

Council of Europe pledges support to Armenia's democratic development



France -- Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland (R) and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at a joint news conference in Strasbourg, April 11, 2019.

The Council of Europe secretary general, Thorbjorn Jagland, praised last year's "democratic transition" in Armenia and a "reform agenda" adopted by the country's new government after meeting with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Strasbourg on April 11.

"I would like to commend the prime minister for the fact that he and his government are moving forward rapidly with reforms, particularly in the judiciary," Jagland told a joint news briefing with Pashinyan.

"I can reassure you that we will continue to be an important partner," he said. "It is absolutely clear that Armenia is a European country rooted in European history and European values."

Jagland also stressed the importance of opposition parties and media for Armenia's democratization. "That is also the only way to combat corruption because if we don't have checks and balances by a parliament, an independent judiciary, and independent news media, then we always get corrupt," he said.

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Nikol Pashinyan visits Council of Europe: PM meets with PACE President Liliane Maury Pasquier

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan arrived in Strasbourg late on April 10. On April 11, the Prime Minister's working visit to the Council of Europe started.

Nikol Pashinyan first met with PACE President Liliane Maury Pasquier. Before the meeting, Prime Minister Pashinyan signed the Golden Book of the PACE President.

The PACE President welcomed the Prime Minister's visit to the Council of Europe, noting that she was glad to meet with Nikol Pashinyan again, this time in Strasbourg. She expressed satisfaction with her visit to Armenia at the end of March, during which she held fruitful meetings and discussions with Armenia's leadership, made a speech in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia and attended the opening of Europe Square in Yerevan.

Liliane Maury Pasquier noted that the RA Prime Minister's hectic visit agenda - high-level meetings with CoE officials, the Premier's speech at the PACE spring plenary session, the official opening of the Armenia's Velvet Revolution exhibition – testi-



fies to the effectiveness of CoE-Armenia cooperation and the sides' willingness to deepen it. The PACE President noted that the Council of Europe is set to cooperate with Armenia in strengthening democratic institutions, protecting human rights and enhancing the rule of law.

Thankful for the reception, the Armenian Prime Minister said he had kept warm memories of his late March meeting with the PACE President in Yerevan and was glad to see Liliane Maury Pasquier again, this time in Strasbourg. Emphasizing that Armenia is a full member of the Council of Europe and PACE, the Premier expressed satisfaction with the ongoing

cooperation with the Council of Europe, the high level of which was reflected in the outcome of late March visits paid to our country by the PACE Co-Rapporteurs and the PACE President, as well as in the report on Armenia's democratic situation. The parties discussed the prospects of cooperation between Armenia and the Council of Europe. They referred to the steps implemented under the 2019-2022 CoE-Armenia Partnership Action Plan and prioritized the full implementation of the commitments assumed by the sides.

Nikol Pashinyan noted that the Armenian government has developed an ambitious reform agenda, and the Council of Europe's support is crucial in this respect. The PACE President welcomed the democratic changes underway in our country and reaffirmed their readiness to assist Armenia in the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

During the meeting, the parties touched upon the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process.

Nikol Pashinyan meets with Venice Commission President in Strasbourg deepening bilateral agenda

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Gianni Buquicchio, President of the Council of Europe Venice Commission (European Commission for Democracy through Law) in Strasbourg.

Welcoming Nikol Pashinyan, the President of the Venice Commission said he was pleased to meet with the Prime Minister of Armenia in Strasbourg and discuss cooperation issues.

Nikol Pashinyan and Gianni Buquicchio referred to the early parliamentary elections held in Armenia last December. The President of the Venice Commission noted that free and fair early parliamentary elections had been held in accordance with the best international standards.

Appreciating the ongoing cooperation with the Venice Commission, the Prime Minister highlighted the role played by CoE monitoring bodies, including the Venice Commission, in promoting his govern-



ment's reform program. The Premier said Armenia is pushing ahead along the path of democracy by improving its judicial system, protecting human rights and developing civil society. Democracy is an inner conviction and fundamental value for our society.

During the meeting, reference was made to the reform of the Electoral Code and the ongoing legislative improvements. The Prime Minister noted that the new government enjoys the full support of the people of Armenia and has been mandated to under-

take ambitious and serious reforms in all areas of political and social life.

Nikol Pashinyan reaffirmed Armenia's commitment to European values, stressing that his government will do everything possible to strengthen democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, build an independent judiciary, fight against corruption and conduct free, fair and transparent elections in the country. In this regard, Prime Minister Pashinyan stressed the importance of effective cooperation with the Venice Commission and personally with Mr. Buquicchio.

The President of the Venice Commission hailed the Armenian government's reform program, including the improvement of the electoral legislation. Stressing the need to institutionalize electoral processes, he assured of his readiness to assist Armenia in this process.

Arrested Businessman's Company Faces More Tax Penalties



(Yerevan – RFE/RL) - The State Revenue Committee (SRC) said on April 11 that it will likely bring more tax evasion charges against Armenia's leading food producing and exporting company whose official owner, Davit Ghazaryan, was arrested earlier this week.

The SRC chief, Davit Ananyan, also made clear that the Spayka's company's resulting financial troubles, which could adversely affect thousands of Armenian farmers, will not deter tax authorities from pressing the charges.

The SRC said last Friday that the Spayka company evaded over 7 billion drams (\$14.4 million) in taxes in 2015 and early 2016. The accusations stem from large quantities of foodstuffs which were imported to Armenia by another company, Greenproduct. The SRC claims that Greenproduct is controlled by Spayka and that the latter rigged its customs documents to pay fewer taxes from those imports.

