

## Armenia Declares 30-Day State of Emergency Over Coronavirus



The Armenian Government convened for a special meeting on March 16, 2020 to declare a month-long state of emergency

Citing the need to contain the further spread of a potentially deadly novel coronavirus, the Armenian government on March 16 declared a state of emergency, introducing a range of limitations for Armenian citizens and partially prohibiting entry into the country for foreigners.

According to the decision, the state of emergency will last for 30 days beginning at 6:30 pm on March 16.

“The decision comes into effect upon the publication of its text,” said Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan after his cabinet unanimously voted to endorse the decision.

The government then presented the decision at a special session of parliament dominated by members of Pashinyan’s My Step alliance.

After several hours of debate none of the three parliamentary factions raised any objections to the state of emergency or proposed amendments to the decision on its introduction. Parliament Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan said this meant that the decision was considered approved by parliament and no vote was needed to be taken.

Addressing Armenian lawmakers, Pashinyan said that at this moment the greatest risk is connected with the most recently identified coronavirus patient, who is employed by a large production enterprise in Yerevan. “I think we’ve managed to outline the scope of his contacts, but you cannot be absolutely sure in such cases and this is one of the reasons for declaring a state of emergency,” the prime minister said, without naming the enterprise.

“I want to assure you that the government of Armenia will refrain from applying any restrictions not emanating from the situation and that we will do everything for the state of emergency, which will last until April 14, to be as justified and efficient as possible in terms of curbing the spread of the coronavirus,” Pashinyan added.

Under the constitution, referendums cannot be held in conditions of a state of emergency, meaning that the

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## Nikol Pashinyan, Charles Michel discuss wide range of EU-Armenia cooperation-related issues

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held meetings with European Union officials as he paid a working visit to Brussels on March 9.

There was no traditional handshake at the start of Pashinyan's meeting with European Council President Charles Michel as the politicians took a precaution against the new deadly coronavirus because of which a considerable number of people in Europe and elsewhere, including Armenia, has been quarantined recently.

According to Pashinyan's press office, during their meeting the two discussed "a wide range of issues concerning Armenia-EU relations."

"At the center of the discussion was the broad agenda of democratic reforms in Armenia," the statement said.

"The European Union is the main partner of our reforms, we have always felt the EU's useful support in their implementation," Pashinyan was quoted as saying during the meeting.



The two sides reportedly expressed their readiness to further develop Armenia-EU cooperation, including trade and economic relations.

According to the Armenian government's press release, the president of the European Council highlighted the importance of the reforms that Armenia has embarked upon, adding that the European Union will continue to actively cooperate with and assist Armenia in bringing about democratic reforms, including in the judiciary.

Pashinyan and Michel also reportedly

talked about their expectations from the upcoming Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels in June.

According to the statement, Prime Minister Pashinyan stressed that Armenia will consistently move forward in strengthening democracy, protecting human rights and ensuring the rule of law.

While on his visit to Brussels Pashinyan also met with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell later on Monday.



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## "You can rely on me in my new position" - Donald Tusk to Prime Minister Pashinyan

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with European People's Party (EPP) President Donald Tusk at EPP headquarters in Brussels.

Welcoming the Armenian Premier, Donald Tusk said: "Mr. Prime Minister, I am pleased to welcome you in my new position but with a feeling of traditional friendship. I mean traditional friendship not only with you, but also with Armenia. You can rely on me in my new position."

Donald Tusk stressed that the Europeans, including society and politicians, have high confidence in Armenia's new government and personally in the Prime Minister, which is an important political capital.

Thankful for the warm welcome, Nikol



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Pashinyan said: "We highly appreciate your role in the development of EU-Armenia relations. We are convinced that as EPP President you will contribute to the further development and progress of our cooperation."

The parties exchanged views on a broad

range of issues relating to cooperation between Armenia and the European Union. They highlighted the need for close cooperation between Armenian parliamentarians and EPP faction deputies in the European Parliament.

Touching on Armenia's judicial reform, Nikol Pashinyan gave details of the upcoming constitutional referendum. The interlocutors exchanged views on the ongoing fight against corruption in our country.

The EPP President hailed the reforms being implemented in Armenia and expressed readiness to promote the development and deepening of cooperation with Armenia.

## Armenian Prime Minister, his wife test negative for coronavirus



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his wife Anna Hakobyan tested negative for the novel coronavirus on March 14 after spending a night in self-isolation in the town of Sevan, the Armenian leader said during a live broadcast on Facebook.

Pashinyan said they had decided to be tested for the potentially deadly virus also known as COVID-19 after concerns were voiced in Armenian media over Hakobyan's contacts with the wife of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro during her visit to the Latin American country on March 7.

Earlier this week international media reports suggested Bolsonaro may have been

affected by the virus after one of his aides tested positive, but the Brazilian leader later said he had tested negative for COVID-19.

"We are glad to tell you that our tests are negative, which means that for now we have avoided the coronavirus," Pashinyan said.

The infection first brought in from coronavirus-hit Iran and Italy was later transmitted locally. Scores of people suspected of having had contacts with coronavirus patients have been either quarantined or self-quarantined in Armenia at present.

Pashinyan said that Armenia's first coronavirus patient, a 29-year-old man hospitalized on March 1 after being evacuated from Iran, now tests negative.

"It means that he has been cured," Pashinyan said. "He will undergo one more test and if the result of that test is negative again, we will be able to say that the man is totally cured."

Armenian authorities say that the most affected community in Armenia is Etchmiadzin, a town situated some 20 kilometers to the west of capital Yerevan. According to officials, 13 of the current coronavirus

patients are people who had contacts with a woman who had arrived from Italy and later tested positive.

Officials say the woman had concealed from healthcare workers who regularly contacted her on the phone to monitor her health condition that she had fever and later participated in her son's engagement party that was attended by several dozen people. All of them have been placed under quarantine, according to officials.

