

So-called ‘Zangezur Corridor’ is a detriment for both Iran and Armenia, Tehran Says



A so-called corridor connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan through Armenia’s Syunik Province will be detrimental for both Iran and Armenia, Iran’s Ambassador to Armenia Mehdi Sobhani said during a press conference on February 6.

“Only Armenia and Iran are aligned in their position on the so-called ‘Zangezur corridor,’” Sobhani said. “Only Iran supports Armenia, opposing the so-called ‘Zangezur corridor.’ Of all the countries in the region, only Iran stands by Armenia on this issue. We have no disagreements with Armenia on the so-called ‘Zangezur corridor.’”

Sobhani was reiterating Tehran’s long-held position, which again was conveyed to Baku this week when President Masoud Pezeshkian met with Azerbaijan presidential adviser Hikmet Hajiyev in Tehran.

President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and his foreign minister, Jeyhun Bayramov,

last week stepped up their insistence on the creation of the so-called corridor, with Aliyev demanding that the transport link through Armenia must become a reality, advancing his threats against Yerevan.

Sobhani on Thursday also discussed Moscow’s tacit support for the so-called corridor.

“We have clearly expressed our position to both Russia and other countries. We oppose the corridor logic, we are against any road under international control, and we reject anything that would lead to border changes. We have made this clear and do not take into account the considerations of other countries in this matter,” Sobhani said.

“Some countries are attempting to sow suspicion by alleging that Iran has rolled back its position on this issue. This matter concerns our security. We remain firm on issues related to our national security. This

is our position – compare it with that of other countries. If they do not align, then we have disagreements with that country. For us, the interests of our country are the priority,” Sobhani emphasized, stressing that Iran will not retreat from its position.

“Iran will not negotiate any deals on this issue,” Sobhani asserted.

“We are not against the unblocking of roads, but only if it is implemented based on the national and territorial sovereignty of the countries. We stand for unblocking of the roads in the territory of Armenia, but it must be done based on respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Sobhani explained.

The Iranian Ambassador also announced that Yerevan and Tehran are in the process of working out a strategic partnership agreement between the two countries.

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Pashinyan, Vance discuss Armenia-US relations, regional issues

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has met with Vice President of the United States JD Vance at the White House.

Issues related to the Armenia-United States bilateral relationship and the regional agenda were discussed at the meeting, the Prime Minister's Office said



in a readout.

Later, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has described his talks with United States Vice President JD Vance as a 'good conversation.'

"I paid a courtesy call on US Vice President JD Vance in the White House. We had a good conversation," Pashinyan said on social media.

PM Pashinyan meets with IRI President

In Washington, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Daniel Twining, President of the International Republican Institute (IRI).

According to the Prime Minister's Office, the meeting focused on cooperation between the Government of Armenia and the Institute, ongoing programs in Armenia, and further joint steps to deepen democratic reforms.

Pashinyan expressed appreciation for the IRI's support, highlighting the

importance of developing public communication capabilities as a foundation for open and transparent governance.

The PM also emphasized the significance of the Charter of Strategic Partnership signed between Armenia and the United States, expressing hope that it would create new opportunities for expanding bilateral ties, strengthening democratic institutions, enhancing civil society capacity and implementing reforms effectively.

According to the source, Twining reaffirmed the International Republican Institute's commitment to supporting the Armenian government's reform agenda and democratic development.



Armenian FM presents foreign policy priorities at Norwegian Institute of International Affairs



Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan has met with the academic staff and researchers of the Norwegian

Institute of International Affairs in Oslo.

FM Mirzoyan presented the Armenian government's perceptions around the

security situation in the South Caucasus region, opportunities for establishing stability and peace, as well as the challenges on that path, the foreign ministry said in a press release.

In the context of diversification of Armenia's foreign policy, the work directed at developing new, strong partnerships and existing achievements in this direction were discussed.

FM Mirzoyan emphasized that ensuring a sustainable security environment around Armenia based on unconditional respect for statehood, sovereignty and territorial integrity is one of the main goals of the Armenian foreign policy. The FM then answered questions from the audience.

Armenian, Norwegian foreign ministers make brief statements to the press

On February 7, within the framework of his official visit to the Kingdom of Norway, Armenia's Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan had a tête-à-tête meeting with Foreign Minister of Norway Espen Barth Eide at the Government Guest House.

The Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Norway continued their discussion in an enlarged format with the participation of delegations from both countries.

Following their bilateral meeting, the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Norway delivered brief remarks for the press, the Armenian Foreign Ministry said in a press release.

"From the Armenian side, I would like to assure that Armenia is interested in deepening bilateral relations with Norway. And Armenia is also grateful for Norway's continuous assistance to its development agenda. When it comes to the South Caucasian affairs, regional affairs, again, Norway has always shown interest in those.

And today I had the opportunity to share some updates from our region and



once again to assure that Armenia is committed to the peace agenda and is doing its best to establish a lasting peace and open an era of peace in the South Caucasus.

Armenia also attaches huge importance to its cooperation with Nordic-Baltic countries, including Norway. And we are also happy to see that there is reciprocal interest from Nordic-Baltic states as well.

So we are determined to explore new horizons in our relations, and we are happy to see that this approach is pretty much shared by the Norwegian side," the Armenian Foreign Ministry said.

The Foreign Minister of Norway Espen

Barth Eide in his speech noted that they have good relationship with Armenia, the people of Armenia, and with the Government.

"We believe that this Government has shown clear strategic leadership for the country in the interest of its people. Under very difficult circumstances, it has to be said, but really bravely looking forward and looking to Europe and looking for closer cooperation. And we are very happy to be a partner on that journey.

I told my good friend and colleague that Norway will remain an all-weather friend for Armenia and for your European aspirations. And we particularly talked about how we bilaterally, but also in the context of the Nordic-Baltic group, can support sharing our experiences and see how we can provide support on the several aspects of that journey, which is important for Armenia, but also important for the whole of Europe in a time of major change in our continent," the Foreign Minister of Norway said.

"Make Armenia-U.S. cooperation great in economy, trade, security" – FM Mirzoyan



Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat

Mirzoyan has said that Armenia is committed to deepening ties with the U.S.

"Delighted to accompany PM Nikol Pashinyan during his visit to Washington D.C.," FM Mirzoyan said on X. "Building on Armenia - U.S. strategic partnership, we continue efforts & important conversations to make Armenia-U.S. cooperation great in economy, trade, security & more.

With a strong foundation & wonderful

prospects, we are committed to deepening ties & seizing new opportunities for our people!"

PM Nikol Pashinyan participated in the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, D.C. and held multiple meetings with members of the Armenian-American community, U.S. senators and others.

Former Karabakh Defense Minister Jalal Harutyunyan sentenced to 5.5 years in prison

The Court of General Jurisdiction of the Syunik Region has sentenced former Commander of the Nagorno Karabakh Defense Army Lt. General Jalal Harutyunyan to five years and six months in prison.

Harutyunyan was found guilty of negligent attitude toward military service.



The prosecution had sought a six-year sentence, but the court reduced it to five years and six months.

He was accused of negligently causing significant losses to Armenian forces during the 2020 war.