Ghazaryan was quick to strongly deny any ownership links to Greenproduct. He said the SRC moved to arrest him after he refused to pay the alleged back taxes. The businessman was taken into custody on Monday amid street protests staged by hundreds of his employees.

Ananyan said that the SRC is now scrutinizing Spayka's operations in 2016-2018 and will likely impose fresh tax penalties on the company. "I think [the 7 billion-dram fine] will rise because we have a seemingly criminal conduct that happened during a three-and-a-half-year period and we have so far processed documents and done cal-

culations covering ... only around 30 percent of that period," he told reporters.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said that Spayka could be ordered to pay as much as 30 billion drams (\$62 million) when he strongly defended the tax fraud case on Tuesday. He said investigators may also implicate the arrested businessman in a broader "chain of machinations" involving "the highest echelons" of Armenia's former government.

Some Armenian media outlets have for years alleged that former President Robert Kocharyan or his successor Serzh Sarkisian's son-in-law, Mikael Minasyan, hold a major stake in Spayka. Ghazaryan again



insisted three days before his arrest that he is the company's sole owner.

Spayka was set up in 2001 and currently employs about 2,000 people. It is Armenia's largest producer and exporter of agricultural products grown at its own greenhouses or purchased from farmers in about 80 communities across the country. The company also owns hundreds of heavy trucks transporting those products abroad and Russia in particular.

In a series of statements issued in recent days, Spayka warned that it may not be able to buy large quantities of agricultural produce from farmers this year because of what it regards as unfair and baseless tax evasion charges.

"We are facing very serious problems," Spayka's acting chief executive, Karen Baghdasaryan, told RFE/RL's Armenian service on Wednesday. "Several foreign

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The Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) in particular voiced support for the peaceful political transition that followed last spring's "velvet revolution" in Armenia. Like other Western observers, PACE representatives called the Armenian parliamentary elections of December 2019 democratic.

banks have started a process of freezing or withdrawing our loans. We are now trying to slow or stop that process."

Among Spayka's foreign creditors is the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB). Last year the ADB lent Spayka \$30 million for the construction of more climate-controlled greenhouses equipped with drip irrigation systems.

Spayka also used foreign funding to build a cheese factory in Yerevan. Pashinyan was present at its inauguration on March 26.

The prime minister dismissed Spayka's warnings on Tuesday, expressing confidence that the food giant will continue to buy fruits and vegetable from farmers despite Ghazaryan's arrest.

Armenia's acting Agriculture Minister Gegham Gevorgyan announced on Thursday that the Armenian government is ready to provide financial assistance to other firms that would buy more agricultural produce. But he did not give any numbers.

Ananyan argued, for his part, that many farmers' dependence on Spayka does not mean that the SRC cannot slap heavy fines on the company or prosecute its owner. "Yes, we don't want to disrupt Spayka's operations," said the SRC chief. "But we cannot accept the non-disruption of its operations as a precondition and avoid making a legal evaluation of its leadership's past behavior."

Spayka was already fined about 2.5 billion drams (\$5 million) for profit tax evasion in July last year. Ghazaryan said on April 5 that he agreed to pay the "unfounded" fine in order to have the company's bank accounts unfrozen.

Macron Declares April 24 National Day of Armenian Genocide Commemoration in France

PARIS—President Emmanuel Macron of France on Tuesday said that his country would observe April 24 as “national day of commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.”

He made the declaration at the annual gala dinner of the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organization in France (CCAF), fulfilling a campaign promise he made while running for president in 2017.

“France is, first and foremost, the country that knows how to look history in the face, and was among the first to denounce the killing of the Armenian people in 1915 as genocide, calling it was, and in 2001 after a long struggle recognized it as law,” Macron told the crowd gathered at the CCAF gala.

France “will in the next weeks make April 24 a national day of commemoration of the Armenian genocide,” he added.

Macron and his wife, Brigitte, visited the Tsitsernakaberd Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex in Yerevan while they were visiting Armenia during the Francophonie Summit in October.

Official Ankara was quick to express its anger at Macron’s statement, calling it “a political lie.”

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin “strongly condemned” Macron’s statement about the Armenian Genocide, reported the Anadolu news agency.

Kalin also accused Macron of “trying to rescue himself by using



historical events as political fodder”.

Macron said he had informed Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan about the decision to declare April 24th a National Day of Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide ahead of his announcement.

“We have disagreements over the fight against the Islamic State, human rights and civil liberties in Turkey and on the Genocide,” Macron was quoted as saying by Euronews.

Armenia welcomes adoption of decision on Armenian Genocide by Chamber of Deputies of Italy

The raising of awareness on the Armenian Genocide by the Italian Parliament is an important message aimed at the prevention of genocides and crimes against humanity, reads the statement issued by the MFA Armenia on the occasion of the adoption of the decision by the Chamber of Deputies of Italy over the Armenian Genocide.

As the press service of the MFA Armenia informs, the statement runs as follows,

“Armenia welcomes the decision adopted by the Chamber of Deputies of Italy with regards to the Armenian Genocide, according to which Italy reaffirms its commitments and obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The decision adopted by the Parliament of Italy is yet another important input to the efforts of the international community to respect and restore the rights of the Armenian people who suffered the Genocide.



The raising of awareness on the Armenian Genocide by the Italian Parliament is an important message aimed at the prevention of genocides and crimes against humanity”.

Kocharyan loses another court appeal



Armenia's Court of Appeals upheld on April 11 a lower court's decision to allow law-enforcement authorities to keep holding former President Robert Kocharyan in detention pending investigation into the 2008 post-election violence in Yerevan.

A district court in the Armenian capital extended his pre-trial arrest by two more months on March 15. Kocharyan appealed against that ruling.