"We have managed to isolate all participants of the Etchmiadzin party and their surroundings. At this moment about 200 people are isolated," Pashinyan said.

The prime minister said that Etchmiadzin is now the most risky community in Armenia in terms of potential coronavirus spread and urged residents of the town to take extra precautions. "I know that at this moment most people in Etchmiadzin are staying at home," Pashinyan said, again calling on all people who suspect they may have come into contact with potentially coronavirus-affected persons to stay indoors and contact emergency services if they exhibit coronavirus-like symptoms.

page 1 → constitutional referendum scheduled for April 5 will have to be delayed.

In presenting the decision Justice Minister Rustam Badasyan said that Vice-Premier Tigran Avinyan, who has so far led government efforts to contain the spread of the disease, will be placed in charge of coordinating measures connected with the state of emergency.

According to the declared state of emergency, Armenian citizens will be allowed to leave the country only by plane on condition that upon their return they will be placed under quarantine or self-quarantine. Entry for foreigners is to be restricted upon recommendations of the Health Ministry based on the current epidemiological situations in countries or territories in question. All arrivals in Armenia will be screened for their health condition and placed under quarantine if they exhibit coronavirus-like symptoms.

Under the decision, authorities are also empowered to set up checkpoints around Armenia, restricting travel of citizens based on the results of medical screenings for coronavirus-like symptoms.

Assemblies and strikes are to be prohibited throughout Armenia. "Mass events" involving more than 20 people, including religious ceremonies, concerts, exhibitions, displays, theater performances, sports, cultural, educational and entertainment events, celebrations and memorial services, can also be banned under the provisions of the state of emergency.

The measure also implies the possibility of regulation of attendance at family occasions like weddings, birthday parties and funerals upon decisions by the authorities.

The coordinator of the state of emergency is also empowered to prohibit the activities of public catering facilities, trade and entertainment centers in designated communities.

Schools, universities and kindergartens will remain closed, with remote learning options allowed.

Under the terms of the state of emergency, limitations are also introduced for visits and parcels sent to prisons and military units to preclude the spread of the virus inside these closed institutions.

Citing the need to prevent "panic-mongering", the government has decided that media reports and posts in social media on some specific aspects of the coronavirus-related situation will have to reflect official reports, and that information reported "in violation of the provisions of this clause must be subject to immediate removal by persons who reported it."

The measure came after the number of cases originally brought to Armenia from Iran, Italy and France reached 45 on March 16, with about two dozen of them linked to a single community.

Late on Sunday Armenia's authorities already stepped up control in Vagharshapat (Etchmiadzin), a town with a population of some 45,000 situated about 20 kilometers to the west of capital Yerevan.

Exits from Vagharshapat have been lim-

ited to only three, with medical screening of commuters conducted at checkpoints to prevent the possible spread of the disease.

Traffic congestions were reported in Vagharshapat's streets leading outside the town on Monday morning.

Vagharshapat's mayor Diana Gasparyan called on local residents to stay at home and travel only if absolutely necessary.

Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan called on citizens to remain calm. He said that the country has a sufficient supply of food to last it for at least a month even in the unlikely event of all supply chains being cut because of the global pandemic. He asked citizens not to resort to "panic buying."

The prime minister also assured the public that, if necessary, his government has the capacity to provide more means and effort to ensure due quarantines for those suspected of having been affected by the virus.

Earlier on March 16, 67 Armenian citizens evacuated on a charter flight from coronavirus-hit Italy were placed under 14-day quarantine in addition to about 300 already being quarantined in Armenia.

At the government meeting Prime Minister Pashinyan also announced that Armenia and Russia have decided to limit mutual travels of citizens for a period of two weeks.

Earlier, Armenia also tightened controls at its borders with Iran and Georgia.



## Opposition calls for Armenian Referendum to be postponed

(RFE/RL- Yerevan) - An Armenian opposition leader has called on the authorities to postpone the constitutional referendum scheduled for April 5 because of the risks posed by the spread of the new coronavirus infection in the country.

“The situation tends to get worse rather than better,” Edmon Marukyan, the leader of the parliamentary Bright Armenia party, warned on March 13. “The number of those infected is increasing, so it will be impossible to hold the ballot, and decisions in this regard must be made now.”

Marukyan also said that he was in favor of introducing a state of emergency for at least 14 days in order to shut down all public and private institutions and stop all mass events. “Citizens are waiting for the government to tell them, for example, not to organize wedding parties so they can postpone such events. We should not delay these measures and wait for the number [of coronavirus cases] to increase and the situation to get worse.”

The oppositionist’s statement came as Armenia reported its eighth coronavirus case on Friday. Five more people were hospitalized in Vanadzor with coronavirus-like symptoms later today.



Dozens of people have either been quarantined or self-quarantined in Armenia at present after having suspected contacts with the infected persons, four of whom had come from coronavirus-hit Italy and Iran.

Naira Zohrabyan, of the largest parliamentary opposition faction, Prosperous Armenia, also believes that if the coronavirus continues to spread, the referendum should be canceled. The lawmaker thinks the ongoing campaign in the referendum must be stopped in any case, as crowded places are the biggest risk of the spread of the deadly virus.

Elections authorities in Armenia have not yet spoken about any plans to postpone the current referendum.

The political team of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who until Friday was actively engaged in campaigning, has sus-

pending rallies for several days.

Deputy Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan, who is a senior member of Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party, told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service (Azatutyun.am) on Friday that they have no decision yet as to when the campaign can be resumed. As for the possibility of postponing the referendum, he said they will follow the dynamics of the spread of the disease.

“There will be no such thing as continuing the political process if there is a danger of epidemic or if the situation gets dramatically worse. It is not an end in itself. We will make decisions based on the dynamics [of the coronavirus spread] and the information that we have.”