Iran understands EU Monitoring Mission's presence in Armenia, clarifies Ambassador Sobhani



The EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia is not military in nature. Armenian

authorities have assured the Iranian side that the mission's purpose is solely to

maintain stability and prevent tension along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, a position that is understood by Iran, Iranian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Armenia Mehdi Sobhani commented on the extension of the mission's mandate.

"We respect the Armenian government's stance on diversifying its foreign policy. The Armenian authorities have informed us that Armenia's relations with the EU and several European countries could present opportunities for enhancing Armenian-Iranian cooperation. If Armenia succeeds in developing relations with the EU and use this situation to advance Armenian-Iranian ties, we view these efforts positively," stated Sobhani.

Pashinyan Hopes for Continued U.S. Efforts at Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has expressed hope that the new U.S. administration of President Donald Trump will not stay "indifferent" to his efforts to end Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan stressed the importance of continued U.S. involvement in the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process when he spoke at the Atlantic Council, a U.S. think-tank, during a visit to Washington on February 6.

"Following the campaign of President Trump, we saw that the peace agenda is very important for him and we see an opportunity to draw the attention of the current administration [to the fact] that peace in the South Caucasus is reachable and maybe more efforts or any efforts or real efforts from the administration will be successful," he said.

"It is very important not to express indifference by the international community [in connection] with our region because indifference could provoke escalation,"

he warned. "And at least it is very important for stability in our region to have real attention and to have a peace agenda of the South Caucasus on the priority list of the current U.S. administration and the international community."

During the U.S. presidential race, Trump blamed then President Joe Biden's administration for the 2023 forced exodus of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population and pledged to "protect persecuted Christians" and "restore peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan." But since taking office late last month, neither he nor members of his administration, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, have made any public statements on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

The main declared purpose of Pashinyan's visit to Washington, which began on February 3 is to attend the annual International Religious Freedom Summit taking place in the U.S. capital. He was not

scheduled to meet with Trump or senior administration officials. Earlier on Tuesday, the Armenian premier met with a group of U.S. lawmakers.

Just days before Trump's inauguration, Rubio's predecessor Antony Blinken signed with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan a document that upgraded U.S.-Armenian relations to "strategic partnership." Blinken described it as a "framework to expand our bilateral cooperation in a number of key areas," including defense and security. Trump administration officials have not yet commented on that document either.

The Armenian government has been seeking to deepen ties with the United States and the European Union amid a deepening rift with Russia, Armenia's longtime ally. Pashinyan said at the Atlantic Council that he remains committed to "diversifying our foreign relations in all fields."

Aram I calls on Trump to achieve release of Armenian POWs held in Azerbaijan, ensure peace

Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia has asked U.S. President Donald Trump to take action and achieve the release of Armenian prisoners unlawfully held in Azerbaijan, the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia has said.

In a letter congratulating Trump on his return to the White House, Aram I called on the U.S. President to reaffirm his campaigning stance regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians' right to return.

Aram I emphasized the need for a strong U.S. leadership to ensure regional peace, stressing that President Trump's involvement in the matter will strengthen



his role as a global peacemaker.

The Catholicos highlighted the protection of U.S. interests in holding Azerbaijan to account for violating international law, warning that continuous inaction could lead to further aggression against Armenians.

The release of prisoners and the acknowledgment of the rights of Karabakh Armenians are important steps for establishing fair and lasting peace, Aram I said.

Aram I thanked Trump for the obligations he assumed in the past and urged his administration to take decisive actions in these matters.

On November 1, 2024, Trump, the then-Republican candidate for the U.S. presidency, called Aram I to express support for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, reiterating their right to return through international guarantees and condemning the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Azerbaijan.

Armenian, Serbian foreign ministries' diplomatic schools to cooperate

The Secretaries General of the Foreign Ministries of Armenia and Serbia met in Yerevan on November 5.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, both sides highlighted the strong political dialogue between Armenia and Serbia.

In this context, the activities of the Embassy of Serbia in Yerevan and the Belgrade office of the Armenian Embassy in Prague were discussed.

The parties also explored opportunities for mutual assistance within the framework of cooperation with international organizations, the European Union, and addressed several issues related to

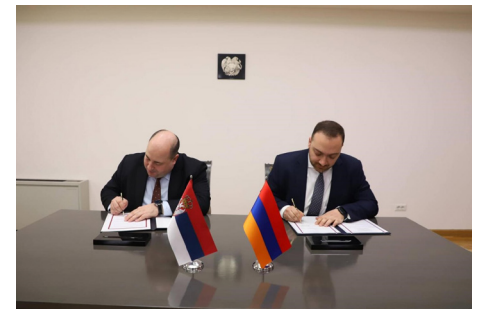
the regional agenda.

The source reported that the parties attached great importance to such meetings and consultations, as well as to a number of visits planned for the current year, considering them as a new impetus for strengthening and further developing bilateral relations.

The meeting also focused on prospects for mutual cooperation.

The Serbian side was briefed on Armenia's Crossroads of Peace project.

At the end of the meeting, the Secretaries General of the Foreign Ministries of Armenia and Serbia, David Karapetyan and Dušan Kozarev, signed a Memorandum of



Understanding "On Cooperation between the Diplomatic School of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia."

Speaker of Parliament, Luxembourg counterpart discuss Armenia-EU partnership

The delegation led by the Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia, Alen Simonyan, who is on an official visit to Luxembourg, visited the Chamber of Deputies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and met with its President, Claude Wiseler.

According to the Parliament's press service, the interlocutors emphasized the role of parliamentary diplomacy in fostering high-level political dialogue between

Armenia and Luxembourg, highlighting its importance in further strengthening bilateral relations.

The meeting also addressed various issues related to the Armenia-EU partnership. Speaker Simonyan underscored the significance of the official launch of the visa liberalization dialogue and welcomed the EU Council's recent decision to extend the mandate of the civilian mission

in Armenia for another two years.

For his part, Claude Wiseler reaffirmed Luxembourg's support for Armenia's European and democratic aspirations and expressed readiness to contribute to this process. The discussion also covered the peace treaty, regional developments, and other issues of mutual interest.

Construction of second bridge over the Araks River between Armenia and Iran deemed essential, says Iranian Ambassador

Statistical data on cross-border traffic and mutual visits of citizens between Armenia and Iran highlight the necessity of constructing a second bridge over the Araks River, according to Iranian Ambassador to Armenia, Mehdi Sobhani.

“Over the past ten months, there have been 231,293 mutual visits between the citizens of our countries, including 66,593 by Iranian citizens. In total, the number of departures and returns amounts to nearly half a million. This is a large number for a ten-month period. During the same period, 126,890 trucks also crossed the Armenian-Iranian border.



“We want this figure to reach one billion and later grow to three billion. Iran is now an observer member of the EAEU, which will contribute to the further development of trade. Therefore, both the Iranian and Armenian authorities support the construction of the second bridge. The design work has been completed, and we hope that construction will begin

soon,” noted the Ambassador. According to him, there is no other way than to promote and strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Citizens also travel by buses and personal vehicles. Currently, the trade turnover between our countries has reached 755 million dollars.”

