

On 8 November President Serzh Sargsyan Handed Global IT Award to a Founding Father of Internet Louis Pouzin



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Sezh Sargsyan congratulates U.S. President-Elect Donald Trump

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan sent on November 9 a congratulatory letter to the newly elected U.S. President Donald Trump.

“Honorable Mr. Trump,

Please accept my warmest congratulations on your election as the President of the United States.

The American people have enthusiastically voted in support of your outstanding leadership qualities, your experience and vision, thus entrusting you with the honorable responsibility to lead the nation. I have no doubt, that under your able leadership the United States will achieve further progress and advancement in the years to come.

As the United States and Armenia prepare to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, I seize this opportunity to express my gratitude for the substantial support extended by the United States over the last quarter of a century to help Armenia build democratic institutions and strengthen its economy.

In Armenia we highly value the important role played by the United States, in its capacity as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk group, in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

I am confident that under your presidency, the Armenia-US close partnership



would continue to develop dynamically – expanding and reaching new heights in diverse areas. I also believe that we can continue to count on the active engagement of the Armenian-American community – a strong bridge between our nations.

As you embark upon your new responsibilities, I would like to assure you and the people of the United States of our continued friendship and sympathy and wish you utmost success in leading your country and the American people to progress and prosperity.

Please accept, Honorable Mr. Trump, the assurances of my highest consideration.”

“The excellent partnership between the U.S. and Armenia...will stay strong regardless of who is elected the next president of the United States,” U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard Mills stated on Wednesday after the U.S. Embassy’s Election Watch Party in Yerevan.

“The U.S. remains committed to our shared goal of an independent and prosperous Armenia at peace with its neighbors, and regardless of who the next president is, the U.S. government and the U.S. Embassy will remain steadfast partners and friends to Armenia, as we work together to ensure the democratic and prosperous future that the Armenian people deserve,” Mills said.

“Trump’s victory in elections in the U.S. may lead to changes in USA-Armenia relations and Washington’s stand on Karabakh issue,” Head of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Bureau’s Hai Tad and Political Affairs Office Giro Manoyan told ArmInfo’s correspondent.

“Speaking about possible shifts regarding Armenia, I first and foremost see possible warming in relations between the U.S. and Russia. I think that in overall, this will have positive impact on Armenia, providing our authorities with more opportunities of political maneuvering between Moscow and Washington,” he noted.

Manoyan also expressed concern related to possible warming in relations between the U.S. and Azerbaijan. According to him, Trump’s interests in Azerbaijan and his ties with its leadership may lead to changes in Washington’s stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict.

NKR MFA: Azerbaijan seeks to undermine the only international monitoring mechanism

“Azerbaijan not only rejects creation of mechanisms for investigation of incidents and expansion of the office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE CiO, but also seeks to undermine the only international monitoring mechanism,” NKR Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The full text is provided below:

On the night of November 10-11, and during the day the Azerbaijani armed forces shelled the frontline positions of the NKR Defense Army near the villages of Talish and Yarimja from 60 and 82 mm mortars. Such massive use of mortars occurring for the first time after a large-scale aggression against Nagorno Karabakh in April, has become the continuation of recent escalation of tension on the Line of Contact by Azerbaijan.

It is of serious concern that the aggravation of the situation takes place against



the background of Azerbaijan’s preparation for the large-scale military exercises near the NKR borders, employing a large number of military equipment and manpower.

Such actions are a flagrant violation of agreements reached at summits in Vienna and St. Petersburg on inadmissibility of escalation of tension on the Line of Contact and indicate to the intention of Azerbaijan to impede the measures aimed at creating conditions for the resumption of the negotiation process.

Moreover, Azerbaijan not only rejects creation of mechanisms for investigation of incidents and expansion of the office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE CiO, but also seeks to undermine the only international monitoring mechanism to maintain the ceasefire regime by firing an area where the OSCE mission carried out a planned monitoring on the day before.

In this situation, we call on the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, the OSCE Chairperson in Office and the international community as a whole to condemn in the strongest terms destructive policy of the Azerbaijani authorities, and to take effective measures to prevent a further escalation of tension.

For its turn, the NKR will suppress any actions of Azerbaijan, threatening the security of the Republic, the peace and stability in the region.

The US to continue with the sides to find a lasting solution to Karabakh conflict

“The United States supports confidence-building measures and increased dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis that can help stabilize the security situation and create a more constructive atmosphere for negotiations,” Daniel B. Baer, US Ambassador to the OSCE said in address to the Permanent Council. The full speech is provided below:

The United States warmly welcomes the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, together with the Chairmanship’s Personal Representative, and the Head of the High-Level Planning Group (HLPG), to the Permanent Council. We reiterate our strong support for their work and appreciate their unwavering engagement with the sides to advance a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The United States was alarmed by the escalation of violence along the Line of Contact in April, and concerned about allegations of atrocities. As a Co-Chair country, the United States took immediate steps to reduce tensions. Secretary Kerry took the initiative to organize a 3+2 meeting in Vienna on May 16, recognizing that the joint efforts of the United States, Russia, and France at the highest levels could help the sides stop the violence and advance the peace process. The Summit produced tangible results. The sides reaffirmed their respect for the ceasefire, and indeed, the situation along the Line of Contact quieted significantly.

The sides also agreed to expand the OSCE Monitoring Mission and agreed to work on a proposal to establish an OSCE investigative mechanism. We call on the sides to support the expansion of monitoring by the Office of the Chairmanship’s Personal Representative, as agreed upon during the Summits in Vienna and St. Petersburg, and hope that this expansion can eventually be reflected in the 2017 OSCE budget. We also call on the sides to work on a proposal to establish an OSCE investigative mechanism.

The United States supports confidence-building measures and



increased dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis that can help stabilize the security situation and create a more constructive atmosphere for negotiations.

The United States appreciates the close collaboration of the German Chairmanship and Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, Ambassador Kasprzyk, in supporting the Co-Chairs’ mediation efforts and stabilizing the situation on the ground.

We share the frustration of the sides that this conflict has gone on far too long. There can be no military solution to this conflict. As a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States remains deeply committed – as Ambassador Warlick has emphasized this morning – to working with the sides to find a lasting and peaceful resolution to the conflict.

We join others who have expressed this morning their good wishes to Ambassador Andrieu as he continues on his journey, and we welcome his successor, Ambassador Visconti - we look forward to working with you.

Yerevan plans new tax for military benefits



The Armenian government announced on November 8 plans to introduce a special tax that will finance new and much heftier benefits for the families of military personnel killed or seriously wounded in action.

Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan publicized details of the scheme at a meeting with President Serzh Sargsyan. In particular, Sargsyan said, the families of soldiers who die or become gravely disabled while on combat duty will be paid 10 million drams (\$21,000) each.

Wounded soldiers suffering from less serious disabilities will be entitled to 5 million drams.

In addition to these one-off payments, the close relatives of killed or maimed army officers, contract soldiers and conscripts will receive monthly benefits ranging from 100,000 to 300,000 drams for 20 years. The compensation scheme will apply to combat incidents happening after January 2017.

“The program will be financed from a special fund to which every working person will contribute 1,000 drams (\$2.1) per month,” the presidential press service said in a statement.