At the same time, Simonyan warned against “demagogic statements about extreme measures.” “The authorities have so far proved their openness, their ability to respond quickly, and the measures that have been taken to date have produced maximum results. If we feel the need to do so [introduce a statement of emergency], if professionals and not politicians make such assessments, surely everything will be done. But today I still can’t talk about such things. And I don’t want to rule out anything,” the deputy parliament speaker said.

## Armenian President receives French Ambassador

President Armen Sarkissian had a meeting with French Ambassador to Armenia Jonathan Lacôte, the Presidential Office told Noyan Tapan

The Armenian President and the French Ambassador discussed the current situation caused by the novel coronavirus around the world. The Ambassador presented the situation in France and the actions taken to prevent the spread of the virus. The sides discussed the possible cooperation on this direction.

Talking about the cooperation projects between the two countries in various areas,



the President and the Ambassador in particular considered prospective the partnership in new technologies. In this context the President introduced the presidential initiative ATOM (Advanced Tomorrow)

aimed at technology, science and education development in Armenia, as well as bringing high-tech companies to Armenia to be engaged in development of artificial intelligence, math modeling, etc.

Soon memorandums of understanding will be signed with several famous French companies, and there are also preliminary agreements with others.

The sides also exchanged views on the cooperation opportunities with French scientific-educational institutions in the field of new technologies.



## Azerbaijan's hate speech against Armenians undermines regional peace and security – MFA

Attempts of the leadership of Azerbaijan to build its own legitimacy on the grounds of hatred towards Armenians can undermine the regional peace and security, Spokesperson for the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Anna Naghdalyan said in a statement.

The comments come after Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev delivered an extensive speech at the opening session of the newly-elected Parliament, which time and again contained clear manifestations of hate speech towards Armenia and Armenian people.

“The authorities of Azerbaijan try to disguise low level of legitimacy of recent parliamentary elections, inability to implement political and democratic reforms under the veil of aggressive, groundless and false allegations which target not only Armenia and the Armenian people, but also European countries, European structures and the



International Election Observation Mission to the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan,” Naghdalyan said.

It is particularly concerning that Azerbaijani leadership tries to instrumentalize religion in its unjustified allegations, on the one hand, accusing European countries of violating the rights of migrants on religious grounds, and calling for religious solidarity in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the other hand, she added.

“The promotion of enmity against the Ar-

menian people, accompanied by new historical and geographical “discoveries” by the President of Azerbaijan, fundamentally contradicts the commitment of Azerbaijan to build up an environment conducive to peace and prepare populations for peace,” the Spokesperson added.

She stressed that the extremely low standards of human rights and democracy in Azerbaijan seriously hinder the advancement of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, particularly the implementation of agreements, reached within that framework.

“Attempts of the leadership of Azerbaijan to build its own legitimacy on the grounds of hatred towards the neighboring nation and of mistrust towards the international community are irresponsible and can undermine the regional peace and security,” Anna Naghdalyan stated.

## Armenians can now apply for Dutch Schengen visa in Yerevan

Armenians wishing to apply for a Schengen visa to the Netherlands no longer need to travel to Georgia only to file an application, as the Netherlands has outsourced Schengen visa processing to the Lithuanian authorities in Armenia, SchengenVisaInfo.com reports.

Due to the absence of a Dutch Embassy or Consulate in Armenia, travelers from Armenia in need of a visa currently have to travel to Georgia for application. However, in a bid to facilitate the procedures for Armenians, the Netherlands has outsourced the process to Lithuania, which is represented by the VFS Global in terms



of visa application.

Starting from April 1, 2020, Lithuania will be representing the Netherlands for the visa application process, VFS announces.

Yet, until March 31 2020, the applications shall be submitted in Tbilisi, Georgia,

SchengenVisaInfo.com reports.

“From April 1, 2020, onwards, Lithuania will represent the Netherlands for the Schengen visa application process. If you wish to apply for a Schengen visa for the Netherlands on or after that date, go to VFS Armenia (Lithuania),” the Visa Facilitation Services Global announces through a statement.

As per Armenian citizens who want to stay in the Netherlands for periods longer than 90 days, they must apply for a residence permit. Therefore, they need to apply for a long-stay visa in Tbilisi, Georgia.

## Armenian Financial System 'Not Affected' By Ruble Depreciation

(RFE/RL- Yerevan) - The fall in world oil prices that has led to a sharp depreciation of the Russian ruble has not had any serious impact on Armenia's financial system, according to a Central Bank representative.

Andranik Grigoryan, head of the Central Bank's Financial System Stability and Development Department, said the Armenian financial system enjoys a "fairly high liquidity". "There is no need for panic," Grigoryan said on March 11. "Our banks are well capitalized and have sufficient liquidity in any currency. Investors in our financial system can rest assured both in terms of their deposits and in terms of servicing loans. Our exchange rate is a free floating one, and I don't see anything extraordinary here."

As for the possible depreciation or appreciation of the Armenian national currency, the dram, against other currencies, Grigoryan said that the Central Bank has been conducting various analyses to understand the potential impact of both trends. "In both cases we can say that our system is quite liquid," he added.

The Central Bank official said the closed



border with Iran due to the new coronavirus infection has not yet had any impact on Armenia's financial system, but cautioned that certain risks are always present when borders are closed – "be it in Armenia, Germany or the United States."

"For the time being we do not see any problems here. Our financial system does not have that level of related assets for the closed border with Iran to lead to problems in it," Grigoryan added.

The Ministry of Economy declined to comment on the possible impact of the closed border with Iran on the Armenian economy in general.

Economist Vahagn Khachatryan believes, however, that a closed border with the neighboring country cannot but have a negative effect on Armenia's economy. "We all understand that a closed border means that

there will be problems. It is clear that there will be some impact and that impact will be negative. Here we just need to be able to assess how solvable the problem will be over time," he said.

The economist said that no business in Armenia could possibly guess in January how the situation would unfold in order to take long-term measures like storing supplies in warehouses for several months. But according to Khachatryan, it is important not to panic now and even more important for the government to take proper action through its relevant agencies.