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Controversy around income declaration system produced opposite effect, says minister

Minister of Economy Gevorg Papoyan said the controversy around the universal income declaration system has actually produced the opposite effect and more people have filed the declaration.

He said that over 4000 people filed the declaration in one month, and nearly each of them received 100,000 drams in returns. For comparison, he said that just over 3500 people filed declarations last year. He said that the controversy actually raised awareness among the public about

the benefits.

“The negative controversy around the income declaration has produced the opposite effect,” he said at a press conference.

Papoyan said the declaration is a positive instrument for citizens who have nothing to hide.

“We hadn’t succeeded in making everyone aware that if you don’t have anything to hide then filing a declaration is simply beneficial for you,” Papoyan said.

Papoyan emphasized that the



declaration system enables to return over 70 billion drams to citizens, whereas the system has been misrepresented as a taxation method.

Armenia’s defense capabilities should not be underestimated: Ambassador Sobhani

Iran will make every effort through diplomatic channels to prevent a new escalation in the South Caucasus, said Mehdi Sobhani, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Iran to Armenia, addressing the potential steps Iran would take if its red lines are crossed and Azerbaijan attacks Armenia.

“We support resolving controversial

issues through diplomatic dialogue and are opposed to solving regional issues through the use of force. We will exert our efforts, as well as leverage our relations with Azerbaijan and other countries, to prevent the Caucasus region from entering a new phase of tension.

“The use of force in opening the corridor has no justification. Iran shares

Armenia’s view that roads passing through the territory of any country should operate under the sovereignty of those countries. This is also an internationally recognized right. If aggression is carried out against Armenia, I believe that Armenia will be able to defend itself. Armenia’s defense capabilities are not weak, and these capabilities should not be underestimated,” said Ambassador Sobhani.

Armenia economic indicators continued growth in 2024

The 2024 economic activity index in Armenia grew 8% compared to 2023, according to official statistics.

Below is the YoY data for the reporting period published by the Statistical Committee.

Industrial production output grew 4,7% and amounted to nearly 3 trillion drams.

Gross agricultural production volume grew 1,6% and amounted to more than 958 billion drams.

Construction grew 14,5% and amounted to more than 709,4 billion drams.

Trade turnover grew 17% and amounted to nearly 6,4 trillion drams.

Services (without trade) grew 10,6% and amounted to nearly 3,5 trillion drams.

The consumer price index grew 0,3%.

Electrical energy production increased 6,5% (nearly 9,4 billion kWh). The figure includes volumes generated by autonomous producers.

The average monthly salary grew 6,4% amounting to 287,172 drams.

Armenia's 2024 foreign trade grew 41,5%, amounting to more than \$30,1 billion.



Exports grew 53,1%, amounting to more than \$13,1 billion.

Imports grew 33,8%, amounting to over \$17 billion.

Armenian Government Reluctant To Deal With Strike At Mining Giant

(RFE/RL) - The Armenian government remained on February 6 in no rush to try to end a continuing general strike that has paralyzed the country's largest metallurgical enterprise and number one corporate taxpayer.

Economy Minister Gevorg Papoyan said only that the government is concerned about the weeklong strike action and hopes that production operations at the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine (ZCMC) will resume "as soon as possible."

"Naturally, we are concerned because the fact that the leader of Armenia's industry doesn't operate for a week will obviously affect our economic indicators and tax receipts," Papoyan told reporters.

But he stressed that it is up to the company's management and workers as well as a national trade union to find a mutually acceptable solution.

The government is reluctant to intervene in the dispute despite holding a 22 percent stake in the ZCMC. The mining giant employing 4,600 people paid 100 billion drams (\$250 million) in various taxes last year. The rest of its stock is owned by entities linked to Russian billionaire Roman Trotsenko.

Several hundred ZCMC workers began the strike on January 30 to demand a 50 percent pay rise and better working conditions. Their representatives and senior ZCMC executives again failed to reach an agreement during more talks held on Wednesday evening.

"They [the management] refused to even symbolically raise wages, demanding that [the striking workers] immediately return to work," one of those representatives, Vahe Mkhitarian, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

"We will stay here as long as necessary," said another worker blocking the entrance to the company's premises in the southeastern town of Kajaran. "If necessary, we will stay here for months, until they meet our just demands."

The management denounced the strike as illegal at the weekend, threatening its participants with "legal proceedings." It argued that ZCMC workers already earn significantly more than the national average wage of 291,000 drams (\$730) per month.

The ZCMC spokesman, Ara Margarian, confirmed on Thursday that the company has sent letters to two dozen striking workers demanding explanations for their walkout and disruption of production operations. He acknowledged that this may be a prelude to their dismissal.

Eduard Pahlevanian, the head of a labor union representing people working in Armenia's mining and jewelry industries, said the protesting workers risk violating Armenian labor legislation. Pahlevanian said they have rejected the union's proposal to suspend the strike and give the company two more weeks to consider their demands. He warned that they and their colleagues could now be left without their sole source of income.

"The combine must definitely operate," added the union leader. "Its stoppage is a disaster for Armenia in the strategic and all other senses."

For their part, organizers of the strike questioned Pahlevanian's impartiality, saying that he seems to be siding with the company management in the dispute.

In what may have been a related development, two groups of men brawled in Kajaran on Wednesday. Local police intervened to stop the fight, detaining eight men in the process. Three of them remained under arrest on Wednesday, with the Investigative Committee conducting a formal inquiry into "hooliganism" involving firearms or other objects.

According to some media reports, the violence broke out when some of the striking workers physically stopped their colleagues from returning to work. Mkhitarian insisted, however, that the incident is not connected with the strike.

Meanwhile, the ZCMC insisted that "the vast majority" of its personnel remains opposed to the strike. It claimed that in recent days some of those workers made three attempts to return to work but faced threats, intimidation and even violence from several dozen protesters.

"The Company has already filed three criminal reports with Armenian law-enforcement agencies regarding those facts," it said in a statement. "Some of the individuals obstructing the Company's re-opening have no connection with the Company at all."

“Religious freedom is a very important part of democracy in Armenia,” - Pashinyan at IRF Summit



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan participated in the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, D.C., where he delivered a speech and answered questions of the speaker.

The Prime Minister's Office published the transcript of the speech and Q&A:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear participants of the International Religious Freedom Summit,

It is an honor for me to have this opportunity to share my views on this very important topic.

From my perspective, religious freedom is about democracy. There can be no democracy without religious freedom, because being free means to be free in one's perception of God and one's perception of religion.

But to be free, on the other hand, means tolerance of the religious views of others, and one without the other can lead to religious fanaticism and extremism.

To believe in God or not is a matter of personal faith and personal freedom. How to believe in God, through which religion, is a matter of personal faith and personal freedom.

Of course, the United States is an exemplary and leading country in ensuring religious freedom for all religions. It was with this understanding that Armenia joined the US-inspired International Alliance for Religious Freedom and Belief, in February 2020, during the first administration of President Trump.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main religious institution of the Republic of Armenia is the Armenian Apostolic Church, and this is natural, because Armenia is the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion,

and this was done back in 301 by the Armenian King Tiridates III. Since then, the Armenian Apostolic Church has played a significant role for our people.

