negotiation process to ensure any concrete result.

There are other well-known "counter-arguments" to the logic of the above part of the article. Some claim that they knew the scenario of successful continuation of negotiations and were going to implement this scenario in 2018 and beyond. This is the apogee of cynicism altogether. That is, Russia and the other Co-Chairs would refuse the plan proposed by them and the co-chairs would

page 11 ➡ agree to recognize the independence of Karabakh, contrary to the position of Azerbaijan?

Again, if you could implement such a victorious plan, then you would implement it in Kazan? If you could implement such a victorious plan, then why did you not avert the Russian plan? If you could prevent the war, you should have prevented the war in April 2016, or would have implemented your plan for victorious negotiations before the 2018 revolution.

You may argue that you would have surrendered 5 regions, leaving two regions to tie in with the status of Nagorno-Karabakh? That is a logical argument. But why did Azerbaijan have to agree in 2018 or 2020 to what it categorically did not agree to in 2011, when in Kazan it refused to sign the document agreed at the level of the Foreign Ministers? Let me remind you that at that time Azerbaijan was less prepared for war.

Another sensational accusation has ap-

peared of late; it says that with my statements I deprived Azerbaijan of all hope of achieving a result through negotiations, which made war inevitable. Please look at it more carefully. It turns out that the whole meaning and purpose of the negotiation process that people have been conducting for 20 years was to give Azerbaijan hope that it could achieve through negotiations what it wanted to achieve through war. This is what I am saying. I say that the purpose of the negotiations over the course of 20 years was to instill hope in Azerbaijan's authorities, and in fact, I was the one to disappoint Azerbaijan against the background of said hopes. After all, which way and when would the strategy of instilling hope in Azerbaijan come to an end?

We instilled hopes in Azerbaijan, while it used to buy weapons and simultaneously recorded in various instances the "international discourse" on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the

framework of its territorial integrity.

Conclusion

In fact, this part of the story treats of the reasons and factors behind the 44-day war. But, of course, it is also important to talk about the course of the war, the chances of victory and the reasons for the defeat, the signing of the statement of November 9, post-war events and, most importantly, the future of Armenia and Artsakh.

I will touch on these topics as needed. If it turns out that an article is still an acceptable genre for our society, perhaps I will do so in the form of articles. Time will tell.

I also realize that this article may be frustrating for anyone who is tired of discussing the past and wants to see the future. But conversations like this about the recent and not-so-close past are important to start an in-depth discussion about the future.

Nikol Pashinyan
Prime Minister of the
Republic of Armenia

Youri Djorkaeff spends Christmas day with Artsakh kids



Goodwill Ambassador for Armenia, world-famous French-Armenian football player Youri Djorkaeff, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports



Karen Giloyan and Chief Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Zareh Sinanyan hosted a group of children from Artsakh at SoftConstruct company on January 6.

The children had an interesting time and received tablets as a gift to make their distance learning more effective.

The former France international, Word and European Champion talked to children about the importance of education, em-

phasizing that it is the most powerful weapon, and noting that an educated society is the guarantee of a strong state.

The employees of SoftConstruct company presented a number of innovative IT solutions to the children. At the same time an agreement was reached to support those interested in IT technologies in choosing a profession.



I think of the Armenians of Artsakh on Christmas – French MP Valerie Boyer

On this Armenian Christmas Day I think of the Armenians of Artsakh -victims of a new genocide, French MP Valerie Boyer said in a Twitter post.

"I am thinking of Father Hovhannès

Hovhannissyan and of the Dadivank Monastery. I think of this threatened heritage. I think of these massacres of Christians. Let's not forget them, denounce and fight," the lawmaker said.



ANCA Welcomes Menendez as Chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee



ANCA Chairman Raffi Hamparian meeting with incoming Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) regarding a broad range of Armenian American community priorities including U.S. aid to Artsakh, stronger ties with Armenia, and federal Armenian Genocide policy.

ANC of New Jersey has Three-Decade Record of Supporting State's Senior Senator

WASHINGTON—The rise of Senator Robert Menendez to the chairmanship of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee was welcomed Thursday by the Armenian National Committee of America, which has worked closely with him, locally and nationally, since he was first elected to the U.S. Congress nearly thirty years ago.

“The ANCA is proud of our strong, enduring, and principled working relationship with Senator Menendez,” remarked ANCA Chairman Raffi Hamparian. “We are confident that as Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee he will be a strong supporter for both Armenia and Artsakh.”