"Entrepreneurs should be kept updated on the situation, as many are asking questions now, wondering when the border can be reopened. But no one can make any forecasts in this matter even by following the international news. On the one hand you hear more positive news from China [on coronavirus], but news coming from European countries, especially from Italy, are more negative," Khachatryan said.

The closed border regime with Iran is expected to be in place at least until March 24.

## Ameriabank postpones loan repayments for 2 months over coronavirus fears

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has advised banks to prevent coronavirus, as well as to avoid crowding in the bank's branches, Ameriabank has decided to provide all its individuals and individual business customers with a "credit vacation" from March 13 to May 13, 2020, the Bank issued a statement.

"To prevent coronavirus, as well as to avoid crowding in the bank's branches, Ameriabank has decided to provide all its individuals and individual business customers with a "credit vacation" from March 13 to May 13, 2020.

"To prevent coronavirus, as well as to avoid crowding in the bank's branches, Ameriabank has decided to provide all its



individuals and individual business customers with a "credit vacation" from March 13 to May 13. All individuals and individual entrepreneurs during this period may

fail to make regular repayments of their loans, including principal, accrued interest, servicing and other payments, which will not result in any adverse effect.

Loan interest rates of its individuals and individual business customers will be calculated and distributed over the remaining months of the loan in accordance with the newly drawn schedule that the customers can receive through the pre-selected communication method they have selected.

Ameriabank continues urging all its customers to use the Bank's Remote Service and 24/7 Contact Center by calling +374 10 561111", reads the statement.



## Armenia closes schools amid new coronavirus cases

Armenia's government has decided to close all schools, universities and kindergartens until at least March 23 as the number of confirmed coronavirus cases reached 13 in the country on Friday.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held consultations with his cabinet and other agencies today after interrupting his vacation and suspending campaign rallies ahead of next month's constitutional referendum to discuss further measures to contain the spread of the highly contagious and potentially deadly disease in Armenia.



In a live broadcast on Facebook after the meeting Pashinyan announced the suspension of classes in all schools, calling on all citizens to show individual responsibility in following

all basic protective measures against the new coronavirus known as COVID-19 that has already affected nearly 140,000 people around the world (with more than 5,000 deaths) and has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

“We will get back to the issue on March 18 or 19 and will extend the suspension if necessary,” he said. “We also urge citizens to avoid as much as possible organizing and participating in mass events, especially those citizens who have [coronavirus-like] symptoms.”

## Krisp: Forbes recommends Armenia-made app for remote work amid coronavirus outbreak

The Armenia-made Krisp noise-cancelling app has made it to the Forbes top five tools to turn remote work more effective amid coronavirus outbreak in the work.

Krisp app – an AI-based technology – allows to mute background noise during calls. It is free for 60 minutes free per week. Apple users get 240 minutes free per week. “You can listen and speak without noise. I have not wrapped my head around how it

works yet, but the site states: “World’s Best Innovative Noise Cancellation Technology Powered by Deep Neural Network.” They promise they will not store or send any of your calls; it is all processed on your machine,” author TJ McCue writes.

In 2018, Krisp was named the best product of the year on the International ProductHunt platform.

Most companies have recommended em-

ployees to work from home as a measure to curb the spread of COVID-19.



## Armenia, Georgia agree to suspend the movement of citizens coronavirus outbreak



Armenia and Georgia have reached an agreement to temporarily suspend the movement of citizens between the two countries for 10 days starting at 08:00 on March 14, Armenia's Deputy Foreign Minister Tigran Avinyan informs.

At the same time, he says, the two countries will ensure the unimpeded entry of citizens who wish to return home.

These restrictions apply to all types of vehicles, but do not apply to freight.

“We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused. I am convinced that there is a general understanding that we are taking these steps solely to ensure public safety,” the Deputy PM said.

## Turkish President Orders Minority Leaders to Sign a Propaganda Letter



By Harut Sassounian

It has been the long-standing practice of the Turkish government to pressure the leaders of minority religious groups in Turkey to issue public statements in defense of Turkish policies and war efforts or to condemn Armenian Genocide resolutions adopted by various foreign countries.

The leaders of the Armenian, Assyrian, Greek and Jewish communities are used to this practice and have willingly complied with the Turkish demands knowing that not doing so can only spell trouble for them personally and for their respective communities.

In the past, such orders were given to the minority leaders in a more delicate manner. For example, a Turkish official would either call or visit the Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul and discreetly suggest that it may be a good idea for him to issue a public announcement on some political issue. Naturally, the previous Patriarchs have never refused such suggestions which are more like orders from the Turkish government. The only difference between the reactions of different Patriarchs has been to somewhat soften or harden the language of their announcements.

What we are experiencing now is completely different. The autocratic government of Pres. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has become so tyrannical that last week it sent a letter to the four minority religious leaders in Turkey asking that they sign it and send it back to the President's Communication Office. All four immediately complied.

The minor surprise was that a week before Pres. Erdogan sent a letter to the minority religious leaders, the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey issued an announcement basically supporting the sentiments expressed in Erdogan's subsequent letter. The Patriarch should not be blamed neither for writ-

ing his own propaganda letter in advance nor signing the government's dictated letter. After all, the Patriarch knows what is expected of him and made his announcement without waiting for official orders.

The issue in this case is the Turkish military's recent invasion of Northern Syria which resulted in the deaths of scores of Turkish soldiers. The Armenian Patriarchate issued the following statement:

"The attack in Idlib [Syria], resulting in the martyrdom of 33 heroic Turkish soldiers, caused a great shock in our country. Wholeheartedly sharing the pain of our nation, we seek God's mercy for the martyrs. Our heroic army is the guarantor of our state's existence. To all the members of the army who have lost their comrades-in-arms we urge endurance. We also continue to pray that peace may reign in the world and particularly in our region. In the name of the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey, the Religious Council, and all members of the community, we would like to share with the public our belief that it will be possible to overcome this difficult process in an atmosphere of unity and solidarity."