The ex-president testified at hearings on his appeal. He was also present in the courtroom when the Court of Appeals rejected it.

One of Kocharyan's lawyers, Hayk Alamyanyan, denounced the decision, saying that it was dictated by the Special Investigative Service (SIS), a law-enforcement body conducting a long-running inquiry into the 2008 violence. "Our courts allow arrests regardless of what materials there

are and there aren't in a criminal case," he said.

Kocharyan as well as three retired army generals stand accused of overthrowing the constitutional order in the wake of a disputed presidential election held in February 2008, less than two months before he completed his second and final presidential term. The SIS says that they illegally used the armed forces against opposition supporters who demonstrated against alleged electoral fraud.

Eight protesters and two police servicemen were killed in street clashes that broke out late on March 1, 2008. Kocharyan declared a state of emergency in the Armenian capital on that night.

All four men deny the charges. Kocharyan, who was also charged with bribery last month, has accused the current authorities and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in particular of waging a political "vendetta" against him. Pashinyan, who was one of the main opposition speakers during the February-March 2008 protests, has dismissed the ex-president's claims.

Yerevan demands 'more respect' from EU, UN



Screenshot of a video of Lilit Martirosyan, a transgender activist, addressing Armenia's parliament on April 5.

Official Yerevan has dismissed international concerns about the state of LGBT rights in Armenia, saying that the United Nations and the European Union should show "more respect" for the Armenian society.

The EU and the UN voiced those concerns on April 9 in response to a furious backlash against an unprecedented speech delivered by a transgender activist in the Armenian parliament on April 5. The activist, Lilit Martirosyan, complained about widespread

hostility and discrimination against sexual minorities in the socially conservative country during parliamentary hearings on human rights.

Martirosyan's appearance on the parliament floor was denounced by both pro-government and opposition parliamentarians, who accused each other of making it possible. It also sparked angry street protests by nationalist groups championing "traditional Armenian values." Some of their members openly advocated violent actions the Armenian LGBT community.

In a joint statement, the EU Delegation in Armenia and the Yerevan-based embassies of EU member states condemned "hate speech, including death threats directed at Ms. Lilit Martirosyan, her colleagues and the LGBTI community as a whole." They urged Armenian law-enforcement author-

ities to "guarantee the physical safety" of sexual minorities.

The UN office in Yerevan issued a similar statement deploring "the recent rise in hate speech and threats of violence against human rights and LGBTI activists."

Reacting to those statements, the Armenian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Anna Naghdalyan, insisted that Yerevan is "fully" committed to protecting human rights and "will not tolerate any illegal actions." She stressed at the same time that "human rights are, as a rule, effectively protected if they become part of a social consensus and are perceived as universal social and moral values."

"Therefore, in this context, our international partners should demonstrate more respect and sensitivity towards the Armenian society and refrain from undue engagement in the public debate, even if they disagree with its tonality," Naghdalyan said in written comments.

"We would like to remind that the principle of public morality is part of international commitments on human rights and cannot be ignored," she added.

Tsarukyan's Party vows 'political' response to tax raid



The opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) has promised a “political assessment” of an unexpected tax audit of one of the businesses belonging to its wealthy leader, Gagik Tsarukyan.

Officers of the State Revenue

Committee (SRC) raided a Tsarukyan-owned market outside Yerevan and confiscated its financial records on Tuesday. The SRC said the search conducted at the Arinj Mall market was a part of a tax evasion investigation launched by it.

The Arinj Mall director, Samvel Hakobyan, suggested that tax inspectors suspect that he has underreported daily fees collected from around a thousand kiosks selling various goods inside the market. He ruled out the possibility of such tax fraud.

The tax raid came just hours after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's My Step alliance and the BHK traded fresh accusations in a continuing scandal caused by a transgender activist's speech delivered in the Armenian parliament last week. Pashinyan accused a senior BHK lawmaker of organizing a “political provocation” against the parliament majority loyal to him. Tsarukyan and his associated rejected the accusation.

Gevorg Petrosyan, a senior BHK figure, said later on Tuesday that the SRC investigation may well be politically motivated. “We think that the [former ruling] HHK's ‘good traditions’ are continuing,” he told reporters at Arinj Mall.

“Whenever there is some political escalation it reflects on Tsarukyan's businesses. This smack of political persecution.”

In a statement, the SRC denied any political motives behind the probe.

The BHK finished second in the December 2018 parliamentary elections and holds 26 seats in Armenia's current 132-member parliament.

Tsarukyan's party supported last spring's “velvet revolution” and joined Pashinyan's first cabinet formed in May 2018. Pashinyan fired his ministers affiliated with BHK in October, accusing the party of secretly collaborating with the HHK.

Prime Minister receives Corporación América Executive Director Martin Ernekian



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on April 9 received Martin Eurnekian, Executive Director of Corporación América, who was accompanied by Ernekian Company Director Jorge Del Agila and Director General of Armenia International Airport Marcelo

Wende.

During the meeting, the investment programs implemented by the company in Armenia and the prospects for their expansion were discussed. Reference was made to the development of Yerevan's Zvartnots air-

port, Shirak airport in Gyumri, the planned infrastructure improvements, HayPost CJSC's activities, and the program of reconstruction of the former Republic Square-located building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. Ideas were exchanged on the development of the aviation market and promotion of competition.

The parties expressed satisfaction with the atmosphere of cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and Corporación América. Both sides reaffirmed their readiness to build on the existing ties of interaction. The Prime Minister attached importance to the programs implemented by the company in Armenia, which promote the business environment in our country.

An arrangement was reached to follow up the discussion between the Office of the Prime Minister, stakeholder agencies and company representatives.