“As a resident of New Jersey, I am so proud that Senator Menendez has risen to become the leader of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee,” shared ANCA Board member Ani Tchaghlasian. “For decades, the ANC of New Jersey could count on Congressman and later Senator Menendez to go to bat for our cause. I am confident that the same will be true as he chairs this powerful committee,” added Tchaghlasian.

The ANC of New Jersey has worked with Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) for decades on shared policy concerns. Incoming Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) is seen here with ANCA supporters and leaders Hovig Koushagian, Karine Shnorhokian, ANCA Board Member Ani Tchaghlasian, Kim Hekimian, Maral and James Sahagian, and ANCA Chairman Raffi Hamparian

Senator Menendez – who spearheaded

unanimous passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution, S.Res.150, in the U.S. Senate in December of 2019 – has a decades-long legislative track record of leading pro-Armenian initiatives. He is respected across Capitol Hill for relentlessly and effectively championing policy priorities of concern to the ANCA of New Jersey and the Garden State’s vibrant Armenian American community. His Genocide resolution locked in permanent U.S. Senate recognition and remembrance of this crime against humanity, which he then leveraged to ensure that the Library of Congress properly cataloged relevant books in its collection under an Armenian Genocide subject heading.

A strong supporter of Artsakh – known for his vigorous defense of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act – Senator Menendez secured a General Accounting Office assessment of the Trump Administration’s dramatic \$120,000,000 increase in U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan, and – in the wake of Azerbaijan’s September 27,



2020 attack on Artsakh, introduced two measures, S.Res.754 and S.Res.755, scrutinizing U.S. security assistance to Turkey and Azerbaijan in light of their domestic abuses and acts of regional aggression. He has led bipartisan Senate campaigns to support U.S. aid to Artsakh and ensure continued USAID funding for the HALO Trust’s life-saving de-mining operations.

The ANCA strongly supported the bold leadership of Senator Menendez in his landmark campaigns to block two deeply flawed U.S. ambassadorial nominations – Matt Bryza to serve as U.S. Ambassador in Azerbaijan and Dick Hoagland to act as U.S. Ambassador to Armenia. Based on Bryza’s demonstrated anti-Armenian bias and Hoagland’s on-the-record denial of the Armenian Genocide, Senator Menendez led successful Senate opposition to their respective confirmations. He faced relentless

attacks for these principled stands – including hostile policy editorials from the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post.

The ANCA was joined in welcoming Senator Menendez’s chairmanship by partner organizations, In Defense of Christians (IDC) and the Hellenic American Leadership Council (HALC).

IDC’s Toufic Baaklini noted that: “Senator Menendez is a strong advocate for ancient Christian communities who are at threat of extinction in the land where Christianity began. We are incredibly grateful for his advocacy for U.S. assistance to the Lebanese people as well as his calls for accountability against Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey for state-sponsored Christian persecution. We are thrilled he will serve as Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and extend our warmest congratulations to him.”

Endy Zemenides of HALC commented that: “Senator Menendez’s chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will greatly advance efforts to restore American leadership in this chaotic world. Bob Menendez is as principled, creative, and effective as any figure in American foreign policy. We very much look forward to working with the new chairman.”

Senator Menendez has consistently received A+ grades from the ANCA. His outstanding track record of support on key Armenian American community concerns began with his election as mayor of Union City in 1986, continued through his time in the New Jersey state legislature from 1988 to 1992, and flourished on a national scale following his 1992 election to the U.S. House of Representatives. As a member of the House International Relations Committee, then-Congressman Menendez voted in favor of the Armenian Genocide Resolution in 2000 and 2005, setting the stage for future House consideration of the measure. During his years in the U.S. House, he is best remembered for his leadership in maintaining Section 907 restrictions on U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan in 1997.

He continued to elevate Armenian American priorities when he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2006. Whether scrutinizing U.S. ambassadorial nominees to Turkey and Azerbaijan regarding their positions on the Armenian Genocide or mediating a lasting peace for the Republic of Artsakh, Senator Menendez has been a stalwart leader on Armenian American concerns.

Facebook extending block on Trump's account indefinitely – Zuckerberg

Facebook is extending the block it has placed on US President Donald Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts indefinitely and for at least the next two weeks until the peaceful transition of power is complete, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in a statement.

"We believe the risks of allowing the President to continue to use our service during this period are simply too great," Zuckerberg said.