The Patriarchate subsequently signed the more propagandistic letter drafted by the office of Pres. Erdogan. Here are excerpts from that two-page letter: "Our country has always been a pioneer of the steps that serve peace in its region and in the world, inspired by its ancient history and deep-rooted civilization. Since our War of Independence, very important struggles have been carried out for our independence, security and welfare.

"In each of these struggles, the spirit of mobilization revealed by our cherished nation constitutes a unique example for the whole world. As non-governmental organizations, we fully support the steps of our state, which are based on the country's security and interests, and that also protect the establishment and maintenance of peace in our region.... "We argue that this struggle to dry terrorism at its source should be continued with the same determination. We know that to question Turkey's presence in Syria means to ignore our border security.

"Various countries' approach in favor of terrorist groups and in support of regional instability has shown that we often fight

this alone.

"However, our nation, which has a foresight, has always been and will continue to be with its state. As non-governmental organizations, we take pride in being part of this cherished nation. In line with the developments in our region, we state that we are behind every decision taken by our state against these cruel murderers and monsters for the peace and security of our country and we support every step taken. No one should doubt that we will overcome all difficulties in unity and solidarity, as it has been until today.

"Turkey is a country of peace. Turkey is the key to peace in the region and the world. "Despite all the obstacles and attacks on our way, we would like to announce to the world that we are ready to support our state and army, and struggle with them when necessary, in order to protect our national security, prevent new humanitarian crises and establish peace in our region.

"We are once again shouting to the world that we will protect this homeland, under all circumstances, and struggle with the integration of the state-nation, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder."

However, not all Turkish citizens support their government's invasion of Syria. Cumhuriyet newspaper wrote a scathing article accusing Pres. Erdogan of pressuring the minorities. Toma Chelik, a member of the Turkish Parliament representing HDP, Kurdish-affiliated party, sent a letter to the Vice President of Turkey, asking the following questions:

- Who prepared the text of the President's letter to the minorities?
- Who decided to send the letter to the minorities?
- To what other groups was this letter sent?
- Will those refusing to sign the letter be punished?

At a time when thousands of innocent citizens of Turkey and dozens of journalists have been thrown in jail by the Erdogan regime, anyone who does not obey the dictates of Erdogan risks incarceration. While Pres. Erdogan is unable to come to an agreement with Western Europe, the United States and Russia on the conflict with Syria, it is much easier for him to take his frustration and revenge on innocent people within Turkey.



## U.S. Says Popular Distrust in Impartiality of Judges Remains Strong in Armenia



The Armenian government took steps in 2019 to investigate and punish alleged abuses by former and current government officials and law enforcement authorities, according to an annual U.S. Department of State report on human rights practices.

As evidence the country report for Armenia published on March 11 refers to criminal cases and trials involving former high-ranking government officials.

“On September 12, hearings began in a high-profile case against former officials for their alleged involvement in sending the military to break up protests following the 2008 presidential election, in which eight civilians and two police officers were killed. Charges filed in this and associated criminal cases included allegations of overthrowing the constitutional order, abuse and exceeding official authority, torture, complicity in bribery, official fraud, and falsification of evidence connected with the investigation of the 2008 postelection events,” the U.S. Department of State says, listing the names of high-profile suspects in the cases, including former president Robert Kocharian.

At the same time, the U.S. Department of

State quotes Council of Europe commissioner for human rights Dunja Mijatovic as noting in her report “the importance of conducting the process in a careful manner, ‘in strict adherence to the principles of rule of law, judicial independence, transparency, and guarantees of fair trial’, in order to dispel any accusations of revenge politics or selective justice.”

Simultaneously, the U.S. Department of State says that more than a decade after the deadly post-election events of March 2008, in June 2019, the Armenian parliament adopted a law on providing assistance to the victims of the violence, and in September the government allocated 720 million drams (about \$1.5 million) to assist victims and their families.

Referring to human rights violations in Armenia last year, the U.S. Department of State highlights shortcomings in the judicial sphere, indicating “significant problems with the independence of the judiciary.”

“Although the law provides for an independent judiciary, the judiciary did not generally exhibit independence and impartiality. After the 2018 political transition,

popular distrust in the impartiality of judges remained strong, and NGOs highlighted that the justice sector retained many officials who served the previous authorities. Corruption of judges remained a concern,” the report says.

It reminded that in May “in an apparent reaction to the release of former president Robert Kocharian from detention by a Yerevan court, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian called on his supporters to block access to courts throughout the country, a move questioned by some observers as pressuring the judiciary.”

Speaking about the judiciary, the U.S. Department of State observed that “following the ‘Velvet Revolution,’ many judges released suspects in politically sensitive cases from pretrial detention.”

“According to human rights groups, because no other circumstances had changed in their cases, this was an indication that, before the April and May 2018 events, judicial decisions to hold those suspects in detention instead of allowing their release on bail were politically motivated.”

The Armenian judiciary came under criticism also for an “increasing tendency to fall back into the previous practice of applying pretrial detention.” “Lengthy pretrial detention remained a chronic problem,” the U.S. Department of State says, referring to the government’s statistics, according to which as of October 1, approximately 45 percent of the prison population consisted of pretrial detainees.

The report also refers to abuse in police stations and in prisons. “According to human rights activists, impunity for past instances of police abuse contributed

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## Bill Gates steps down from Microsoft board to Sign a Propaganda Letter



Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates is stepping down from the company's board to spend more time on philanthropic activities.

He says he wants to focus on global health and development, education, and tackling climate change.

In a post on LinkedIn, the 64-year-old said he was planning to devote more time to his charitable activities, particularly through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

"Stepping down from the board in no way means stepping away from the company," Gates said, adding that Microsoft will always be an important part of his life's work.