In Armenia, we also have the Armenian Catholic Church, we also have the Armenian Missionary Association of America, which operate freely and enjoy great respect in our society. There are also other religious organizations based on Christianity, and they operate freely.

I would also like to mention that Armenia is home to the largest Yazidi community in the world, and the world's largest Yazidi temple was recently built in Armenia. We have the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Assyrian Church, Russian Molokans, and pagans in Armenia.

The Jewish community of Armenia, although small, plays an important role in our diverse society with its spiritual life centered around the Yerevan Synagogue.

In the center of our capital, Yerevan, we have a functioning Muslim mosque, which is a very important part of our cultural heritage.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Religious freedom is a very important part of democracy in Armenia. In terms of regional relations, three of the four neighboring countries – Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan – have predominantly Muslim populations. Our other neighbor, Georgia, has a predominantly Christian population with a large Muslim community. This shows how important religious tolerance is for the stability of our region.

Fortunately, despite political and ethnic contradictions, we have a good tradition of religious tolerance and respect in our region, and this makes lasting peace and stability in the South Caucasus more realistic. And we hope to transform our regional disputes into regional dialogue, and religious freedom is one of the tools that can make this a reality.

Thank you for your attention.”

Prime Minister Pashinyan then answered questions from speaker David Curry.

David Curry - Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for being here today, it is an

honor for us. The most critical question today is how to achieve peace in the complex neighborhood you live in. I would like to congratulate you on the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative. Tell me, please, what are the prospects for the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan - Thank you once again. This is a really good opportunity and an honor for me to have this conversation. Yes, we have initiated a program that we have called “Crossroads of Peace”. It is first of all about opening our regional communications, but it is not only about communications, because if we look at the issue from the perspective of religious tolerance, it is also about communication between people, because when transport communications are open, this is first of all an opportunity for people to interact with each other. This is a very important factor for a sustainable and lasting peace. This is an open proposal addressed to the countries of our region, and of course, we are working with each of them to implement this project.

David Curry - It's amazing. For millennia, Armenia has been in the midst of this crossroads of Abrahamic religions. Beyond economics, how can Armenia culturally become part of an interfaith dialogue between Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others?

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan - I have already mentioned that we have different religious communities in our country. Of course, there is no tension between different religious communities in our country. Of course, there are certain forces, as everywhere, that are trying to take provocative steps from outside, but our institutions are reacting effectively to them, not allowing anyone to sow tension between religious communities.

A real dialogue is taking place in our country. As I have mentioned, we have the largest Yezidi community in the world, and this community is a very important part of our country, our national heritage. Of course, we have huge respect for Muslims, Jews, and other religious groups. I have already

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page 8 ➡ said that the largest religious institution in Armenia is the Armenian Apostolic Church, but we also have the Armenian Catholic Church, and other churches. This is a very important tradition for us.

David Curry - It has been years since Armenia transitioned from being part of an empire to becoming an independent state. How have the Armenian people emotionally accepted the fact that they have become a truly independent state while remaining interconnected with the rest of the region?

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan - You know, this is a really important issue. Now we are trying to bring the ideas of statehood, independence closer to our people. Because you are right, these are absolutely different things when you are a citizen of an empire and when you are a citizen of an independent and democratic country. For a long time, for several centuries, Armenia did not have an independent statehood, and 30 years ago we began to build our independence, and now we are in the process of creating a sustainable and institutional democracy. It is not an easy path, but it is extremely important. But we are doing it, as I mentioned, we are a striving democracy, which shows that democracy has a great future in Armenia.

David Curry - We had a short conversation backstage and I learned that you like to ride a bike, which I myself used to do years ago. I have been to Armenia several times, I have seen that beautiful country, I have even glanced at the disputed territories, where tragic events have taken place in recent years. I would

like to see Armenia as a travel country, where people would come... What kind of future awaits you, do you think Armenia will one day become an attractive country for traveling?

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan - Yes, of course. By the way, we are working on organizing a professional tournament, maybe it will be called Tour to Armenia...

David Curry - Can I get royalties for that?

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan - Yes, of course. But organizing a professional tournament will take time, maybe several years, that is why we have decided to organize an amateur cycling race from the south to the north of Armenia this year, and I invite you all to participate. It will be a very good opportunity to see the beautiful nature of the Republic of Armenia, and we would like to see you all in our country.

David Curry - Thank you for coming here. Your attendance means that you believe in religious freedom, that everyone has the right to practice their religion. What is your final message to these people who have different beliefs, but believe that people have the right to practice the faith that comes from their hearts. What would you say to encourage them?

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan - You know, for me the values of the Holy Bible, the New Testament are very important and actually the beginning of my political activity was based on it. When I was in prison, as a political prisoner, the Bible was the force that helped me overcome that ordeal. Of course, it is very important to be guided by the Bible, for me, in particular, the New Testament, how

to behave in everyday work.

Of course, it is not easy, particularly in politics, but we are trying to have value-based policies, be it domestic policy, economic policy, foreign policy. For this, religious tolerance and freedom are very important. It is very difficult to imagine democracy without religious freedom. Thus, we see Armenia as a democratic country, a real democratic country, with a vivid political dialogue, regional dialogue, dialogue with different people, countries and civilizations.

We will work to make Armenia a very bright place for different people to come, to engage in dialogue, to ride bikes, to enjoy nature, food and see the holy places. Our religious center is Etchmiadzin, and as I mentioned, in 301 AD Christianity was adopted by the Armenian king, which was the first time that any country adopted Christianity as a state religion. All the places that are connected with these events are now in Armenia, they are holy places, and I invite you to visit them, and in Khor Virap, where our first patriarch was detained as a Christian, it was persecution, but after some time the king realized that Christianity is the best religion, and he made the appropriate decision. So I invite you all to see all the holy places and interconnect with this very rich and important history.

David Curry - I have been to some of them, they are very beautiful holy places. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for your commitment to peace.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan - Thank you.

Quincy Institute Vice President comments on impact of Middle East developments on South Caucasus

Co-founder and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft Trita Parsi has given an interview to Armenpress about the impact of the Middle East developments on South Caucasus, Iran's policies in various directions, as well as the U.S. interests in South Caucasus and particularly in Armenia.

What impact could the latest developments in the Middle East have on the South Caucasus? How does Iran view the changing dynamics in the South Caucasus, especially considering Azerbaijan's actions in Nagorno-Karabakh

and its growing ties with Israel?

There are several factors involved here. On the one hand, without a doubt, the Iranians have suffered some significant blows and already a weaker Iranian position is part of the reason why they essentially caved to the pressure on Armenia and kind of pulled back. Of course, Armenia's own failure to stand up against Azerbaijan, you know, paved the way for that. But under previous circumstances, if both Russia and Iran hadn't become weakened, I don't think the outcome would have looked the way it did.

So, on the one hand, you already have that. On the other hand, you have a scenario in which Iranians have to rethink exactly how they want to pursue their strategy at this point. They made a lot of investments all the way out to Lebanon. Whereas something much closer to them is now at risk. And are they going to be reassigning priority? Are they going to try to double down and regain Syria, or instead move resources to make sure that their interest in the Caucasus is protected? That would require a very different approach ➡ page 10

page 9 in many different ways. Such an approach will probably see Iran's involvement in the Israel-Palestine theatre as a diversion, not helpful, etc.