"Over the last several years, we have allowed President Trump to use our platform consistent with our own rules, at times re-

moving content or labeling his posts when they violate our policies. We did this because we believe that the public has a right to the broadest possible access to political speech, even controversial speech," the Facebook boss said.

He added, however, that the current context is fundamentally different, involving use of the platform to incite violent insurrection against a democratically elected government.

Elon Musk becomes world's richest person as wealth tops \$185bn



Elon Musk has become the world's richest person, as his net worth crossed \$185bn, the BBC reports.

The Tesla and SpaceX entrepreneur was pushed into the top slot after Tesla's share price increased on Thursday.

He takes the top spot from Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who had held it since

2017.

Mr Musk's electric car company Tesla has surged in value this year, and hit a market value of \$700bn (£516bn) for the first time on Wednesday.

That makes the car company worth more than Toyota, Volkswagen, Hyundai, GM and Ford combined.

IDC call on members of Congress to quit Turkey Caucus, cites Ankara's role in offensive against Artsakh

In Defense of Christians (IDC), the US's leading advocacy organization for Christians and religious minorities in Africa and the Middle East, calls on Members of Congress to resign from the U.S.-Turkey Caucus. IDC also calls on newly elected officials to decline invitations to join the caucus.

IDC says 2020 witnessed a series of antagonistic policies directed both towards Middle Eastern Christians and the United States by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Republic of Turkey. In December, Turkey was sanctioned for its purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system.

It adds that Turkey and Turkish backed militias also attacked historic Christian communities in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), Iraq, and Syria. Domestically, Erdoğan also mandated the erasure of Christian historic sites from Anatolia by calling for the conversion of the Hagia Sophia, once Christianity's

largest cathedral, and the Chora Church into mosques.

"Turkey's reckless foreign policy clearly runs counter to U.S. interests in the Eastern Mediterranean," said IDC President Toufic Baaklini. "It's outright

persecution of Christians can no longer be ignored. It is time for our elected officials to send an unmistakable message to the Turkish Embassy that they will not allow their names and headshots to be exploited to promote Erdoğan's reckless leadership."



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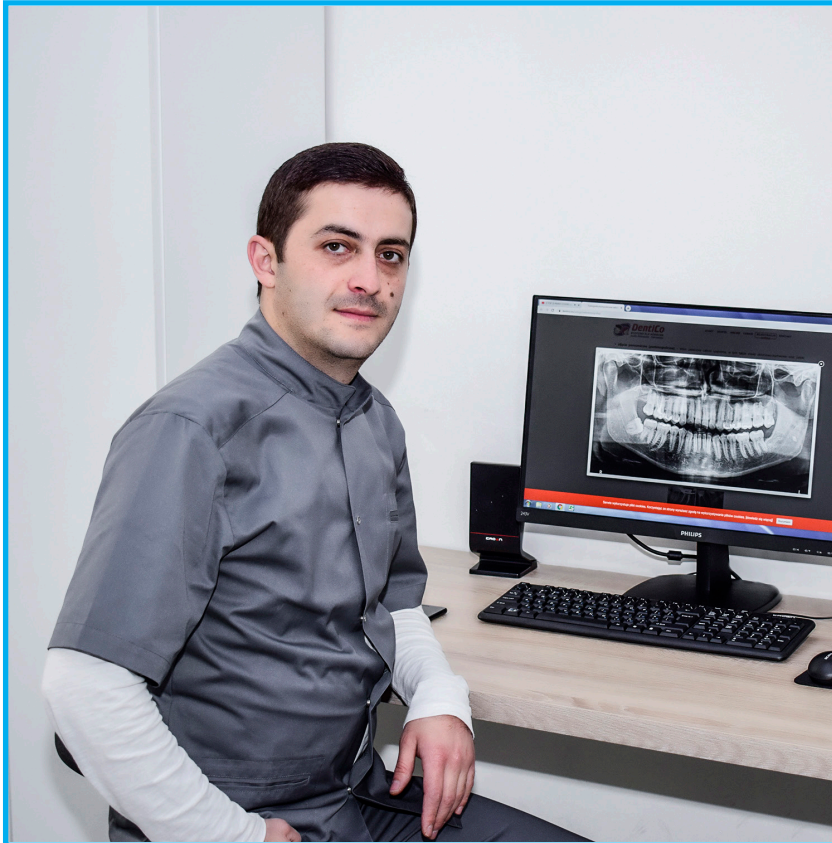
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