He will continue to be engaged with the technical leadership to help shape the vi-

sion and achieve the company's ambitious goals.

"I feel more optimistic than ever about the progress the company is making and how it can continue to benefit the world," Bill Gates stated.

One of the world's richest men, Mr Gates has also left the board of Warren Buffett's massive holding company Berkshire Hathaway.

He stepped down from his role running Microsoft in 2008.

## 75 U.S. Representatives call on Congress to save Artsakh aid

In a strong showing of legislative support, 75 U.S. Representatives from 23 states sent a bipartisan Armenian Caucus letter today asking Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Ranking Member Hal Rogers (R-KY) of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations to fund de-mining and rehabilitation services in Artsakh and expand U.S. assistance to Armenia, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

"Over twice as many U.S. Representatives signed this year's letter – illustrating the energy and urgency of Congressional support for saving Artsakh aid in the face of ill-advised attempts by the Trump-Pence Administration to kill a life-saving, peace-promoting de-mining program," said Aram Hamparian, Executive Director of the ANCA.

"We thank Representatives Pallone, Speier, and Schiff and all their colleagues who co-signed this letter for advancing a targeted, forward-leaning aid package for Artsakh and Armenia that invests in peace and democracy," he added.

The letter, circulated for signatures by the Congressional Armenian Caucus, included the following budgetary requests:

— \$1.5 million for Artsakh demining and robust funding for regional rehabilitation services for survivors of landmine injuries and individuals with physical and cognitive



disabilities.

— \$100 million for economic, governance, rule of law, and security assistance to Armenia through State Department and USAID accounts.

— That the State Department and USAID lift any official or unofficial restrictions on U.S. travel, communication, or contacts with Artsakh government officials.

— The suspension of U.S. military aid for Azerbaijan until it has been verified to have ceased all attacks against Armenia and Artsakh.

Joining Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chairs Frank Pallone and Jackie Speier, and Vice-Chair Adam Schiff in cosigning the letter are: Representatives Karen Bass (D-CA), Don Beyer (D-VA), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Anthony Brindisi (D-NY), Cheri Bustos (D-IL), Salud Carbajal (D-CA), Tony Cardenas (D-CA), Judy Chu (D-CA), David Cicilline (D-RI), Gil Cisneros (D-CA), Jim Costa (D-CA), TJ Cox (D-CA), Jason Crow (D-CO), Danny Davis (D-IL), Madeleine Dean

(D-PA), Ted Deutch (D-FL), Anna Eshoo (D-CA), Adriano Espaillat (D-NY), Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI), Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), John Garamendi (D-CA), Chuy Garcia (D-IL), Jimmy Gomez (D-CA), Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ), Josh Harder (D-CA), Jim Himes (D-CT), Steven Horsford (D-NV), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Hank Johnson (D-GA), Ro Khanna (D-CA), Steve King (R-IA), Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), James Langevin (D-RI), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Susie Lee (D-NV), Andy Levin (D-MI), John Lewis (D-GA), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Daniel Lipinski (D-IL), Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), Stephen Lynch (D-MA), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY), James McGovern (D-MA), Seth Moulton (D-MA), Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Donald Norcross (D-NJ), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Devin Nunes (R-CA), Ilhan Omar (D-MN), Chris Pappas (D-NH), Donald Payne (D-NJ), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Kathleen Rice (D-NY), Max Rose (D-NY), Harley Rouda (D-CA), Linda Sanchez (D-CA), John Sarbanes (D-MD), Janice Schakowsky (D-IL), Brad Schneider (D-IL), Brad Sherman (D-CA), Albio Sires (D-NJ), Haley Stevens (D-MI), Tom Suozzi (D-NY), Dina Titus (D-NV), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Lori Trahan (D-MA), David Trone (D-MD), and Ted Yoho (R-FL).



## U.S. Says Popular Distrust in Impartiality of Judges...

to the persistence of the problem, although to a lesser extent than observed prior to the 2018 “Velvet Revolution.” Furthermore, observers contended that the failure to prosecute these past cases was linked to the lack of change in the composition of law enforcement bodies since the 2018 political transition, other than at the leadership level.”

As for prisons, the report notes that according to the Prison Monitoring Group, “political will at the highest level to eradicate corruption in the penitentiaries had not yet been translated into institutional change.”

As for corruption, the U.S. Department of State says that Armenia has “a legacy of systemic corruption in many areas, including construction, mining, public administration, the parliament, the judiciary, procurement practices, and provision of grants by the state.”

“There were allegations of embezzlement of state funds, involvement of government officials in questionable business activities, and tax and customs privileges for government-linked companies. In 2018 the government made combating corruption one of its top priorities and continued to take measures to eliminate it during the year. Although top officials announced the “eradication of corruption” in the country, local observers noted that anticorruption measures needed further institutionalization. Criminal corruption cases were uncovered in the tax and customs services, the ministries of education and health care, and the judiciary,” the report says.

“According to the Prosecutor General’s Office, in the 13 months ending in June, enforcement bodies and tax services un-

covered violations in the amount of 110.5 billion drams (almost \$230 million), constituting damages to the state, embezzlement, abuse of official duty, and bribes. Of this amount, 30.1 billion drams (\$63 million) was reportedly paid to the state budget; NGOs raised concerns regarding insufficient transparency in this process.

“During the year former officials made public announcements of their intent to return assets to the state, allegedly to avoid prosecution. The process by which the government accepted or negotiated such arrangements were unclear.”

Speaking about omissions, the U.S. Department of State refers to media reports throughout the year that “the Ministry of Defense was providing incomplete information or not reporting on certain non-combat deaths in the army.” “Human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) voiced concern regarding the Defense Ministry’s classification of military deaths and the practice of qualifying many non-combat deaths as suicides, making it less likely that abuses would be uncovered and investigated.”