Tibetan tea company ready to cooperate with CIS countries, including Armenia



Ya'an Tea Factory, one of the largest and oldest Tibetan tea companies operating in the Ya'an city of the Chinese province of Sichuan, is ready to cooperate with the CIS countries, including Armenia if these states refuse from tea packages containing chemical components, company CEO Chao Gui Li told ARMENPRESS.

“We are ready to cooperate with the CIS countries and export the product at local prices. We really hope to move on one path and closely cooperate with all countries, as well as to produce high-quality Tibetan tea guided by the latest developments so that the traditional Tibetan tea will be introduced all over the world enabling the con-

sumer to use alternative product for health”, the director of the company said.

The company CEO is against the tea packages which are quite known in the CIS states and contain chemical components.

“It harms health, that is the reason that our cooperation is not so large-scale. If the markets of these countries are ready to accept our tea, we will cooperate with a great pleasure”, Chao Gui Li said.

The company produces over 20.000 tons of tea annually. The CEO said currently the company exports the Tibetan tea with 35 healing properties to Russia, EU, US, France, Czech Republic and other countries.

“The Tibetan tea is one of the most favorite teas of French President Emmanuel Macron, and he sent a letter and a gift as a sign of gratitude”, Chao Gui Li said, adding that leaders of several states like and drink their tea.

The Ya'an Tea Factory has been established in 1564. The company is engaged in the production, selling and study of tea.

Interview by Karen Khachatryan

Armenian airports report 9% growth in passenger flow



The two airports of the Republic of Armenia served 199,855 people in March 2019, marking a 9% growth as compared to the

same period last year.

As compared to March 2018, a 7.6% increase in passenger flow was observed at

Zvartnots International Airport of Yerevan this March.

In March 2019 Armenia's main airport served 188,946 passengers against 175,605 last year.

As for Shirak Airport of Gyumri, this March it served 10,909 passengers against 11,138 passengers in March 2018, marking a 2.1% increase.

Since the beginning of the year passenger flow at the two airports of Armenia has amounted to 578,575 people, which exceeds the indicator of the same period of the previous year by 10.2%.

In January-March 2019, an increase in the number of takeoffs and landings has also been registered at the two airports.

Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan's speech at PACE plenary session



On 11 April, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan participated in the spring Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg.

Below is a transcript of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's remarks, as reported by his office.

"Distinguished Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Honorable Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Dear Parliamentary Assembly Members,

It is an internationally accepted common practice for high-ranking guests to address the audience from this podium with the following words: "It is a great honor for me to speak at the podium of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly." This is a great honor for me, too, but let me say that speaking from this podium has a special meaning and significance for me.

I will try to explain why being the editor-in-chief of the "Oragir" daily in the summer of 1999 I was awaiting the court's verdict against me. The reason for initiating a criminal case was a publication in my newspaper.

The prosecutor demanded that I be sentenced to three years in prison and sent to prison. At that time it was almost impossible for the court to neglect the prosecutor's motion. But in those days, something like a miracle happened, and the court sentenced me to only one year's imprisonment so that it could be postponed for a while. Then it turned out that the reason was one. Armenia was going to become a member of the Council of Europe in those days and PACE President Lord Russell Johnston would visit Armenia to discuss membership issues. The authorities realized that a prison sentence was not a good backdrop for such an official visit. In fact, Russell Johnston referred my issue during his visit, and perhaps the authorities promised that they

would not send me to prison.

That is how it happened. After Johnston's visit my verdict became conditional, and in 1999-2000, I was not sentenced to prison because of Armenia's accession to the Council of Europe. And although there were several criminal proceedings against me, my detention was postponed, and it

occurred only after the March 1, 2008 events when 10 Armenian citizens were killed, including eight peaceful demonstrators. At that time, thousands of oppositionists were taken to police stations for attending the demonstrations. And nearly one hundred political leaders and activists went to jail as political prisoners.

The Council of Europe and the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly were the only hope for the citizens deprived of their legitimate right of assembly, for imprisoned politicians and their relatives and the relatives of the victims of March 1 events, because after March 1, the Constituency was eventually abolished in the Republic of Armenia and people had no reliable legal guarantee of protection, no hope.

And like fresh air, the five resolutions adopted by the PACE on those events changed the atmosphere of Armenia, raising hopes that everything was not yet lost. Having been imprisoned since 2009 and sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment in 2010, I spent only two years in jail and came out to freedom with the help of Armenian citizens, but also with the assistance of the Council of Europe.

In the winter of 2011, I met with Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg, and it was crucial for drawing attention to the problem of political prisoners in Armenia and to my issue as well. Soon, the European Court of Human Rights recognized my case urgently, two months after that time, the authorities released me with an amnesty act, realizing that the Council of Europe would officially announce me a political prisoner.

December, 2018 came as the next stage of my relationship with the Council of Europe and PACE. At that time, I was the Prime Minister of Armenia and reached that status as a result of the non-violent velvet popular revolution in April and May of that year. Early parliamentary elections were held in

the country as the next port of call of our revolution.

Our political force received more than 70 percent of the votes in these elections. But what matters most here is the fact that the PACE observation mission qualified the elections as democratic.

I wish to quote the assessment given by the PACE observation mission: "It was possible to hold democratic elections in Armenia due to the so-called Velvet Revolution and the manifestation of political will by the authorities." Other international observation missions also acknowledged the December elections as free, fair, democratic and competitive. No Armenian election had ever been rated like that before. This was the first parliamentary election in our country, the official results of which were not contested in the Constitutional Court and the first parliamentary elections, the results of which were unanimously adopted by all political forces and the public at large.