The average monthly wage in Armenia currently stands at 185,000 drams (\$390), according to government data.

Serzh Sargsyan welcomed the proposed compensations. “I think that we are now able to drastically improve the situation with the help of our fellow citizens,” the president told the recently appointed defense minister, who had previously managed his staff.

Sargsyan added that Armenians will also be encouraged to make voluntary contributions to the new government fund. He argued that many of them rushed to provide financial assistance to the families of dozens of Armenians soldiers killed during last April’s heavy fighting with Azerbaijani forces around Nagorno-Karabakh.

Oskanian calls for new opposition alliance

Former Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said on November 10 that his Hamakmbum (Consolidation) party is ready to form an alliance with other opposition groups ahead of next year's parliamentary elections.

Oskanian described the April 2017 vote as a "unique opportunity" to achieve regime change, arguing that it will be followed by Armenia's transition to the parliament system of government.

"For the sake of a great consolidation, we stand ready to put aside any personal ambition," he told reporters. In particular, he said, he would not aspire to the top spot in the opposition bloc's list of election candidates.

Oskanian was reluctant to list his party's potential opposition allies. "I won't name any party at this point," he said. "I'll just

say that we don't exclude anything and are ready to sit down, negotiate and reach common ground with everyone."

In that regard, Oskanian made clear that he is open to joining forces with the Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK).

The ex-minister and his political associates, who set up Consolidation earlier this year, are former senior members of the BHK. They quit Armenia's second largest parliamentary force last year after its founding leader, Gagik Tsarukyan, was forced into political retirement following a bitter confrontation with President Serzh Sargsyan.

Tsarukyan indicated late last month that he is now considering returning to active politics. The BHK's current leadership publicly urged him to do so earlier in October.



Oskanian, who served as foreign minister under former President Robert Kocharyan from 1998-2008, would not be drawn on Tsarukyan's possible political comeback. "I will try to skirt this question as long as Mr. Tsarukyan himself has not made a statement," he said.

But when asked whether Tsarukyan can play a major role in the consolidation of opposition forces sought by his party, Oskanian replied: "Of course he can."

Russian Federal Assembly delegation visits Armenian Genocide Memorial

Nikolay Ryzhkov, Co-Chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission on Cooperation between the Armenian National Assembly and the Russian Federal Assembly, and members of the Commission visited the Tsitsemakaberd Memorial on November 10, accompanied by Hermine Naghdalyan, Co-Chair of the Commission, MPs Volodya Badalyan and Levon Martirosyan.

The guests laid flowers at the Eternal Fire and paid tribute to the memory of the Armenian Genocide victims with a minute of silence.

Noting that he has been familiar with the tragedy that befell the Armenian in the Ottoman Empire in 1915, Nikolay Ryzhkov said: "Centuries will pass, but the Armenian Genocide will not be forgotten. Four generations have changed in Turkey, but they keep denying the Armenian Genocide. It's necessary to take steps towards reconciliation of the two peoples."

"Unfortunately, the tragic events that befell the Armenians 100 years ago continue in Syria and other places today. Their prevention is the sacred mission for you and us," Ryzhkov said.

Karapetyan may join ruling party

Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan may join the governing Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) at its upcoming congress in Yerevan, a senior HHK lawmaker said on November 9.

Gagik Melikyan at the same time insisted that Karapetyan will not replace President Serzh Sargsyan as HHK chairman.

"The chairman of our party is President Serzh Sargsyan, who has been in active politics since the first days of our independence," he told RFE/RL's Armenian service (Azatutyun.am). "The party will always see him as its chairman."

The HHK spokesman, Eduard Sharmazanov, said earlier this week that Sargsyan will continue to lead the ruling party for "many years" to come. Sharmazanov made this clear when he was asked whether the president will seek to become prime minister after completing his second and final term in 2018. Sargsyan himself has declined to rule out such a possibility.

Karapetyan, 53, is a former business executive who is currently not affiliated with any party. The main official rationale for Sargsyan's decision to appoint



him as prime minister two months ago was to speed up economic reforms in Armenia.

"The next two or three years will see a breakthrough," Sargsyan declared late last week. "I am sure that the lives of our citizens will improve day by day."

Melikyan claimed that such a "breakthrough" is already happening. He pointed to major policy changes announced by the newly reshuffled government.

Aram Manukyan, a senior member of the opposition Armenian National Congress (HAK), dismissed the claim as "pre-election demagoguery."

The HAK and other opposition groups say that the promised reforms are a mere ploy designed to improve the HHK's chances of winning the next parliamentary elections slated for April.

Armenia, UAE discuss visa liberalization

President Serzh Sargsyan met with the Vice President of the UAE, Prime Minister, Emir of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

At the beginning of the meeting the President of Armenia expressed thanks to the friendly United Arab Emirates for the warm welcome extended to the RA official delegation and expressed confidence that the visit will provide the opportunity to conduct practical discussions and achieve mutually beneficial agreements which will elevate the Armenian-UAE multifaceted friendly relations to a qualitatively new level and will bring their significant contribution to the future development of the bilateral cooperation.

Stressing the importance of historical and cultural legacy of the Armenian-Arab past, a common approach to a number of issues, as well as the presence in the Arab countries of the Armenian communities, Serzh Sargsyan underscored that in Armenia's foreign policy the Middle East has always occupied a considerable role and 25 years after the Armenian independence our country has been unfolding an efficient and multifaceted cooperation with the Arab states.

According to the President of Armenia, the relations between Armenia and the UAE with this regard occupy a special place and present an excellent example of cooperation.

At the meeting, the parties praised the relations between the two friendly states and peoples and expressed readiness to develop and strengthen them even further.

President Sargsyan highlighted the importance of deepening the trade, economic and investment cooperation with the countries of the Persian Gulf. He said that Armenia views the UAE as an important hub for transportation from Armenia to the Gulf region and other countries and back, towards Armenia. He informed Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum that from the viewpoint of developing relations between the two friendly states, he has made an offer to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sul-

tan Al-Nahyan to organize an investment conference in the Emirates dedicated to Armenia. According to the President of Armenia, the experience and good reputation of the successfully organized conferences at the United Arab Emirates will allow the major investment companies from the Emirates and regional countries to turn the conferences into working meetings and create opportunities for the development of investments in Armenia.



The parties stressed the importance of establishing the visa-free regime which will promote tourism. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum noted that starting next year the Emirates intend to make Fly Dubai flights to Yerevan daily.

The President of Armenia and Vice President of the UAE, Prime Minister, Emir of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum concurred that there is a great potential for deepening the co-

operation between the two countries.

At the conclusion of the meeting, there took place the document signing ceremony. Armenia and the UAE signed a number of documents aimed at the deepening and strengthening of the bilateral cooperation in different areas. Signed were the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the United Arab Emirates on Cooperation in the Area of Security and Fight against

Terrorism, as well a Memorandum of Understanding between the RA Ministry of Emergency Situations and the UAE Supreme Council for National Security, National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority on Cooperation in Emergency Situations, Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the United Arab Emirates on Scientific and Technical Cooperation and Agreement on the

Expansion of Investment and Business Opportunities between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the RA and the UAE Chamber of Commerce.