Then you have a third factor which is whereas Iranian-Turkish relations have always been characterized by a significant degree of tension, it has also been characterized by an almost unprecedented level of maturity. In a regional context, this is a relationship in which there have been, I think, I counted 19 wars between the Safavids and the Ottomans. And that's just that period. That's not going back to Cyrus the Great taking Lydia and all of those different things back then. So, there is a realisation on both sides to respect the other side as a major power. You cannot have a maximalist approach. You have to be pragmatic, and they have compartmentalized their relations. They can quarrel, even fight in Syria, at least earlier, and collaborate somewhere else. They don't allow one single issue to define the entire relationship. But there's been a significant shift in the balance now. On the one hand, what the Azeris have done in Nagorno Karabakh and on the other hand, what the Turks have now done [in Syria], which I think to a certain extent was accidental, they thought, HDS thought they would take Aleppo and that would be it. Instead, they take all of Syria. What does this do to elder guns? Ambitions? What does this do to fear on the Iranian side that always existed, which is that Erdogan is a Neo-Ottoman and that there's a real effort to be able to restore that Turkish position and squeeze out Iran simultaneously. And if that is the case, will this now translate into a much more aggressive position by the Turks in the Caucasus? And how does that affect these other two variables in the sense of can the Iranians afford to still try to be very active in Lebanon? Are you going to see a much more aggressive Azerbaijan? And from my distance, watching this, my impression has been that the Turks obviously are supporting the Azeris. But the Azeris are more aggressive than the Turks are, and [for Turkey] going forward is not necessarily intended.

Moreover, you have another aspect here that is complicating things further. The Azeris are completely dependent on the Israelis militarily. They're very close to the Israelis and the Turks and the Israelis are bumping up against each other in Palestine. It's going to require a lot of finesse for there not to be some sort of if not confrontation, but certainly heightened tensions there.

How will that affect Turkey's approach too?

I've heard Turkish, not officials, but

people close to AKP complain that Azeris are "so stupidly Pro Israel", or "childishly Pro Israel" or something like that. They have a degree of frustration and unease with that as well. So, within all of these, the Iranians nevertheless have weaker cards than they did before. And areas that they thought were calm have now become activated. Areas where they thought that they were safe, such as Syria, have been lost. And then a source factor in all of this, which is that at the end of the day, the most important thing for the Iranians right now is going to be to make a deal with the US. So that will take even more priority, but it will also be interesting to see where the US is on this issue. Because the US may end up being closer to Iran and Armenia on this issue than to Turkey and Azerbaijan. So, yes there's a disruptiveness in the region as a whole, and then massive disruptiveness coming in with the American angle that creates both challenges and opportunities.

The U.S. has traditionally focused on energy routes and NATO allies, such as Turkey. What interests does the U.S. pursue in the South Caucasus today, particularly regarding Armenia's border security?

I think it's from the Biden administration. This was a political game that gave him another opportunity to be a problem in Russia's 'near border' area, which the Biden administration, with or without Ukraine, saw as valuable. I'm not so sure it's as valuable to Trump, to the Trump people, but also because it's not valuable they may not pay attention to it at all, and the old policy may continue by inertia.

I think it's very unclear, I've not heard anyone make any particular comments about this, and what Trump is going to do regarding Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Can we clearly define the specific interests that the US is pursuing in the South Caucasus, and namely on the borderline of Armenia?

Well, I think one thing that is definitely in favor of the Armenians here is that the Trump crowd have a lot of people who would define themselves as Christian nationalists. And I don't really know what it is. I don't know if they know what it means as well, but it means that the Christian-Muslim variable in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which I think was a complete non-issue for the Biden administration may very well become a rather potent issue for the Trump administration if they pay attention to it.

I mean this is one of those things that has tended to be somewhat consistent with the Trump crowd, whether they act on it consistently is a different story. They don't act on almost anything consistently

so that's a non-issue in some ways. But I would suspect that the ANCA and some of the other Armenian groups will take significant advantage of this and they definitely have a tremendous amount of influence on some of these issues, so I wouldn't be surprised to see some potential changes here, but the first question is will it even be a priority?

Even many Iranian experts believe that the position of the Azerbaijani authorities has drastically changed and is no longer constructive, particularly after the developments in the Middle East. What is your opinion on this?

I think part of the reason why the Iranians right now are trying to improve relations with Azerbaijan is precisely to prevent others from doing stupid things.

Because they can do stupid things?

Yes, absolutely. Aliyev's government is not viewed as a mature actor by his enemies, or by his friends. That's something almost everyone can agree upon. And of course, the fact that he is so dependent and so close to Israel also increases the likelihood that he will be under pressure by the Israelis to do things as part of the larger Iran-Israel conflict.

Another very important issue, which is directly linked to Iran is the so-called Zangezur Corridor issue. In your view, how determined is Iran to prevent any changes to its border with Armenia? How would Iran respond if Azerbaijan attempted to implement the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" project, which President Aliyev repeatedly mentions as a threat? In other words, is the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" a red line for Iran?

Not really my area of expertise, but I would speculate and say that it's actually either a red line or as close to a red line as possible. Part of the reason I say that is because historically it has been a red line. Yes, Iran is weakened but if Iran backtracks from that red line, the fear will be that a lot of other things that were neither red lines or didn't even have to be red lines —because they were not even up for discussion— would now become up for discussion. And, as a result, already we've seen that the Iranians had to retreat from Syria. Also, if this ends up becoming a cascade, it becomes very dangerous. It's one thing to do a strategic retreat and stop there. But if it becomes an uncontrollable cascade, which it very well may end up becoming if Iran suddenly starts to lose on several different fronts, then I think the Iranians will be put in a position in which they would have to put a lot of resources at least in one of these arenas to turn the momentum around.

Congressional Armenian Caucus Leaders Urge Rubio to Hold Azerbaijan Accountable, Back Artsakh Armenians' Right of Return

Text of the Congressional Armenian Caucus Letter to Secretary of State Rubio

February 6, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio Secretary of State

U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to offer congratulations on your recent confirmation and share a list of bipartisan priorities for the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues that we hope to collaborate on during the 119th Congress.

One of our main requests is that the United States continue to build off the strategic partnership agreement signed with Armenia on January 15, 2025. That agreement reflects the efforts made by a broad bipartisan coalition of Members of Congress who have cultivated this important bilateral relationship across several Administrations. It demonstrates the growth and significant reforms the Armenian government has made since the Velvet Revolution in 2018. It also shows the promise the nation has as a reliable American partner in the South Caucasus. Most importantly, the strategic partnership opens the door for closer bilateral ties between our countries, unlocks further American investments in the economic future of Armenia, and creates an overall stronger bond between our people.

Armenia faces many geographic and political challenges as a landlocked country blockaded by Turkey and Azerbaijan. These obstacles have long hindered its economic potential. The United States has an incredible opportunity to shape the future of the region by advancing Armenia's energy security and economic resilience aligned with its "Crossroads of Peace" vision for sustainable peace. Investing in this transition will allow Armenia to fulfill its goal of diversifying its energy production

and pivoting away from Russian energy and trade dependence. Specifically, we ask the State Department to accelerate negotiations already underway on a civil nuclear cooperation agreement, or a 123 Agreement, which will provide Armenia with a strong platform for enhanced energy cooperation with our country. Moving ahead with such an agreement in an expeditious timeframe will translate to substantial American trade and business prospects in the region, while providing Armenia with independent, secure energy for the future.