And now, as the prime minister elected by the people of the Republic of Armenia, I would like to thank the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for their support of human rights and democracy in Armenia.

Today, the people have triumphed in Armenia, and this has happened due to the non-violent, velvet popular revolution in Armenia. I want to emphasize that the revolution was born in the heart and soul of the Armenian people, and there was not a single foreign power involved in any way in our revolution. Our revolution neither had a geopolitical content, nor a geopolitical context.

But how did this revolution happen? How did it succeed? In 2015, Armenia's then-actual leader Serzh Sargsyan initiated fundamental changes at the end of his second term, which implied that the semi-presidential form of government in Armenia would have to shift to a parliamentary system in April, 2018.

When this constitutional amendment was initiated, he pledged publicly that he would never be nominated to the office of Head of State - in this case, to the post of Prime Minister. But in 2018, it turned out that he was the candidate for premiership, nominated by the ruling majority. On May 31, we started a march of protest, walking from Armenia's second largest city Gyumri to capital Yerevan. We walked 13 days - more than 200 kilometers - covering the whole process live on social networks. And in Yerevan, in the first place, many schoolchildren, boys and girls joined our



movement, followed by their elder brothers and sisters, followed by their mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers.

On April 17, 2018, Serzh Sargsyan was elected as Prime Minister by the Parliament, and on April 22, I appeared once again in prison, and the next day Serzh Sargsyan had to release me and my friends under the pressure of the people; he resigned 15 days later, on May 8, 2018, that same parliament elected me Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, because this was demanded the entire Armenian nation.

This is how our revolution happened. Called a revolution of love and solidarity, it was originally based on the logic of non-violent struggle. The top open hands were the symbol of our revolution. And that was the sign of our repeated statement that even if the police and the former government exercised violence against us, we would not respond to violence with violence. And the idea of love, the non-violent struggle really won the oligarchic, corrupt system in Armenia for many years. Won without any violence, won without any victims, won without any weapons. Raised up with open arms.

Dear friends,

Indeed, there are huge political changes going on in Armenia today. We have managed to eradicate corruption in Armenia, eradicate the monopoly system, and create real conditions for all people before the law.

We are reducing the black economy in daily routine. Over the past 10 months, Armenia has seen more than 50,000 jobs created or coming out of the shadow, which is 10 percent of the total labor market.

Our budget revenues have been overwhelming and we are going to exceed the budget revenues of 2019 by about 70 million euros, or at least by 70 million euros, which is 2.6 percent of our budget receipts.

These extra amounts will be used to build roads, educational and health institutions, proportionate territorial development, and jobs. Our government's activity is transparent and accountable, and our power stems from the free will of the people.

Today, Armenia is a truly democratic country with perfect freedom of speech and assembly. The chapter of electoral frauds and systemic corruption is closed for ever in our country. Our government is taking

measures to continuously raise the status of human rights protection. But our democracy needs strengthening, as well as economic and institutional guarantees.

The development of democratic institutions, the establishment of an independent judiciary, the establishment and strengthening of anticorruption institutions are the key areas where we need the support of the Council of Europe. All this is important not only to put on record the results of the political revolution, but also to bring about a new economic revival.

The key goal and significance of our economic revolution is to encourage and help our citizens in their economic activities, create real opportunities for them, make Armenia more attractive to investment and tourism, and transform our country into a technological hub. And we are convinced that we will succeed in this difficult mission, because our people now have confidence in their own strengths and their own future.

Dear participants, Ladies and Gentlemen
The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continues to be a major challenge for the Republic of Armenia and for our region, in general.

Like any democratic government, the Armenian government is dedicated to the principle of exclusively peaceful settlement. But democratic changes in our country have brought new shades in our understanding of the issue.

Of course, it is extremely important that we have been able to start a constructive and positive dialogue with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, but I am convinced that the dialogue between the two leaders is not enough to resolve the issue. It is extremely important that a dialogue be initiated between the communities so that we could prepare our populations for peace, not for war.

At the end of a press conference in Yerevan, I announced that social networks can be the most important platform for dialogue, where unfortunately the Armenians and Azeris are still communicating in the language of blasphemy and hate.

The thirty years of the conflict seemed to be enough for us to have exhausted the language of hatred and blasphemy. We should help each other in order to understand our respective positions in a bid to find out the reasons behind the conflict.

I personally started to voice this vision of mine several times from the podium of the Armenian Parliament, saying that any version of the settlement of the Karabakh issue should be acceptable for the people of Armenia, for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, and for the people of Azerbaijan.

This is an unprecedented statement, as a matter of fact, and it is just the formula that

may help us achieve a peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict. Unfortunately, we still cannot hear similar statements from Azerbaijan, but I do hope that the message sent from this podium of peace will receive an adequate reaction in the Azerbaijani society.

Dear friends,

It is no coincidence that I called this podium of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe a seat of peace. I believe that this is the place where curses should be substituted with dialogue; where provocation must be replaced by constructive work. But, unfortunately, the chair of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is sometimes used to provoke wars.

In this regard, I cannot rule out that the discussions on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue that took place here in January 2016 became the prelude of the Four-Day War that broke out in April of the same year, creating a propitious ground for Azerbaijan's armed forces to launch offensive operations.

I do not want to assert that the authors of those debates consciously triggered the war, which cost a few hundred human lives for Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

Unfortunately, today as well we can see attempts to turn the podiums of PACE and other international organizations into platforms of geopolitical games and conflicts, which is absolutely opposite to the essence and mission of these organizations.

It should also be remembered that any conflict should be viewed in its essence and content, while making judgments about a conflict without understanding its origins, causes, essence and peculiarities simply means to play with human lives and human destinies.