After the document signing ceremony the Vice President of the UAE, Prime Minister, Emir of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum gave official dinner in honor of the President of Armenia who is in the UAE on official visit.



EU Ambassadors welcome Armenian Prime Minister's plans to improve business and investment climate

Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan received on November 11 the Ambassadors of EU member states accredited to Armenia and the Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia Piotr Switalski.

The Prime Minister emphasized the sincere and open dialogue and cooperation with the EU in all directions and stressed the importance of exchange of experience and implementation of the European culture in our country in the fields of business management, fight against corruption, protection of human rights, and implementation of judicial reforms.

Speaking about the government program, Karen Karapetyan noted that the main goal of the executive is to create maximally fair, free and equal field for business and promote investment programs.

The Prime Minister briefed the diplomats on plans to create foundations that will co-finance active, openly operating business and encourage them to be law-abiding taxpayers. He said he does not see a way of development of the country without fight against shadow economy and corruption in all spheres.

Piotr Switalski, in turn, underlined that he's impressed by the Prime Minister's and government's ambitions and reforms agenda. The Ambassador stressed, that as a friend of Armenia, the



European Union is willing to help the country develop the economy, improve the business field, the tax and customs management.

Referring to the fight against corruption, Mr. Switalski hailed the measures envisaged by the government and voiced willingness to cooperate in that direction.

The EU Ambassador attached importance to the implementation of reforms in the organization of electoral processes, independence of the judicial system, defense of human rights.

ADB to provide \$90.5 million loan to help improve infrastructure operations, sustainability in Armenia

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved \$90.5 million in a loan and a technical assistance grant to improve infrastructure operation and sustainability in Armenia through reforms in the road, water, and power sectors.

"Aging public infrastructure, limited fiscal resources and the lack of adequate prioritization and management of scarce public resources, limit opportunities for inclusive growth in Armenia," said Matthew Hodge, economist with ADB's Central West Asia Regional Department. "Providing adequate infrastructure services is critical to supporting economic activity and income generation, especially outside of the capital city."

Armenia faces economic challenges and a tight fiscal situation due to reduced remittance inflows from the Russian Federation and lowering export demand from its main trading partners. The government's fiscal consolidation limits budget allocations for infrastructure investment, operation, and maintenance in the foreseeable future, emphasizing the need for improved cost recovery, generation of alternative revenues, and better management of fiscal resources.

The program will focus on improvements in infrastructure operations and sustainability through enhanced public financial management practices and utility regulation, increased maintenance expenditures, and improved contracting and maintenance practices in the road and water sectors. In addition, the program will also introduce competition in the power market which opens the opportunities for greater revenue generation especially from exporting surplus electricity.



This is the second phase of the Infrastructure Sustainability Support Program supported by ADB. The first phase of the program, approved in 2012 and already completed, focused on policy reforms in the water and road sectors and laid the platform for deeper engagement and expansion of the program in the second phase.

The program is in line with Armenia's Development Strategy 2014–2025, which recognizes the need to improve the country's management of public infrastructure to improve connectivity and utility services.

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, ADB in December 2016 will mark 50 years of development partnership in the region. It is owned by 67 members – 48 from the region. In 2015, ADB assistance totaled \$27.2 billion, including cofinancing of \$10.7 billion.

IBM, USAID and Armenian partners unveil new tech center

ISTC

The Innovative Solutions and Technologies Center (ISTC), which has been supporting the development of Armenia's IT sector since 2014, opened its new home on Thursday, November 10, welcoming its first guests to its new 1,000 square-meter state-of-the-art premises on the Yerevan State University Campus.

The ISTC – a joint project of the Government of Armenia, the Enterprise Incubator Foundation, IBM, USAID, and Yerevan State University – helps meet the demand for quality specialists to work in Armenia's IT sector. ISTC will help develop and strengthen the education and research potential of Armenian universities in the areas of IT and hi-tech. The new facility, fully equipped with the latest IBM technology, will also offer a favorable and innovative environment for the development of sustainable businesses, providing the startups with space and infrastructure, technical and business consulting, and networking opportunities.

"I am proud of the fact that this uniquely designed partnership promotes the education of one of Armenia's most valuable resources – its youth. The collaboration between the private sector and universities creates economic opportunities for younger generations of Armenia," said U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard Mills, Jr., who was joined at the opening of the new facility by Armenia's Minister of Transport, Communication and Information Technologies Vahan Martirosyan, and IBM University Relations Manager

Sergey Belov. Attendees at the opening included high-level guests from the Government of Armenia, IBM, and the U.S. Embassy, as well as more than 100 Armenian tech and business representatives.

Supporting the development of Armenia's IT sector has long been a priority of the U.S., Ambassador Mills said. "USAID support to the IT sector began a decade ago. Since that time, USAID has played an important role in laying the foundation for a strong and vibrant IT sector in Armenia," he said during the opening. "We see the establishment of the Innovative Solutions and Technologies Center as a capstone achievement in our efforts to partner with you to develop and strengthen IT in Armenia." Ambassador Mills also emphasized the Center's important role of fostering cooperation between Armenian and U.S. institutions of higher education, noting that the ISTC has signed collaboration agreements with several U.S. universities, including for example Duke University, Fordham University, and Stanford University.

The ISTC serves students and university faculty, providing them with the latest hardware and software for training and research. Since the project's launch, the ISTC has already assisted more than 100 professors from nine major Armenian universities to improve their training courses. Thanks to these efforts, more than 1,500 students have already received training through 30 modernized curricula in the areas of artificial intelligence, business process

management, cloud computing, and cyber security among others. Several new Master-degree programs in cutting edge technological areas have also been designed with local universities and will be launched in the next academic year.

"The Enterprise Incubator Foundation consistently initiates and implements strategic projects targeted at IT development in the country, formation of innovative environment, and provision of quality training for personnel. One of our most important achievements is the establishment of ISTC. Thanks to this initiative, international knowledge and financial resources will be accessible to Armenia. IT specialists will be trained in line with market requirements. And local companies with have the chance to engage in global networks," EIF Director Bagrat Yengibaryan said during the event.

IBM's Sergey Belov noted that ISTC is a best practice of education and research, which can serve as a basis for IBM to promote collaboration and development in the region. "The American University of Armenia and Yerevan State University will have new and fully personalized Academic Hubs, including software and educational materials for their students and professors," he said.

Several new ISTC initiatives were also announced during the opening event, including the launch of the Research Grant Program that will help develop the R&D capacity of Armenia's higher education institutions. The program will provide its beneficiaries with full access to the IBM cloud infrastructure as well as support them with funding and research commercialization. Another new initiative will facilitate exchange programs for Armenian researchers at IBM partner universities in the United States.

On the margins of its grand opening event, ISTC also launched the "Smarter Armenia Hackathon '16," a two-day contest for students, challenging them to create the best IT solutions in finance, healthcare, and the telecommunications industry.

President Sargsyan: “Thank you, Mr Pouzin, for Inventing Internet...Just for Us the Armenians” Honoring the Seventh Global IT Award Louis Pouzin of France...