We also request the State Department build on our current defense engagements with Armenia, which include the bilateral peacekeeping exercise Eagle Partner and support from State's Export Control and Border Security program and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to develop Armenia's border security capabilities. We ask you to fully consider the Armenian government's outstanding request for purely defensive equipment and training to protect its territorial integrity, including anti-aircraft and anti-drone equipment. Providing our partner with the capabilities to guard its borders is critical at a time when it faces continued threats by Azerbaijani troops stationed in its sovereign territory and violent rhetoric from President Ilham Aliyev. We urge the United States to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its war crimes and ethnic-cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) – via enforcement of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, the application of Global Magnitsky sanctions, and the denial of EXIM Bank financing of dual-use sales to Azerbaijan. A durable and dignified peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan requires strict accountability and must be founded upon the collected and protected return of Armenians to their indigenous Nagorno-Karabakh homeland.

To that end, we urge the State Department to remain comprehensively engaged in the peace process and help secure guarantees for the territorial integrity of

Armenia, bring an end to the forced blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan, and facilitate better trade and transportation links in the region. A final agreement must also secure the release of all POWs and hostages, including Nagorno-Karabakh's political leaders – who are unjustly detained in Azerbaijan – and safeguard ancient Armenian cultural sites in Nagorno-Karabakh and elsewhere in the region that are under immediate threat.

Finally, we draw your attention to the challenges facing the Armenian community in Syria and more widely in the region. Armenians and Orthodox Christians have a long and rich heritage in the region tracing back millennia, which is increasingly being challenged on several fronts.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. We appreciate your long track record of supporting peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus and the attention you have given to bolstering the Republic of Armenia's ongoing democratic and economic reforms throughout your career. A lasting, equitable peace in the Caucasus is critical to the United States's strategic long-term interests in the region. And there is a once-in-a-generation chance to bring peace and prosperity to a region that has seen far too much instability and bloodshed over the last several decades.

We stand ready to work with you to craft a policy in the South Caucasus region that is consistent with U.S. national security, universal principles of human rights, and our democratic values. Our hope is to further discuss these issues with you and your team at the earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

FRANK PALLONE

Member of Congress

GUS M. BILIRAKIS

Member of Congress

BRAD SHERMAN

Member of Congress

DAVID G. VALADAO

Member of Congress

Azerbaijan tries to normalize ties with Iran to realize expectations regarding Armenia, says analyst

Azerbaijan is trying to normalize its relations with Iran to pursue its goals in terms of Armenia, according to a political analyst.

Expert Armen Petrosyan says that amid the active topic of unblocking regional connections in South Caucasus, where Azerbaijan has its special interests, the latter needs a positive environment with Iran to realize them.

Petrosyan made the comments after Azeri President Ilham Aliyev's assistant Hikmet Hajiyev's visit to Iran.

"Over the course of the last month, the Azerbaijani tactics in its relations with Iran implied a tactic of manageable tension in the region also in the relations with neighboring countries, in order to show that Azerbaijan is able to simultaneously deal with several directions, Armenia, Russia, France, Iran, and conduct political and propaganda resistance. Naturally such a conduct sends signals beyond the region, particularly to the new U.S. administration, because new developments are taking place and the topic of unblocking regional connections in the South Caucasus is increasingly becoming more active, where Azerbaijan has its special interests and in order to realize them it needs at least a manageable, positive atmosphere with Iran," Petrosyan said.

Citing the latest statements made by Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev, the analyst warned that Azerbaijan has not abandoned what it describes as the "Zangezur corridor" project.

Petrosyan didn't rule out that the activation of the topic of unblocking could be linked to Turkiye's interests and its growing efforts. Since Azerbaijan continues to expect an extraterritorial solution and wants unilateral concessions by Armenia, then, according to Petrosyan, Baku will pursue a tactic on two levels, just like before.

"First is the language of threats, meaning if the Armenian side doesn't meet Azerbaijan's demands, Azerbaijan still states that it will achieve its goal at any cost, and second is the language of blackmail, meaning, if the Armenian side doesn't agree then Azerbaijan would use Iranian infrastructures. Azerbaijan can't implement its project on neither level without the existence of a positive relationship environment with Iran," Petrosyan said.

One of the key actors who is against the use of force is Iran. And in the second case, an alternative road would be provided to Azerbaijan again by Iran, thus Azerbaijan needs positive partnership with Iran for the resolution of the matter. That's why

Azerbaijan tried to mitigate the tensions by sending top official Hajiyev to Iran.

"Of course, Iran is not ready for the implementation of the Azerbaijani project, but on the other hand we must realize that the Iranian side's opportunities are somewhat limited. At this moment Iran has a highly important task, as long as the fundamental changes continue taking place in the world Iran will try to keep manageable the existing problems in all regions in its neighborhood, to not allow military escalation or foreign intervention. In this context a positive environment in the relations with Azerbaijan is important for Iran too, which would allow to find solutions for the problems through direct dialogue, especially when in conflict situations Azerbaijan is acting far more brazenly and undesirable actors for Iran could intervene in them," the analyst said.

Petrosyan said that although the Azerbaijani side would try to convince Iran to have a pro-Azerbaijani stance regarding the corridor, the Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated during the meeting with Hajiyev that Tehran's red lines remain the same and that the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty of regional countries is of principled and vital significance for Iran.

33rd anniversary of formation of Armenian Armed Forces marked in Greece

The 33rd anniversary of the establishment of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia was celebrated at the Hellenic Armed Forces Officers' Club.

Attending the event were the Minister of National Defense of the Greek Republic, Nikos Dendias, senior officers of the Ministry of National Defense and the General Staff, high-ranking officials of other state bodies, members of the Greek Parliament, more than twenty ambassadors and diplomats accredited to Greece, representatives of the Armenian community of Greece.

The attendees of the event were greeted by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to Greece, Tigran Mkrtchyan, and Lieutenant Colonel Armen Mirzabekian, representative of the Armed Forces of

the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia in Greece.

Ambassador Mkrtchyan congratulated the Armed Forces of Armenia on the 33rd anniversary, underlining that the Armenian Army is one of the most important factors of Armenia's sovereignty and independence and that the more self-sufficient and powerful the army, the more self-reliant and powerful is the state. The Ambassador added that the reforms and modernization programs of the Armed Forces aim to strengthen the country's defense capability.

The Ambassador emphasized the friendly relations between Armenia and Greece and the close relationship between the Ministries of Defense and the General

Staffs of the two countries, as well as the cooperation that has expanded further in recent years, from regular high-level meetings to special military exercises. In this context, he placed special emphasis on the trilateral cooperation between Armenia, Greece and Cyprus.

The Ambassador expressed special gratitude to the General Staff and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for responding to Armenia's request to address the damage caused by floods in the northern and northeastern regions of Armenia and for providing three bridges to Armenia.