This is the reason why we consider and believe that jointly with the three parties to the conflict, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs are the only ones to deal with the Karabakh conflict because this format has been aware of the current state of affairs, the conflict's background history and the nuances of negotiations ever since their inception.

The OSCE Minsk Group format was set up as a platform for dialogue between all parties to the conflict - Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia - and we are taking steps today to restore the dialogue between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in the format of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This does not mean that the Council of Europe has nothing to do in the Karabakh conflict zone. This organization, which is at the forefront of human rights and democratic institutions in Europe, pays zero attention to the support of non-governmental

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organizations operating in Nagorno-Karabakh. PACE has so far failed to take any steps to strengthen democratic institutions and to build civil society in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The only explanation is that there are contradictions and misinterpretations regarding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, which imply that Nagorno-Karabakh is not internationally recognized as a state.

But as far as the Council of Europe and PACE are concerned, the point is not the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. I wonder if there is an international debate about whether the people living in Nagorno-Karabakh are humans or not. I wonder whether the Council of Europe, which is one of the world leaders in human rights protection, prefers the documents to real people.

From this high podium, I would like to appeal to the Council of Europe and to all those organizations in Europe dealing with the protection of human rights, freedom of expression and democratic institutions: Please support the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to improve their laws and institutions, strengthen human rights, the rule of law and build an independent judiciary. The citizens, the people will benefit from it.

We should remember that humans are worth more than any document, any political or group interest, and I do believe that the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be guided by these very values.

Distinguished Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,
Honorable Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Dear Parliamentary Assembly Members,
I am really pleased and honored to deliver a speech from this podium on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Armenian Revolution of Love and Solidarity.

Recognizing Armenia as the country of the year in 2018, the Economist asked whether Armenia could build on its achievements.

I have the honor to declare from this high podium that democracy is irreversible in Armenia. It is irreversible for a simple reason: the aforementioned victories in our country were not brought about by political leaders or forces, but by our people, citizens, the youth who know very well that they are the driving force behind progress and they will definitely not miss the chance to make of Armenia a beacon of democracy, law, liberty and tolerance.

Armenia can stand for and will come as a piece of good news for all those who believe in democracy!

Thank you.”

Armenian War Veterans Pick New Pro-Government Leader



The Yerkrpah Union, a once powerful organization uniting thousands of Armenian veterans of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, has elected a close associate of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as its new leader.

Yerkrpah members unanimously voted for Sasun Mikaelyan, a prominent war veteran and the nominal chairman of Pashinyan's Civil Contract party, at a weekend congress in Yerevan.

Mikaelyan, 61, pledged to resign from the party leadership in May. But he gave no indications that he will also terminate his membership in Civil Contract.

Yerkrpah was established by the late Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan and played a major role in Armenian politics in the 1990s and the early 2000s. It began losing its political influence after Sarkisian was assassinated in the October 1999 terrorist attack on the Armenian parliament.

But the group remained linked to the Armenian military in one way or another. It

sent thousands of armed volunteers to Nagorno-Karabakh following the outbreak of large-scale hostilities there in April 2016.

Manvel Grigoryan, an army general who succeeded Sarkisian as Yerkrpah chairman in 1999, served as Armenia's deputy defense minister from 2000-2008. He was removed from the military after supporting former President Levon Ter-Petrosian in the February 2008 presidential election.

In 2010, Grigoryan openly pledged allegiance to then President Serzh Sarkisian. He and Yerkrpah helped Sargsyan win reelection in a disputed vote held in 2013.

Grigoryan resigned as Yerkrpah leader shortly after being arrested in June 2018 on corruption charges. His arrest came two months after Sarkisian was overthrown in the “velvet revolution” led by Pashinyan. Mikaelyan actively participated in the protest movement.

The new Yerkrpah leader insisted that he will not turn the veterans' union into the ruling party's “appendage.” “You saw what happened when they tried to make Yerkrpah serve the [former] authorities,” he said.

Mikaelyan made clear at the same time that Yerkrpah “will never hamper” the current Armenian government.

Pashinyan attended and addressed the Yerkrpah congress.

Expansion of women's participation in peacekeeping operations among priorities of Armenian Armed Forces – Ambassador



Armenia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mher Margaryan on April 11 participated in the “UN Peacekeeping Actions: Women in Peacekeeping” meeting in the UN Security Council, the Armenian foreign ministry told Noyan Tapan.

The meeting was attended by the delegations of over 70 UN member states.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres delivered report during the meeting,

touching upon the increase of women engagement in peacekeeping mission and the achievements recorded on this direction.

In his remarks Mher Margaryan said the Armenian government attaches special importance to the promotion of women engagement in all spheres of public life. He noted that the expansion of women's participation in the peacekeeping operations is one of the priorities of the ongoing reforms of the Armenian Armed Forces and presented the actions of the Armenian side aimed at increasing the number of women peacekeepers in Armenian units participating in the international peacekeeping missions.

The Special Representative highlighted the engagement of NGOs and initiatives led by women to the processes aimed at settling conflicts and establishing peace.

Senators Menendez, Cruz Introduce new Armenian Genocide legislation



Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Democrat Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and former presidential candidate Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) introduced Armenian Genocide legislation today reaffirming proper U.S. recognition and remembrance of this crime and rejecting U.S. complicity in its denial, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA). Senators Menendez and Cruz were joined as sponsors by 14 Senate colleagues, including Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Edward Markey (D-MA), Gary Peters (D-MI), Jack Reed (D-RI), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Tom Udall (D-NM), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Ron

Wyden (D-OR).