At the same time, the report says that in its July 8 biannual report on the human rights situation in the armed forces, the NGO Peace Dialogue noted that, for the first time, the Ministry of Defense had designated the protection of soldiers’ human rights as an organizational priority: “On July 24, the Defense Ministry launched a “trust line,” a telephone number that soldiers may call to submit complaints, ask for assistance, and provide suggestions.”

The report also presents observations on media. The U.S. Department of State says that since the 2018 political transition, the

media environment in Armenia has been freer. “However, there were reports that some outlets avoided criticizing the authorities so as not to appear ‘counterrevolutionary,’” it adds.

“According to some media watchdogs, public television continued to present news from a pro-government standpoint, replacing one government perspective with another in the aftermath of the political transition. Nonetheless, public television was open and accessible to the opposition as well and covered more diverse topics of public interest than before.”

“Media company ownership was mostly nontransparent. The country’s Fourth Action Plan of Open-Government Partnership Initiative of the Republic of Armenia (2018-2020) included commitments to improve ownership disclosure. Media NGOs advocated for the media sector to be included as a priority sector in the action plan and proposed changes to the Law on Television and Radio that fostered media ownership transparency,” reads the U.S. Department of State’s report.

Whereas previous annual reports criticized the Armenian authorities for systemic corruption, violence against journalists and the opposition, the suppression of freedom of speech and assembly, impunity of law-enforcement agencies and violations during elections, this time, the U.S. Department of State says, quoting international observers, that Armenia’s early parliamentary elections of December 2018 “were held with respect for fundamental freedoms and enjoyed broad public trust that needs to be preserved through further electoral reforms.”

## Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator: a Metal Shelter Became Farmer's Warehouse...

One more family left the metal container house in Gyumri.



Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia continue to contribute to this cause. The metal container that used to be a house with upsetting conditions for life for 35



years is now repurposed into a warehouse to serve to the family engaged in farming. The heads and teams of organizations implementing the house-building project celebrated housewarming with the Yedigaryan family.

Like many others, this family, too, was left homeless after the devastating earthquake of

1988. The *Yedigaryans* were forced to live in the metal container for many years. The family's grandmother, Tamara, has gone through many difficulties. She lost one of her sons during the earthquake, and the second one died in Nagorno-Karabakh war. Tamara's third son has health problems.



After many years of difficult life in a metal container, the Yedigaryans were able to purchase an apartment, but because of numerous social and health problems, they were unable to renovate it and to create proper living conditions.



In 2019, the family was involved in the housing project implemented by Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia. After several months of construction, the family's dream of many years has now come true.

*"After so much trouble and suffering, it seems the light*

*is shining. We celebrate the housewarming of our new home with new hope and faith. Thank you for your support,"* said **Tamara**.

*"This program makes everyone happy: the family fulfills its long cherished dreams, and the supporting organizations achieve the task set before them. I am glad to state that the metal container with all its inconveniences will no longer morally depress those who used to live in it. Moreover, it will serve to an important purpose for a family engaged in gardening. I also want to believe that only carefree days await this family in this new and bright house,"* Viva-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** said.

*"Our organization, together with Viva-MTS, has been helping families to overcome poverty and difficult social conditions they have lived in for many years. In order to overcome the crisis, it is important for the family to have home of their own with decent conditions. The Yedigaryans deserved to have such conditions. I am happy for this family,"* said Fuller Center for Housing Armenia President **Ashot Yeghiazaryan**.





## Dvin, a Legendary Capital of Arshakunis

By Gourgen James Khazhakian,  
Chief Correspondent



Dvin is one of the oldest settlements in Armenia. Archaeological excavations and researches that have been started in 1936 and continue up today indicate that the earliest settlement in this area was founded at least at the end of the BC 4<sup>th</sup> millennium and continue its existence until the last quarter of the III<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

Material remnants of Kura-Araxian Early Bronze Age agricultural culture (complete and blunted examples of black-polished shells, hearth pedestals, stone-based brick apartments, stone, bone and copper remnants of work instruments and arms, parts of cave statuettes) found on the western slope of Dvin Hill refer to those times. Probably after the decline of the Kura-Araxian culture, judging from the results of archaeological excavations, this area did not have a permanent population for some time, however, in the middle of the second millennium BC it was inhabited by a sedentary population.

The excavations at Dvin Hill indicate that it was a powerful settlement in the border of the II-I millennia and maintain that role until beginning of the VIII century BC. Judging from the discovered materials, the Dvin Early Metal Century settlement was one of the most important historical - cultural and production centers of the Ararat Valley.

Excavated there ceramic ornamentation boards, kernotypes, anthropomorphic and zodiac vessels, stone moldings used for casting jewelry and weapons, remnants of glazed pottery production, metal baking ovens and sanctuaries are the best evidence of this. Judging by the results of the C14 isotope radiocarbon study of many pieces of metal carbon age excavated on the site of the monument, this worship site was destroyed at the boundary of the IX-VIII

centuries BC in result of the process of unification of the northern parts of the Armenian Highland within the Kingdom of Van in II - I centuries BC. There was an ancient



settlement and tomb site in Dvin in II century BC – I century AC, the excavations of which yielded rich archaeological material. According to experts, in the 58-59 century AD, during the Roman invasion of Corbulun, this settlement was also burned with Artashat.

After these events, life on the hill ceased until the 30s of the IV century AC. During the reign of *Khosrov II Kotak* (331-339), of the Arshakuni royal family the royal court moved from Artashat to a hill above the forest and here, in the Vostan (Vostan Dvno) Province of Ayrarat, in the borders of the current Ararat Marz of the Republic of Armenia – Verin (Upper) Dvin, Nerkin (Lower) Dvin, Artashat, Norashen, Berdik, Hnaberd and Aygestan villages, totally around 400 villages, new capital Dvin was built. According to the “father of Armenian historians” *Movses Khorenatsi*, “Dvin” is a Persian word and literally means “hill”. King Khosrov made the move of the capital to get rid of Artashat’s unhealthy climate. A considerable part of Artashat’s residents gradually moved to Dvin over time. In a short period the population of the City reached 100,000.