The event ended with music by the "Nostalgia" Philharmonic Orchestra and a reception.

Europa Nostra: Arakelots Monastery and Settlement in Armenia listed among Europe's most endangered sites

Arakelots Monastery and Settlement in Armenia has been named among the 14 most endangered sites in Europa.

The 14 monuments and heritage sites in Europe shortlisted for this year's edition of the 7 Most Endangered Programme were announced today by Europa Nostra, the leading European heritage civil society network, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) Institute. Since its launch in 2013, the programme has become a leading civil society initiative dedicated to safeguarding Europe's endangered heritage, acting as advocate and catalyst for rallying the necessary public and private support, including funding.

The 14 endangered heritage sites, spanning 14 European countries, were shortlisted by an Advisory Panel comprising European experts in history, archaeology, architecture, project analysis, and finance. The nominations of the sites for the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2025 were made or endorsed by members of Europa Nostra, as well as by members of the European Heritage Alliance.

The shortlisted sites were selected on the basis of their heritage significance and cultural value, as well as the serious danger that they are facing today. The level of engagement of local communities and the commitment of public and private stakeholders to saving these sites were considered crucial added values. Another selection criterion was the potential of each of the sites to act as a catalyst for sustainable socioeconomic development.

Arakelots Monastery and Settlement

Hidden within the forests of the Tavush region in northern Armenia, the Arakelots Monastery and Settlement is a gem of medieval heritage. This ensemble of religious and secular monuments located two kilometers west of the Acharkut village, along the Kirants River, provides invaluable insights into the cultural and economic life of the 13th century. Its remote setting, coupled with its proximity to the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, underscores its



historical and geopolitical significance.

The monastery, fortified with imposing ramparts and watchtowers, features the main church, a unique domed hall adorned with delicate architectural details, and an adjoining narthex with a traditional Armenian "hazarashen" roof structure. Notable among its treasures is a fresco of Saint Sargis, a rare depiction of the Armenian saint, reflecting the monastery's dedication to Armenian Apostolic traditions. The remnants of the settlement include a pair of churches, a caravanserai, an oil mill, and the Sranots Bridge, which collectively narrate the story of a vibrant medieval trade hub on the Armenian Silk Road.

Arakelots flourished under the Georgian Zakarian and Mongol rule, benefiting from its exemption from taxation as a monastic estate. This symbiotic relationship between the religious and secular domains fostered prosperity and left a remarkable legacy of Armenian-Georgian cultural influences. Despite its historical prominence, the site has been abandoned since the 17th century, remaining largely unexplored.

Today, the Arakelots Monastery and Settlement faces significant threats. Encroaching vegetation, structural decay, and climate-related hazards, including excessive rainfall and mudslides, jeopardize its preservation. Additionally, the area's location in a seismically active zone has left its monuments vulnerable, with visible earthquake damage to key structures. Human-made impacts, such as graffiti and the construction of two large picnic areas and a lack of formal conservation, further exacerbate the situation. Furthermore, the

presence of large bat colonies in the monastery creates a need to balance cultural heritage preservation with wildlife protection.

The nomination of the Arakelots Monastery and Settlement to the 7 Most Endangered Programme is led by an Individual Member of Europa Nostra, Dr. Jasmine Dum-Tragut from the Armenian Studies Division

at the Centre for the Studies of the Christian East of the University of Salzburg in Austria. The nomination is supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of the Republic of Armenia, the Municipality of Acharkut, Blue Shield Armenia, and the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. Additional expertise comes from the University for Continuing Education in Krems, Austria, ensuring a collaborative effort for the conservation, research, and sustainable development of the site.

Proposed actions include holistic research, cleaning and conservation of the Arakelots Monastery and Settlement, alongside the development of sustainable ecotourism. Local stakeholders, including academic institutions and civil society organizations, are integral to these efforts. Educational initiatives and trail improvements aim to reconnect the local population with this forgotten medieval treasure heritage, fostering pride and appreciation for the region's cultural identity.

The Advisory Panel of the 7 Most Endangered Programme remarked: "Arakelots is an outstanding medieval ensemble that reflects the cultural hybridity and peaceful coexistence of its era. Its precarious state due to geopolitical tensions and environmental challenges calls for immediate action. The restoration and promotion of the Arakelots Monastery and Settlement can act as a catalyst for reconciliation, regional stability, and sustainable development, offering a pathway for transforming heritage into a resource for peace and progress."

TUMO expands in Germany: Third center opens, three more on the way

TUMO continues to expand in Germany, bringing its innovative education model in technology and design to even more teenagers. With support from Germany's state-owned investment and development bank KfW, along with other national and local organizations, TUMO Hirschaid was officially launched just days ago, joining the existing centers in Berlin and Mannheim. More centers are also on the way in Lüdenscheid, Saarbrücken, and Essen.

TUMO Hirschaid: A New Hub for Innovation

TUMO Hirschaid officially opened its doors on January 31! The center can welcome 500 students each week, with 200 already diving into programming, animation, drawing, robotics, 3D modeling, game development, photography, and filmmaking from day one.

Funded by Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research and KfW Bank, the Center is located within the MINT-Zentrum Hirschaid. True to TUMO's signature style, the space features a bold and creative interior, complete with inflatable seating and ceilings designed by renowned

Austrian architect Thomas Herzog.

TUMO Berlin: The First TUMO Center in Germany

TUMO's journey in Germany started with TUMO Berlin, which opened its doors in October 2020. Today, it's one of TUMO's biggest international centers, with over 1,000 students diving into 10 innovative learning areas every week. Located in Berlin's historic Charlottenburg district and backed by KfW Bank, the 2,000-square-meter space is a vibrant hub where creativity and innovation thrive.

TUMO Berlin has already built a tight-knit community of talented students and graduates—young, driven professionals ready to make an impact.

TUMO Mannheim: Where Music Meets Technology

Since its opening in March 2024, TUMO Mannheim has been welcoming 1,000 students each week, offering eight learning areas: programming, music, robotics, 3D modeling, filmmaking, game development, graphic design, and photography.

One of the center's standout features is its state-of-the-art music and recording

studio—a nod to the city's deep-rooted musical heritage.

TUMO Mannheim became a reality thanks to the support of key partners: the Dietmar Hopp Foundation, the City of Mannheim, Starkmacher, KfW Bank, and Next Mannheim.

Upcoming Centers: Lüdenscheid, Saarbrücken, and Essen

TUMO's expansion in Germany is moving full speed ahead with three new centers set to open soon in Lüdenscheid, Saarbrücken, and Essen. This growth highlights TUMO's mission to create life-changing learning experiences for teens while further cementing the program's reputation—born in Armenia—on the global education stage.

TUMO is a global educational network offering a free after-school program where teenagers take charge of their learning, exploring the intersection of technology and design through hands-on experience. Born in Armenia and now expanding worldwide, TUMO is redefining how teens learn—outside the classroom, beyond textbooks, and straight into the future.

Displaced by wildfires, unique Armenian painting collection now set to open in Fresno

Internationally recognized brothers Paylak and Kayts Vanikian will showcase an exhibition featuring over 60 oil paintings on high-quality linen, which kicks off with an opening reception on Feb. 5, [Fresnoland](#) reports.