“We want to thank Senators Menendez and Cruz for taking aim directly at U.S. complicity in Turkey’s denial of the Armenian Genocide,” said Aram Hamparian, Executive Director of the ANCA. “Their bipartisan resolution would end – once and for all – a foreign gag-order that has, for nearly a century, compromised our nation’s independence and government’s credibility on issues of human rights, religious freedom, and atrocities prevention.”

“As we near the anniversary of Armenian Remembrance Day, one of the darkest events in human history, I am proud to lead this effort to formally recognize the Armenian Genocide on behalf of the U.S. Congress. The Armenian genocide is a historical fact and not up for debate,” said Senator Menendez. “Only by accurately recognizing this genocide of the past can we ever hope to move forward in a legitimate and effective manner to meet the challenge of preventing mass atrocities and genocide in the future. With this resolution, we honor the millions of victims of this genocide, remember how they died and pledge that history accurately remember their deaths.”

“We must never be silent in response to atrocities. Over one hundred years ago, the world was silent as the Armenian people suffered a horrific genocide, and today many are still unaware of it,” said Senator Cruz. “I am proud to join Sen. Menendez and my colleagues today in introducing this resolution. May the terrors of those events awaken in us the courage to always stand for freedom against evil.”

Earlier in the day, His Eminence Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Eastern U.S. joined ANCA leaders, including Raffi Hamparian, Ani Tchaghlasian, and George Aghjayan, met with Senators Menendez and Cruz during a full day of Capitol Hill meetings and thanked them for their leadership in securing a principled U.S. policy on the Armenian Genocide.

The measure is the companion to the Armenian Genocide Resolution introduced yesterday by House Select Committee on Intelligence Chair Adam Schiff (D-CA) and Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), which had over 75 original cosponsors.

The Armenian Genocide Resolution notes that the U.S. has, as early as 1951, officially recognized the Armenian Genocide through a filing with the International Court of Justice, followed by House legislation adopted in 1975, and 1984 and President Ronald Reagan’s Proclamation in 1984.

The resolution resolves that it is the policy of the United States to:

- 1) Commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance;
- 2) Reject efforts to enlist, engage, or otherwise associate the U.S. Government with denial of the Armenian Genocide or any other genocide; and
- 3) Encourage education and public understanding of the facts of the Armenian Genocide, including the U.S. role in the humanitarian relief effort, and the relevance of the Armenian Genocide to modern-day crimes against humanity.



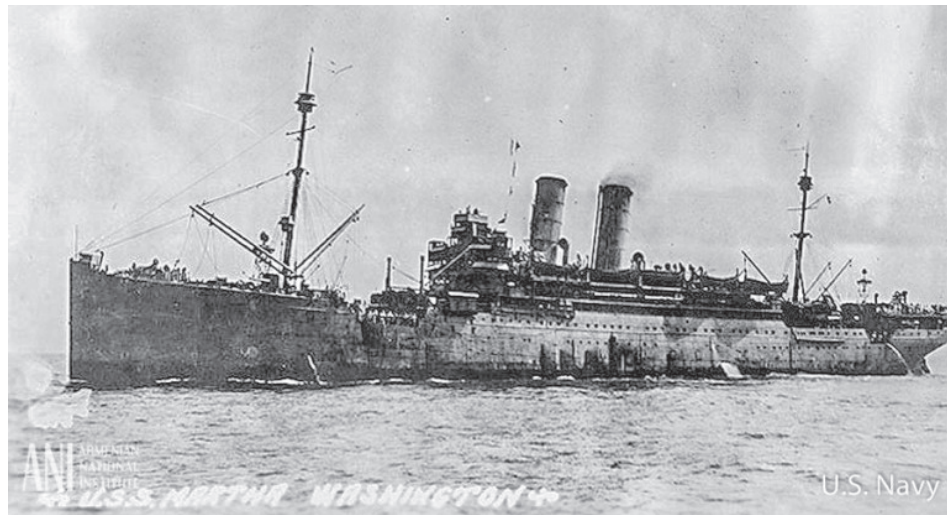
New exhibit reveals U.S. military's humanitarian assistance to Armenia in 1919-1920



On Friday, March 22, Professor Taner Akcam (Clark University), will deliver a public lecture at the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research, co-sponsored by the USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies. The lecture is co-sponsored by the two organizations,

government that contain the killing orders, and demonstrates the authenticity of these orders, which had been signed by Ottoman Interior Minister Talat Pasha. He will introduce this new evidence and the online archive he has developed to provide the public access to these documents.

Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies at Clark University, Akcam



is widely recognized as one of the first Turkish scholars to write extensively on the Ottoman-Turkish Genocide of the Armenians in the early 20th century.

He is the author of more than ten scholarly works as well as numerous articles in Turkish, German, and English on the Armenian Genocide and Turkish nationalism. His most known books, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (Metropolitan Books, 2006) and *Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2012) have received several awards.

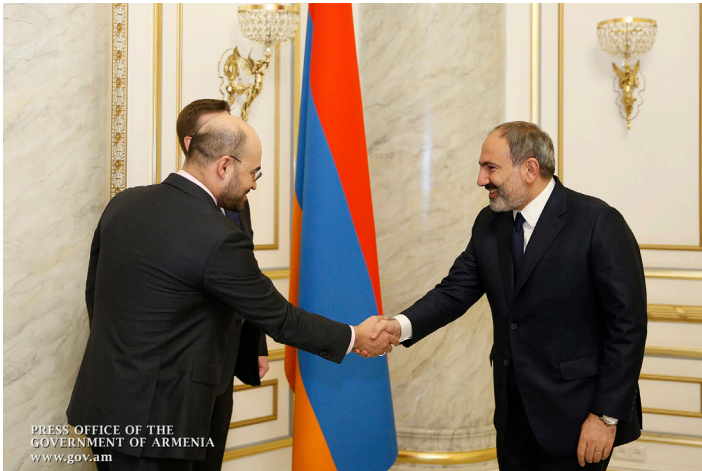
the Armenian Mirror-Spectator reports.