By **Gourgen James Khazhakian**

Chief
Correspondent

In its previous issue The Highlights has started to cover visit of the 2016 Laureate of the RA President’s Award for Outstanding Contribution to Humanity through IT (the Sponsor of which since its establishment is Armenia’s leading telecom operator Viva-Cell-MTS, Founding GM **Ralph Yirikian**) **Louis Pouzin** of France to Armenia.

To remind, Monsieur Pouzin is a world-recognized expert in computer communication and networking technology. He is also known internationally for his numerous publications, many of which are instructional materials for courses on computer network. L.Pouzin has released more than 80 articles and a book on the computer networking, and has received numerous prestigious awards such as IFIP Silver Core, ACM SIGCOMM, IEEE Internet, ISOC Hall of Fame, and Chevalier of Légion d’Honneur. Monsieur Pouzin is one of the five founding fathers of Internet. He was awarded the **Queen Elizabeth II Prize for Engineering**.

(The Award was initiated by the British Government to raise the value of engineering, as an award accompanying the Nobel Prize. Louis Pouzin received the Award at the Buckingham Palace from the hands Queen Elizabeth II herself on the June 25th 2013).

Within the frames of his trip Louis Pouzin, traditionally, met the RA Prime Minister **Karen Karapetyan**, visited the State Engineering University of Armenia (SEUA, Polytechnic) where he was awarded the University Honorable Doctor title, paid tribute to the 1915 Armenian Genocide victims at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial, made a sightseeing tour in Yerevan and the country.

In the evening of the November 8th President **Serzh Sargsyan** received the world famous French scientist, one of the forefathers of the Internet, Executive Director of

Open-Root organization Louis Pouzin.

The President of Armenia welcomed the celebrated scientist and his spouse **Chantal Lebrument** in our country and underscored that the RA Presidential Award that was bestowed on Mr. Pouzin, is the embodiment of the Armenian people’s gratitude and admiration for the individuals who are moving the world forward and whose talent allowed the West to achieve technological advantage compared to the East. *“This Award serves another purpose too: to invite the attention of our young people to the individuals and activities which have become successful, and is called to inspire them. We*



want to prove that knowledge can make someone world famous and allow to live a prosperous life and enjoy respect,” said the President of Armenia.

Louis Pouzin said that throughout his life he has been working with pleasure and has been happy to contact persons who are resolute in their steps. *“I am confident that there are many such people in Armenia with whom it is possible to work and implement programs. My objective is to maintain a constant contact with them and thanks to that link even to develop new programs and carry out works,”* said Louis Pouzin at the meeting with the President of Armenia.

After the meeting, at the Presidential Palace the ceremony of the cancelling a special envelop dedicated to the recipients of the RA Presidential Global IT Award took place. This is a special philatelic product – a thematic envelop with two stamps released

in 2013 and dedicated to the “RA Presidential Award for the Outstanding Contribution to Humanity through the Information Technology” topic. This special edition envelop that was printed in 500 copies, was cancelled with a special seal. The envelop depicts the GIT Award 2016 laureate, the French scientist, the inventor of datagram, one of the five forefathers of the Internet Louis Pouzin and the six previous Laureates.

And after that the official ceremony of the awarding was held. After the ceremony, in honor of the recipient of the Award Louis Pouzin and his spouse Chantal Lebrument a reception was given.

The Chairman of the Executive Board of the Global IT Award Committee, Synopsys Armenia Director H. Musayelian presented the history of the Award created by the Presidential decree, principles that guide the activities of the selection committee, individuals who received the award

(An author’s remark: for six years already Mr Chairman of the Executive Board of the Global IT Award Committee, Synopsys Armenia Director

H.Musayelian in ALL his speeches, when pronouncing the first name of the first (2010) GIT Award Laureate, Retired Intel Chief, a very honorable scientist, public person and man Dr Barrett, calls him “Greg”, while his name is “Craig” -??).

Member of the Award Committee Selection Panel, CEO and Chairman Viasphere International, Co-Founder/Co-Chairman, ArmTech Congress Mr **Anthony (Tony) Moroyan** (who has been very helpful in finding the Award nominees since its very establishment – **G.Kh**) presented the merits of the Laureate and spoke of his contribution to the area.

And then President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan handed the Award to Louis Pouzin and made a statement. Below The Highlights readers could find essential extracts from the statement:

“...Today we are honoring one of the forefathers of the Internet.

Once someone joked that the global internet has been created just for the Armenians, so that Armenians spread all over the world can contact each other quickly, develop and implement joint programs. Mr. Pouzin, we are grateful to you for that. And if seriously, I will say the following: You are a person who participated at the greatest technological revolution in the history of the mankind. The invention of the internet is comparable to the invention of fire, metal processing, and book printing. Those had been truly epic events which changed the world picture and demeanor: You are one of those who have been changing the world and continue to do so.

The first works on the creation of the world-wide web started, if I am not mistaken, during the Cold War. The main objective of the preliminary works conducted at the time was to create alternative means of communication for the commander control, particularly in case of a horrible and unimaginable nu-

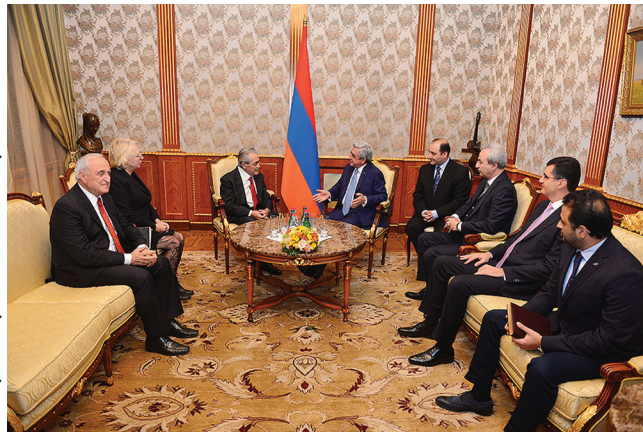
mation technology area who are contributing to the advancement and unity of the mankind. With this Award, we want to once again stress the significance of the pioneers of the area such as yourself. We need dedicated people who will serve as a role model to our teenagers and young people and you are just like that.

... For Armenia, the development of information technologies is of a strategic importance. In the short as well as long-term perspective our education, science, economy and our entire society in general will be able to move in step with the world only

Just awarded Louis Pouzin said words of gratitude:

“Mr. President, very pleasing words have been addressed to me, and I believe we need to look together into the future. We don't know what's going to happen with the internet twenty years from now. Today to make the internet safe is a great challenge, that is to make it more adaptable to the people's needs, and it requires time, energy, work and purposefulness to get the acceptable balance in the areas of industry, research, technology, sociology, and others. In a certain context, we need to avoid the clash of interests. We have to consider that life is much more interesting than death thus we need to move forward, striving to overcome difficulties and in the next ten years probably the society should adapt itself to the era of the internet”.

Speaking to Armenian 168 Jam newspaper correspondent, the 7th GIT Award Laureate said he discovered that here, in Armenia, there is a clearly developed strategic policy for the information technology development. This is



clear war. Thanks God, ghastly confrontation of the Cold War became history, and we need to make efforts and pray that those times do not return while the internet today serves millions in peaceful conditions.