The City had two layers of defensive walls, trenches, towers. At the top of the hill was the citadel with adjacent buildings. After the fall of the Arshakuni dynasty (428), Dvin also remained one of the largest cities in Armenia, becoming the seat of the Sassanian and Byzantine rulers.

In 470s, during the reign of the Catholicos *Gyut I* (of Arahez) the Catholicosate also moved from Vagharshapat to Dvin. In the central district of the City is the columned Armenian Catholicosate with its twin churches and the residence of Catholicos. In 640s Dvin was captured by Arabs who

massacred 12,000 and captured 35,000 of the City. As a result of the Arab invasions, by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, all of Armenia was under Arab rule.

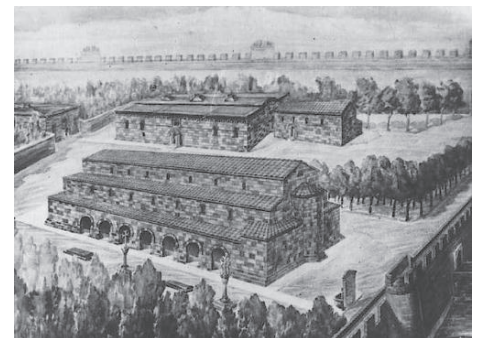
The latter formed the Arminia administrative unit, with Dvin as the center. It was one of the prominent cities of the East, a major center of craftsmanship and transit trade. There were six international highways through which Armenia traded with the countries of Asia Minor and South Europe, the North Caucasus and Central Asia, Mesopotamia and North Africa.

According to Arabic bibliographies, woolen and silk fabrics, rugs and carpets, glass, furs and brass articles, «vordan» red paint, metallurgical (iron and copper) products, silver jewelry were manufactured and exported to foreign countries. Since the establishment of the Bagratid’s Kingdom in Armenia (885), Dvin had experienced a new rise. The City continued its prosperity until 893 AC devastating earthquake. After 1020s Dvin was then ruled by Muslim Emirs, and in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century second half it was conquered by the Seljuk Turks. In 1203 the City was liberated by *Zakarian* Princes and merged with their Shirak domains. In 1225 *Jalaleddin*, son of Shah of Khorezm *Mohammad*, escaping of Mongols, enters and conquers the northern parts of Persia with his troops. In the same year he entered Transcaucasia and occupied a number of major cities, including Dvin, one of the Country’s flourishing and prosperous centers.

Dvin was destroyed and looted, some of its inhabitants were murdered and captured.

In 1236 Dvin was captured by Mongol-Tatars, destroyed and plundered, but survived for one more century.

Dvin was last mentioned in 14<sup>th</sup> century Georgian chronicle, in a row of Turkish-ravaged cities. In the following centuries, several villages were built on the ruins of the great city.



## Hayastan All-Armenian Fund provides medical items to healthcare ministry



Hayastan All-Armenian Fund's US Western Region affiliate responded to the request of Armenia's healthcare ministry and the Office of High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, sending large amount of medical items to Armenia, the Fund told Armenpress.

This initiative became a reality thanks to the close cooperation with the Chevy Chase Surgery Center and the Armenian

Relief Society. In order to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) or to control the situation in case of its spread large amounts of preventive, protective, as well as disinfectants, including medical clothing, face masks, digital thermometers and other means were sent to Armenia.

The first case of coronavirus was confirmed in Armenia on March 1. As of now the total number of COVID-19 cases in the country is over 50. The World Health Organization declared coronavirus a global pandemic. Armenia's healthcare ministry takes respective measures to prevent the spread of the virus in the country.

"We are happy for another effective cooperation with the ministry of healthcare. Thanks to the efforts of our Fund's US Western Region affiliate we managed to send the necessity items to Armenia in a short period of time", executive director of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund Haykak Arshamyan said.

The Fund carries out multiple healthcare projects. Every year a medical mission is visiting from the United States to Armenia and Artsakh to conduct surgeries, consulting.

*Founded in 1992, the Hayastan All-Armenian fund is a unique organization working to create a panarmenian network to support Armenia and Armenians around the world to implement projects ensuring the proportional and sustainable development of Armenia and Artsakh.*

## Armenian MFA issues travel advice regarding the spread of COVID-19

Taking into account the current situation related to the spread of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urges the citizens of Armenia to limit their trips abroad, unless there is an urgent need.

"In any case while planning a trip, be guided by the statistics of International Health Organization on the spread of virus and temporary avoid visiting countries of the spread of COVID-19, particularly South Korea, Japan, the United States of America, as well as EU and other European countries (mostly Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Switzerland, Norway, Den-



mark, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Austria)," the Ministry said in a statement.

In case of currently being or visiting the above-mentioned countries, Armenian nationals are advised to follow the instruc-

tions and advice of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia or the relevant authorities of that country, as well as contact the relevant diplomatic representation of Armenia.

The citizens of the Republic of Armenia returning from the countries with wide spread of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), depending on original country/countries of arrival, should be subjected to a 14-day self-isolation, unless decision on special quarantine is made.

At the same time, the Ministry urges the citizens of Armenia abroad or planning a trip abroad to apply for consular registration, which can be done through automated system.



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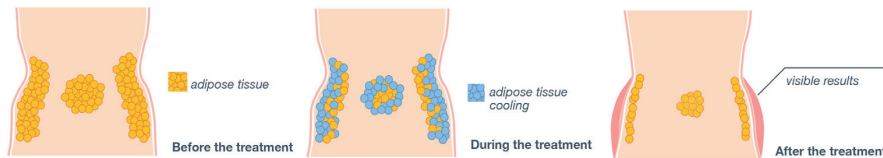
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