The brothers will attend the reception, which will take place from 3 to 6 p.m. at the Armenian Museum of Fresno, located in the UC Center. The event will feature traditional Armenian finger foods, such as Lahmacun flatbread and Spinach Borek dip.

The brothers will also be available throughout the weekend for visitors to meet the artists and discuss their work. The exhibition will run through Feb. 28.

The exhibition was originally

scheduled for a museum in Southern California but was relocated due to the region's ongoing wildfires.

Born in Yerevan, Armenia, brothers Paylak and Kayts are internationally acclaimed artists whose works have been exhibited across Europe, the United States, and the Middle East.

Paylak, a contemporary artist, is known for his vivid storytelling and deep connection to his Armenian heritage, while Kayts, a realist painter, transcends traditional canvas art, through capturing the human condition through color, texture, and tone.

Varoujan Der Simonian, director of the Armenian Museum of Fresno, said that a friend of his who owns a gallery in Carmel,

California, contacted him to ask if the exhibit could be moved to Fresno. The setup process took about two weeks, including writing a press release, creating promotional postcards, shipping the paintings, and organizing the reception.

Der Simonian said the opportunity was "too good to pass up," especially since he was already familiar with Kayts' paintings from a previous group exhibition he helped organize at the Armenian Museum of Fresno.

He also said that Paylak and Kayts' paintings will "bring something different from the norm" to the Armenian Museum. This includes Paylak's "Bird and Girl" and Kayts' "Lady and Child" paintings.

Anora wins Best Picture at 2025 Critics Choice Awards

Anora took home the top prize at the 2025 Critics Choice Awards, beating out fellow nominees *A Complete Unknown*, *The Brutalist*, *Conclave*, *Dune: Part Two*, *Emilia Pérez*, *Nickel Boys*, *Sing Sing*, *The Substance* and *Wicked*, PEOPLE reports.

Accepting the Best Picture award, writer-director Sean Baker called the win “so unexpected.”

“When those who dedicate their lives to their love of film and film criticism and film journalism, when they see something positive in your work, just a little, it means everything in the world,” PEOPLE quoted the filmmaker as saying. “So thank you guys so much.”

Baker continued, “We made this little film — it was \$6 million. That’s

micro-budget these days. We shot on film. We shot in New York City. That all happened because of my incredible cast and crew who roughed it up. We put every dollar up on that screen.”

Anora stars Mikey Madison as a New York City sex worker whose whirlwind Cinderella story after meeting and marrying Ivan (Mark Eydelshteyn), the young son of a Russian billionaire family, takes a turn for the worse when Ivan’s parents find out about the marriage.

Anora was nominated for seven total awards at the Critics Choice Awards, including nominations for Madison in best actress, Yura Borisov in best supporting actor, the entire cast in best acting ensemble, Baker for best director and best



original screenplay and best editing, PEOPLE reported.

Anora cast includes Armenian actors Vache Tovmasyan and Karen Karagulyan.

Anora has received six nominations at the upcoming 97th Academy Awards.

The film has received several accolades, including the Palme d’Or.

Paris hosts conference on Armenia’s intangible cultural heritage

A conference titled “Armenian Intangible Cultural Heritage: Language, Music, Stories, Crafts” was held in Paris. Issues related to Armenia’s intangible cultural heritage, state policies, and program directions were touched upon during the conference.

Astghik Marabyan, Head of the Cultural Heritage Department at Armenia’s Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport, delivered a report outlining the country’s state policy in the field. Marabyan presented the legislative framework, development directions, and strategic priorities, according to a press release from the ministry.



Among the speakers at the event were Arman Khachatryan, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Armenia to France; Rima Sleiman, Vice-President of the Scientific Council at Inalco; Anahit Tonapetyan, Head of the Department

of Armenian Studies at Inalco; and Pascal Gollnisch, Director General of Œuvre d’Orient.

Aram Hakobyan, Armenia’s Permanent Representative to UNESCO, highlighted the work carried out within the framework of UNESCO to promote Armenian intangible cultural heritage. The conference also provided an opportunity to sum up achievements in the field.

The event was organized at the initiative of the French organization Œuvre d’Orient, in cooperation with the Inalco Foundation and the French Institute of Historical and Cultural Heritage.

Yerevan to host new major beer fest organized jointly with Czechia, Germany and Belgium

A major new beer festival will be organized in Yerevan soon.

The President of the Tourism Committee Lusine Gevorgyan announced Friday that the event will be held jointly with Czechia, Germany and Belgium.

The festival is not associated with the Yerevan Beer Days event.

Gevorgyan said at a press conference that the agreement to organize the festival

was made during meetings with ambassadors of EU countries.

The Yerevan city downtown administration has also approved the initiative.

The committee also plans to organize wine events with France and Belgium.

Other plans include boosting tourism programs with Georgia and Iran.

Multiple festivals will take place across Armenia in 2025.



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AZAD Pharma AG AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Switzerland

AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Durachweg 15
CH-8200 Schaffhausen
Phone No: +41 52 632 09 10
Fax: +41 52 632 09 11

AZAD Pharma AG

Bahnhofstrasse 9
CH-3125 Toffen
Phone No: +41 31 810 40 10
Fax: +41 31 810 40 11

Canada

AZAD Fine Chemicals Ltd.

1895 - 55th Avenue
Dorval, Qc H9P 1G9
Phone No: +1 514 636 19 99
Fax: +1 514 636 75 55

Atlit Inc.

16 Westminster Ave.,
Suite 306A
Montreal, Qc H4X 1Z1
Phone No: +1 514 369 25 91
Fax: +1 514 369 81 67

China

Hangzhou Representative Office of AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Room 801-087, Lixin Plaza,
#102 Moganshan Road
310051 -Hangzhou China

Phone +86-571-8761 5336
Mobile +86-153-5505-0903
Fax: +86-571- 8895 8963

Germany

AZAD Pharma GmbH

Fritz-Reichle-Ring 6a
DE-78315 Radolfzell
Phone No: +49 7732 939101510
Fax: +49 7732 9391016

Armenia

AZAD Pharmaceuticals LLC

Vanahovit 8, Proshian
Ashtarak Ave., Kotayk Maiz
Phone No: +374 93 40 40 62
Fax: +374 93 40 34 40



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President of the NT Media Holding:
TIGRAN HARUTYUNYAN
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GAYANEH ARAKELYAN
Director of the weekly:
MARINA HARUTYUNYAN
Chief Correspondent: **GOURGEN KHAZHAKIAN**
Computer Design: **Ashot Khalapyan**

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E-mail: contact@nt.am
URL: www.nt.am

Address in Armenia:
28 Isahakian Str., Yerevan, 0009, RA
Tel.: (+374 60) 35-11-22 (+374 60) 35-11-24

Address in France: Masion De L'Armenie,
Paris 17e-95, Bld. Gouvion, France
Tel.: (+33) 01 43 59 66 72

Address in USA: 1146 E. Lexington Dr., #112,
Glendale, CA, USA, 91206
Tel.: +1 (818) 646 10 72

Հասցե՝ Իսահակյան 28, Երևան, ՀՀ, 0009