Together with Mr. Pouzin, we once again underscore the importance of peace and cooperation, and internet should be their true and positive result.

Esteemed Mr. Pouzin,

This Award, which we created and are bestowing for the sixth year in a row, is called to recognize those devotees of the infor-

and only if armed with modern information technologies. In the contemporary, rapidly changing world to be competitive for many may mean to be prosperous, but for us it's a matter of national security. Our vision for our future lies in that very context. For us, you're a guest from the future.

I congratulate you, dear Mr. Pouzin on receiving this Award. I wish you excellent health and unbound energy in your gratifying work. Please be assured that from now on you have many keen friends in Armenia. Thank you”.

a policy that you can not see even in many developed countries, he said. In GIT Award 2016 Laureate words, “In Paris they've told me that the great work being done for the promotion of the IT sector here in Armenia, and I have received a pretty good explanation on what this Award is. And so I gladly accepted this offer, and here I am...”

And... “The companies that make data collection and storage of private persons such as Google, Twitter, Facebook, Apple, Amazon, - these are instruments having

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President Sargsyan: "Thank you, Mr Pouzin, for Inventing Internet...Just for Us the Armenians" Honoring the Seventh Global IT Award Louis Pouzin of France...

from p.p. 8-9

the real threats to the society. People simply are not aware that such a collection of data about them is not in their favor. The information that is provided and distributed to the people, - sports, politics, fashion and other works with well thought-out mechanisms that also contributes to interests of huge enterprises, or even to enrichment of the public sectors.

Now the most important job of my life is to make the Internet more diverse, - by this freeing it from the American domination.

My task is to make the Internet more useful for people and not to allow certain groups of people to become too rich at the expense of others..."

As **Armen Baldryan**, a GIT Award Committee's Selection Panel member, Founding Director of Unicom, one of the most dynamic Armenian IT companies said, "such scientists as Louis Pouzin enlarge horizons of researchers and engineers, bring new culture of R&D to us, especially the young generation..."

Your correspondent asked Tony Moroyan who was with Mr and Mrs Pouzin along all their stay in Armenia, to summarize the visit.

And Mr Moroyan said the following:

"Mr. Pouzin was very impressed by the progress of Armenia since the collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of Armenia in 1991.

He noticed the passion and the energy of the IT community and extensive collaboration of the university, government and both the start-ups and the multinationals.

He has interacted with members of the very active Armenian Community for many years even before 1991 in France. However, he did not know much about Armenia even after its independence.

He was very pleased to visit several enti-

ties that included: VivaCell-MTS (the leading telecom operator), SEUA (Polytechnic University), Viasphere Technopark (the first very successful commercial business park and incubator with leading edge technology start-ups and multinationals), Matenadaran (unparalleled miniature drawings and archives), Tumo Center (ever enthusiastic youngsters), Ayb School (very revolutionary approach to the education), Garni and Geghard (with a stop at the very inspiring Charent's Arch where they enjoyed a great view of Ararat), Karas Winery (they loved the wine and gave high marks!). His visit to

tal to learn the Duduk.

Both Louis Pouzin and Chantal could not have enough famous Armenian Cognac everywhere we went. They enjoyed the diverse Armenian cuisines with members of IT Community, university officials and government officials in restaurant settings. He was especially taken back when visited Bureaucrat (book store, wine bar and restaurant), HyeLands, Eco Village Resort, Charles, Zeituna, La Piazza, etc.

The formal GIT awarding ceremony and the private meeting with the President of Armenia were the climax events for both Lou-

is and Chantal. He has received many medals and awards but none compare with these events. His comment was that he thought the President enjoyed their conversations during the dinner; he definitely enjoyed the interactions.

His meeting with the Prime Minister was very special and he appreciated to have been given the chance to give his opinion to the PM regarding the future of the Internet.

Louis found everyone warm, friendly, gracious, informative and passionate about Armenia and IT.

At the time of his departure, Louis Pouzin said that this was one of the longest week for him. In his own words, he will never forget all the people he met, the events he participated, the honor he enjoyed, the warmth he felt. The visit to the Genocide Museum, the Memorial and the tree planting are sculptured in his memory for perpetuity".

Asked "How do you feel now that Louis Pouzin has left Armenia?", Mr Moroyan replied: "I think this was a team effort. A major effort. It was very successful and this is just the start of a long term of relationship of Louis Pouzin with Armenia. We thank all the people who made this important visit".



Khor Virap on the first day after his arrival was overpowering to him to see both Ararat (the Story of Noy) and the Pit (where St. Gregory the Illuminator spent many years).

He visited Vernisaj where we gifted a professional DUDUK and several famous Duduk music to motivate his spouse Chan-

Armenia’s Leading Telecom Operator Recently...

Open Doors Day at VivaCell-MTS

Yet another Open Doors day was organized at VivaCell-MTS. This time it hosted 30 students of the Services Department at the School of Geography and Geology, Yerevan State University.

The students’ meeting with the Founding General Manager of VivaCell-MTS Mr **Ralph C. Yirikian** was organized upon the initiative of the university as the students expressed willingness to familiarize with the Company’s activities, culture of corporate management, as well as the specifics of structural and quality management.

“VivaCell-MTS is a servicing company in

The SunChild 6th International Environmental Festival kicks off in Yerevan

The program of SunChild International Environmental Festival 2016 is rich and symbolic as it marks the 10th anniversary of partnership between SunChild Eco Clubs and FPWC-VivaCell-MTS. This year the festival also features a new project - the Green Mobility.

Each year the festival strives to address important environmental issues. The festival program includes screenings of wild-life and environmental films from all over

striving to shape environmental way of thinking and culture especially among the younger generation. Merciless, consumerist attitude and carelessness is the boomerang thrown at the humanity, which may one day return as a disaster. To avoid it, we should first shun making the deliberate mistake of destroying the nature, polluting it and creating an atmosphere of indifference. We manage to achieve our goals step by step by events like this. I am confident the younger generation is more committed in this matter,” said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph Yirikian.

The grand opening ceremony of the SunChild 6-th International Environmental Festival was held on November 11 in “Moscow” Cinema Blue Hall.



as much as it is an ICT company. Company can have the best operational systems including cutting-edge technology, infrastructure, productivity, human resources, the best competence, and yet lag behind in terms of customer care. Customer care is a sort of applied science in nowadays world. It’s a key driver of competitive advantage. The principles of customer care are almost the same for different spheres, and VivaCell-MTS is ready to share its knowledge with you, the future key responsible for developing tourism in Armenia and making the country one of the centers of natural and cultural sight-seeing internationally;” said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph Yirikian.



the world, workshops, exhibitions, media campaigns and other events designed to raise awareness about the growing global challenge of nature conservation.

This year the festival featured 38 films from around the world in competition and non-competition programs.

“For ten years now we join efforts in

Before the opening ceremony, the French photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand’s exhibition titled “Sustainable development: why??” was presented in the Moscow Cinema 2-nd floor lobby.

The festival’s opening ceremony was followed by the exclusive screening of “Racing Extinction”, a film from the Oscar-winner director of “The Cove” Louie Psihoyos.