A unique feature of the Armenian Genocide has been the long-standing efforts of successive Turkish governments to deny its historicity and to hide the documentary evidence surrounding it. Denialists have claimed that there was no central decision taken by Ottoman authorities to exterminate the Armenians and that all available documents that indicate otherwise are either fake or were doctored by Armenians. In this lecture, Professor Taner Akcam will explore how his latest research provides a major clarification of the often-blurred lines between facts and truth with regard to these events.

Akcam both brings to light documents either hidden or destroyed by the Turkish



PM receives MTS Group representatives



Prime Minister *Nikol Pashinyan* received Russian MTS Group President *Alexei Kornya* and Vice President *Andrei Smelkov*. The meeting was attended by VivaCell-MTS Founding GM *Ralph C. Yirikyan*.

Prime Minister Pashinyan stressed the importance of implementing MTS programs in our country, which promote the development of telecommunications and the spread of innovative technologies. The Premier advised that the Government of Armenia prioritizes the development of digital infrastructures and the domestic market of information technologies in a bid to turn Armenia into a technological country.

With reference to the reforms towards the consistent improvement of Armenia’s business climate, Nikol Pashinyan said the Government’s goal is to increase investment transparency and introduce a new culture of public-private sector partnership.

“We are eager to see successful businesses which can pay more taxes, get richer and enrich others,” the Head of Government said.

Alexei Kornya thanked Prime Minister Pashinyan for information about the Government’s reforms and ex-

pressed satisfaction with his company’s programs implemented in our country, as well as with the ongoing cooperation with the Government of Armenia, including the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technologies. He said that the MTS Group intends to expand the scope of its activities in our country and implement new projects to develop the digital market, software and services.

Alexei Kornya noted that the MTS Group will continue to make investments in Armenia, contributing thereby to the development of information technologies



and telecommunications.

Prime Minister Pashinyan welcomed MTS’s intention to increase investment and reaffirmed his government’s readiness to follow up the existing ties of effective cooperation. The interlocutors exchanged views on the prospects for the development of Armenia’s telecommunications market, improvement of technological infrastructures, implementation of programs as part corporate responsibility, etc.

* * *

Public Mobile TeleSystems Joint-Stock Company (MTS Group) is among the largest telecom operators in Russia and the CIS countries. Together with its subsidiaries, the company serves over 100 million mobile subscribers in Russia, Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine. VivaCell-MTS is a subsidiary of the Russian Mobile TeleSystems (MTS).



Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

You are a powerhouse this week. Put that energy to productive use and you will accomplish a great deal more than in a routine week. Focus your attention on making the world a better place and you will gain help from others. If you use it to serve your personal ego, people will resist and make life difficult.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

You may feel out of sorts this week. Your feelings are in conflict with your ideal self and your values. You want to put your best foot forward, but circumstances do not feel quite right. If the conflict is deep, it is usually best to wait and not yield to whatever pressure is around you. You will soon sort it all out.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Your mood is expansive and optimistic this week. It is one of those “good luck” times that occasionally happen to the Archers. You have a grasp of the big picture and could use this energy to promote your projects and gain support. Beware of going overboard with your plans.



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

Your career or life direction is blending harmoniously with what you feel is the “right” thing to do. People with power are giving help and/or education as you need it. Forward motion moves smoothly.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

The aspects this week point at a busy household. There are more at home than is normal. There will be lots of chatter and philosophies on the table for discussion. Don't allow your obsessions, such as the need to be right, or the need for a clean house, to take over the playfulness of this aspect.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

At the beginning of this year you began the initial steps of materializing your new life direction. At this point you arrive at a significant turning point. There is the possibility that you could turn back toward the known and security. The more life-giving option is to pour more of your resources into the new tack.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

You and your partner may be restless and want to do something different. This is a good weekend to take a day trip to somewhere you haven't been for a while. Go to a concert or a movie with an uplifting message.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

Events of this week trigger your sense of compassion and draw you into the need to assist in the healing of another. As you live into this experience, you will discover that having compassion also heals you. Your spirit is lifted. Don't ignore the call.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

Social and romantic life is favored this week, particularly over the weekend. You may be mixing business and pleasure in a pleasant combination. This is a good time to discuss issues within a relationship because you are steady of mind and likely to be realistic, in relation to yourself as well as others.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

You have favorable aspects concerning romance, social, and family life with your partner and children. The Other in your life wants to run things and you don't mind turning over the responsibility, at least not this week. This is a good time to heal rifts in any relationship.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

You may be overloaded with nervous energy this week. Increase your exercise routine if you feel ungrounded or unable to sleep. Old resentments may surface and grab your attention. There is little point of listening to the angry voice unless you can do something productive about the issue.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

You have several aspects that favor romance, the arts, and things of beauty. You may be the happy recipient of small gifts, compliments or favors from others. Your mind wants to wander in the world of fantasy, daydreams, good books, and music. It is not a great week for getting things done, but you will enjoy the journey.

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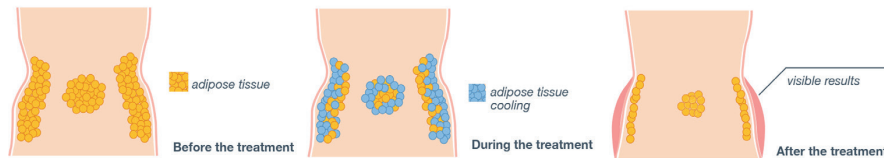
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