Film screenings and discussions, exhibitions and workshops were held in AEON, Mass Media Center, AGBU, TUMO, Alliance Française, Article 3 Club, Ilik Handmade crafts store and cafe.

The Festival has been organized owing to the support of FPWC General Partner VivaCell-MTS.

Youth Orchestra: New Initiatives and Khachaturian Fest Concerts

One More Joint Initiative of VivaCell-MTS and SYOA Launched in Gyumri: Master-classes in the Regions for the Musicians of the All-Armenian “Generation of Independence” Choir and Orchestra

For already six years VivaCell-MTS undertakes the general partnership of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia. Thanks to the long-term cooperation with Armenia's leading telecommunications operator VivaCell-MTS, SYOA has achieved considerable progress in promoting classical music among the general public.

Thanks to the partnership with VivaCell-MTS, the SYOA has not only collaborated with outstanding musicians, but also has presented the Armenian culture and the achievements of the Armenian



performing arts school on foreign stages and within the frameworks of the most prestigious festivals.

The Youth Orchestra has also implemented an unprecedented project in Armenia: lovers of classic music are given a unique opportunity to follow all the concerts of the Orchestra online, regardless their location.

The initiatives of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia implemented thanks to the partnership with VivaCell-MTS, help spread our cultural traditions to the wider public and facilitate the aesthetic education of the young generation.

Yet another joint initiative of VivaCell-MTS and SYOA was launched recently in Gyumri. It is aimed at fostering the sphere of musical education in the regions of Armenia. In the frames of the project, several master-classes will be organized in the regions for the musicians of the “Generation of Independence” All-Armenian Choir and Orchestra.

22 participants of the “Generation of Independence” All-Armenian program from Shirak and Tavush Marzes aged 12-18, will attend master-classes of the tutors from Yerevan.

“Armenia is a country rich in cultural traditions. Our goal is to maintain and develop these traditions. These goals are easier to achieve when you have a partner and supporter like VivaCell-MTS. The company and its General Manager Ralph Yirikian have their invaluable contribution to the outreach and propagation of the classical music,” said the SYOA Artistic Director and Principal Conductor **Sergey Smbatyan**.

“VivaCell-MTS supports and encourages

the activities of the State Youth Orchestra. Commendable is the striving of the Orchestra to achieve even more, to continue presenting classical music to the wide public and popularizing it among the young generation. To meet these objectives, the Orchestra implements projects which are aimed at providing young musicians from regions of Armenia an opportunity to reveal their potential and hone their performing skills. Projects of this kind help to raise a new generation of musicians, fostering the preservation of Armenian cultural traditions and elements of national identity in the sphere of classical music,” said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph Yirikian**.

World and Armenia premieres and famous soloists within the framework of the Khachatourian Festival

World and Armenia premieres were presented to the audience on November 8 within the framework of the 4th Khachatourian International Festival. World premiere of the composition Three Pieces for Orchestra by *Alexey Shor* took place. Verdiana for Clarinet and Orchestra by the same composer was performed in Armenia for the first time. Besides, the audience enjoyed Sinfonietta for Strings by *Alexander Haroutiunian* and Piano Concerto No. 2 by *Sergey Rachmaninov*. World-famous musicians *Alexander Romanovsky* (piano, Ukraine / Italy) and *Julian Milkis* (clarinet, Canada) performed with the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia. Conductor that night was *Sergey Smbatyan*.

The Khachatourian International Festival invites renowned musicians to Armenia. Leading clarinetist of the music world, a student of legendary *Ben Goodman*, Julian Milkis is an international artist who performs as a soloist, chamber musician and has solo concerts, as well as is famous for his jazz performances.

Milkis performed in such famous concert halls as Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York, Salle Pleyel and Salle Gaveau in Paris, the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the Grand Hall of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, etc.

The Armenian audience waits and receives pianist *Alexander Romanovsky* with lots of love. As the pianist says, in Armenia he feels like at home. Romanovsky who has high demand in the world, won the First Prize of the international competition after Busony (Italy) at age only 17. Since 2013, Romanovsky has been the artistic director of the International Competition for Young Pianists after *Vladimir Kravinev*.

As a soloist, he performed under the direction of *Valery Gergiev* at the Mariinsky Theatre with the Orchestra of the theater, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the direction of *Ames Colony*, with the Philharmonic Orchestra of New York under the direction of *Alan Gilbert*, as well as at the Barbican Centre in London with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, etc.



Otri Trio performed within the framework of the Khachatourian Fest

On November 11 the ensemble of State Youth Orchestra of Armenia Otri Trio performed a chamber concert at the Aram Khachatourian House-Museum. The evening took place within the framework of the 4th Khachatourian International Festival. Concert program included pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach, Antonin Leopold Dvořák, Simon Hovhannisyán, Edward Baghdasaryán, Aram Khachatourian. The concert was also attended by cellist *Anush Yavrumian*.

The members of the trio are *Ruzanna Tovmasyan* (flute), *Angela Hovhannisyán* (violin) and *Arevik Kosyan* (viola). This format of the trio is exclusive for Armenia. In contrast to the classical piano trio, they represent an alternative embodiment of the ensemble that incorporates wind and string instruments. The members of the Trio noted that the participation in the Khachatourian Festival was a great experience for a musician, as they communicate both with the audience, and with other musicians, including the world-famous ones.

The exchange of the experience with them is very important for the younger generation of musicians. The members of the Trio noted that the Khachatourian Festival plays an important role in the musical life. It distributes high values, making classical music accessible to more people. Musicians emphasized that the Festival also pays special attention to the Armenian music.

In particular, during its concerts, Otri Trio, along with European, American composers always presents works by Armenian composers.

4th Khachatourian International Festival is held under the patronage of the President of RA *Serzh Sargsyan*. It is held thanks to the joint efforts of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia (General Partner of the Orchestra – VivaCell-MTS) and the “Classical Music Support” NGO, with the support of the Ministry of Culture of RA, the “Khachatourian” Foundation and the European Foundation for Support of Culture. The sponsors of the 4th Khachatourian Festival are “Jermuk Group” Company, “Ani Plaza” Hotel, the Yerevan Brandy Factory and the ArmSwissBank.



A Dictator Obsessed with Power & Wealth: Erdogan's 12 Scandals!



*Harut
Sassounian*

With each passing day, Turkish President Erdogan is becoming increasingly dictatorial. The arrest of 11 members of the opposition pro-Kurdish party, HDP, is the latest in a long string of Erdogan's dictatorial policies.

Michael Rubin, a former Pentagon official and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote a devastating exposé on Erdogan last week, listing some of his scandalous actions!

I have summarized Rubin's lengthy article which was posted on Newsweek magazine's European edition website, under the title, "Twelve Questions Turkish Journalists Dare not Ask":

1. How did Erdogan become a billionaire?

Erdogan was raised in a poor family until he became Mayor of Istanbul when he faced 13 corruption probes. In 2004, when he was Prime Minister, the U.S. embassy in Ankara reported in a cable to Washington that "he had at least eight Swiss bank accounts." In addition, secret phone recordings revealed his instructions "to liquidate perhaps a billion dollars in cash. Erdogan used his power over the courts to quash the case and arrest prosecutors and judges who sought to pursue it."

2. Where is Erdogan's university diploma?

Erdogan claims to have graduated from Istanbul's Marmara University in 1981. His degree may have been forged. "A four-year degree is a prerequisite for the presidency. If Erdogan lied about having a degree, can he remain as president?"

3. Is there another story behind the coup attempt?

Erdogan fired and jailed thousands of his political opponents, accusing them of

being the followers of Fethullah Gulen, the alleged mastermind of the July 15 coup attempt, which the Turkish President called "a gift from God."

4. If there is a FETO, is there also an ETO?

Erdogan called Gulen's movement "the Fethullahist Terror Organization (FETO)... If it is permissible to talk about FETO as a terror group, would it be equally acceptable to refer to the Erdoganist Terror Organization (ETO)?"

5. If Gulen is a terrorist, why did Erdogan work with him till 2013?

Gulen and Erdogan had practically identical religious philosophies until their split in 2013. Why is Gulen a 'terrorist' now?

6. Why is it OK to report on PKK attacks but not on ISIS?

"When the PKK or fringe Kurdish groups attack, it often dominates the headlines in Turkey for days as the investigation continues, authorities name suspects, etc.... But when ISIS has attacked, the Turkish government has put an embargo on reports about the investigation."

7. Why did Turkish intelligence help the Nusra Front? And ISIS?

"Evidence is overwhelming that both the Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, and ISIS itself, have received arms, support and equipment from authorities in Turkey. When journalists broke the story — and provided photographic evidence — Erdogan's response was to arrest the editor of the newspaper that published the scoop. Likewise, when Turkish soldiers stopped an arms shipment into Syria, Erdogan ordered the soldiers' arrest rather than the smugglers...."

8. Was a Turkish death squad behind the Paris assassinations?

"In 2013, assassins executed three Kurdish activists in their office in Paris. All three were PKK members.... The French captured Omer Guney, a 32-year-

old Turk who had arrived in France at age 9. Telephone intercepts after the murders show him calling back to handlers in Turkey's intelligence agency...."

9. Why did Erdogan appoint his son-in-law oil minister?

"Berat Albayrak, Erdogan's 37-year-old son-in-law, became Turkey's energy minister on November 24, 2015. Was he the best qualified? Or were other factors at play?"

10. Can we talk about Erdogan's associations?

Erdogan is a close friend of Yasin al-Qadi, a Saudi businessman, who, according to the U.S. Treasury Department "had alleged ties to Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden until 2014." Erdogan persistently declared: "I know Mr. Qadi. I believe in him as I believe in myself. For Mr. Qadi to associate with a terrorist organization, or support one, is impossible." Erdogan is also close to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of Afghanistan who has "allied himself with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda." Another friend, Khalid Meshaal (the militant leader of Hamas), visited Turkey as Erdogan's personal guest!

11. What deal have you struck with Putin?

After Erdogan and Putin buried the hatchet earlier this year, they agreed on a pipeline deal and held talks on the Turkish purchase of a Russian missile system. Were there any secret agreements?

12. What explains the court's 2008 refusal to close the AKP?

In 2008, Turkey's constitutional court came close to dissolving Erdogan's ruling party. But, at the last-minute, one justice switched his vote. It is alleged that "a businessman, long hounded by Erdogan, wired money into that justice's account just before the vote."

During a November 6 ceremony in Istanbul to receive an honorary doctorate, Erdogan proudly proclaimed: "I don't care if they call me a dictator or whatever else. It goes in one ear, out the other!"

USAID completes successful effort to improve social protection system in Armenia

More than 700,000 Armenians have access to an improved social safety net thanks to the USAID-funded Pension Reform Implementation Program (PRIP), which marked the completion of its activities on November 9. The four-year program worked with the Government of Armenia and local partners to make the country's social protection system more efficient, transparent, and financially stable.

The improvements brought by the program support Armenia's broader strategy to reduce poverty, strengthen social services institutions, and empower its citizens to exercise their social protection rights and responsibilities.

During the event marking the completion of the project, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Artem Asatryan, USAID Armenia Mission Director Deborah Grieser, and John Thissen, Project Management Unit Director at Chemonics International (the partner that implemented the program), spoke of the project's success.

In her welcome remarks, Director Grieser noted that the partnership between USAID and the Government of Armenia on this effort was geared towards tangible results and improvements in the sector. Thanks to this partnership, the government was able to increase pension benefits by 15% in 2014 and an additional 15% in 2015, with no additional cost to the budget.

"The introduction of modern technologies and the digitalization of the Ministry of Labor's paper-based personal records have significantly improved record management and the transparency of Armenia's social protection system, resulting in savings of many millions of drams for the state budget," she said. "In addition, this modern system helps limit the opportunities for fraud and corrup-

tion."

Over the past three and half years, USAID has used the reform effort to help the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs integrate several databases into a single electronic platform, ePension, which makes social sector data more accurate and decreases the chances for corruption. Through ePension, the possibilities for duplicate registrations and multiple payments to the same beneficiary from different social service offices have been removed. Furthermore, the ePension system is now accessible in all of the integrated social services centers throughout Armenia. As a result, citizens with ID cards

has also digitized and archived paper-based personal records to secure electronic files against any unauthorized data alterations or transfers.

In an innovative approach to social reform, the program also helped the Ministry work with civil society organizations to ensure that beneficiaries of the social services system receive payments and services in an efficient manner. In fact, following the project's implementation, a survey of about 500,000 pension beneficiaries found that 99% received timely payments and improved social services.

Another of the program's accomplishments is the creation of the 114 hotline, which the Ministry developed with support from USAID and the World Bank. The hotline initially addressed only pension-related questions but has since grown to accommodate a large volume of calls regarding all types of social issues, including disability allowances and family benefits. A nationwide survey has revealed that Armenian families are highly satisfied with the 114 hotline.

Building on these successes, USAID will continue to work with the Government of Armenia on social sector reforms, including reforms that will help ensure social inclusion, improved welfare and better protection for children and other vulnerable groups.

"We applaud Armenia's consistent progress in implementing social protection reforms and encourage the Government of Armenia to continue improving the transparency and accountability of the system to see even more results in the social protection area," Director Grieser said.



can now conveniently receive services and social payments in more locations, without having to visit several government offices and present numerous documents.

Also through the project, the Ministry developed a centralized payment system for child care benefits, so families no longer face demands for bribes in order to receive child benefits. The Government of Armenia

His Holiness Aram I and Pope Francis meet in Vatican

On November 11 the scheduled meeting between the Pope and the Catholicos was held at the Papal office in the Vatican.

After sharing greetings, Catholicos Aram I expressed his great appreciation for the Pope's two pronouncements on the Armenian Genocide of 1915 as the first genocide of the 20th century, which he had made in 2015 at the Vatican and in 2016 in Yerevan. His Holiness Pope Francis reiterated his conviction on this matter.

Speaking of the conflicts in the Middle East and the current problems of the churches, Aram I said that the churches had endured difficulties at the cost of martyrdom for centuries, and, yet presently, they remain committed to their vocation. He then thanked Pope Francis and the Vatican for defending the rights of Christians in the Middle East and for supporting efforts towards Christian-Muslim cooperation and conviviality. Pope Francis welcoming the Catholicos' reminder, stressed, in his turn, the vital importance of the Christian presence in the Middle East and assured of the continuing solidarity of the Vatican to this effect. In this context, the two Pontiffs emphasized the need to continue, with renewed pace, interreligious dialogue and collaboration in general, and Christian-Muslim in particular, to face together concerns and challenges of modern societies.

His Holiness Aram I speaking about the importance of the unity of the church, pointed out that establishing a common date for Easter would be a visible expression of Christian unity. The Holy Father reminded Aram I that during the last few decades the Catholic Church has given special attention to this matter and welcomes any efforts aimed at fixing a common date, which could be acceptable by all the churches.

Aram I shared with Pope Francis the good news that eventually Lebanon had a new president in the person of Gen. Michel Aoun. The Pope warmly greeted the election of a president, considering it an important step towards deepening the Christian-Muslim cohabitation in Lebanon. Referring to the historical relations between the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia and the Vatican, which dates back to the time of the Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia, His Holiness Aram I reaffirmed his commitment to continue bilateral relation and collaboration with the Vatican. At the end of their meeting, both Pontiffs reemphasized the decisive importance of taking the church to the people through the kind of initiatives, which make the church a living and relevant reality in the life of the people.



The Telegraph: Why Armenia might be Europe's best-kept secret



By Frank Gardner

It's midafternoon in a mountain village close to the Azerbaijan border and the air is thick with the smoke of a dozen chargrill barbecues. Men are turning giant skewers of chicken and lamb on the coals while their obedient sons fan the flames, dressed in traditional Armenian costume.

High above the gorge the sun is pouring down from a cloudless sky and beyond the river bridge there's dancing: troupes of young men and women, linking arms, kicking their legs and singing in unison as wild music blares out from speakers beneath the chestnut trees.

On the trestle tables there are baskets overflowing with freshly picked fruit and bottles stacked up high, filled with a dark red liquid. It's semi-sweet wine from the areni grape because today, October 1, is the annual Areni wine festival.

You know you're in wine country the moment you arrive at Yerevan airport. You can't really miss it as there's a 20ft high inflatable wine bottle parked outside the terminal.

A Christian country sandwiched between predominantly Muslim Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan, Armenia likes its alcohol. They also produce what they say is the best brandy in the world and driving into town the advertisements are everywhere for Ararat brandy and Noy cognac.

My driver deposits me at the quaint Villa Delenda, one of the few surviving relics of 19th-century town houses in the capital, Yerevan. Outside its ivy-covered walls stone bollards line the cobbled pavement, sten-

cilled with a Kalashnikov assault rifle and the words "Defend Yerevan".

Was this, I wondered, a reference to the deadly on-off conflict with Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region? No, says Maryam, one of the girls who run the villa as a guesthouse, with part of the proceeds going to charity. It's a campaign to stop the developers from bulldozing the last of Yerevan's historic buildings.

Inside the villa it's all woven carpets, wooden floorboards and exquisite locally-made ceramics which they sell from a shop in the basement. A kindly old woman bustles around me, speaking only Russian. It's late and the staff have gone home but she fetches me a bowl of potato soup, floating with mushrooms and herbs, and stands, arms folded, to watch appreciatively as I wolf it down

with hunks of bread.

She tells me her name is Amelia and I wish I had enough Russian to ask her about her life. I put her age at about 75, meaning she would have lived two thirds of her life in the USSR, when Armenia was part of the Soviet Union, before it disintegrated in 1991 and Armenia became an independent country.

Despite the developers, Yerevan is a delightful capital. Its wide, leafy boulevards are lined with cafés and wine bars where Armenians like to sit chatting late into the night.

People here still talk about the recent visit of the world's most famous living Armenian, Kim Kardashian, when her husband, the singer Kanye West, jumped into a fountain after a concert and invited the crowd to join him.

Armenians from the large overseas diaspora who visit for the first time are said to be pleasantly surprised by how modern, safe and civilised Yerevan is, and then rudely disappointed to find the suburbs and roadsides littered with the hangover detritus of the failed Soviet economy.

Driving out of the capital on my first morning, two things are immediately apparent. The abandoned, derelict factory buildings and the grim, Russian dormitory blocks surrounded by empty carcasses of old vehicles, rusting oil tanks and decrepit machinery overgrown with weeds. Armenia needs a clean-up.

But then you look up to the horizon and there, towering over everything, is the magnificent, awe-inspiring snow-capped peak of Mount Ararat, 5,165 metres high and just

continued on page 20



Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

Your attention naturally shifts toward plans for the future and finding ways to meet your goals. The probability is high that you will be leading or joining activities that call for cooperation from one or more groups of people for the next few weeks.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

For the next 3.5 weeks your attention is focused in the areas of travel, education, publishing, teaching, the law and the internet. Venus, your ruling planet, will generally smile upon you when you work within these areas. People will want to support you here, or you may be helping them.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Your mind has been truly busy in recent weeks. If you have not yet resolved an issue, set it aside while you take a break. Even a short time away can help your mental nerve endings synapse more easily. Clear the cobwebs from old, non-working solutions so that a fresh perspective can emerge.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

The Full Moon in Taurus occurs on Nov. 14th. These days that approach it are probably very busy and social. Don't forget to chant 3 times & dance 3 circles, while holding pockets, purse or wallet open. "Moon, Beautiful Moon, Fill it up, Fill it up, Fill it up soon."



Leo (July 22–August 21)

This week is about finding healing on either the physical or emotional levels. You may be the healer or the healee. It is possible that alternative medicine may play a role. If a friendship or a more significant relationship needs mending, now is the time to do so. The willingness to open your heart and mind to give and to receive is yours at this time.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

Your focus shifts to matters of home, hearth, and family. Events of the past may float up in your mind for reflection. If this occurs, ask yourself what you learned from the former experience. It probably would help you now. Family concerns may occupy your attention. It is a good time to open important discussions with those most important to you.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

You have favorable aspects related to home, property and family matters. You may have a desire to improve the appearance of the environment around you, whether at home or at work. You may be attracted to activities that allow you to play or work with your favorite colors.



Scorpio (October 23–November 19)

Your focus shifts at this time to matters of home, property, and family. Through the next 6 weeks you may be handling heavy work around your home, and/or making repairs to your property. Sometimes this transit interferes with your reflexes, so take care with ladders, kitchen knives, and the car.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Mercury moves very quickly through your sign over the next 3 weeks. During this period there likely will be greater emphasis on communications, errands, and other short distance travels. Your mind will be quick and your attitude persuasive. New projects begun at the end of this month will probably not be finished before mid-January.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

You are caught in a Mars/Saturn trap for the present. Saturn keeps you in the background and unable to climb out of your hole. It is like the brakes of a car. Mars, which is the personification of the accelerator is straining to pull you out. At present Saturn is too heavy to drag into the light of day. Time will be of great help. Later you can arise from the hole.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

It is a real challenge to make any moves forward at this time. Unless you are sharpening your skills, you might as well let it go for a few weeks. It is possible that machinery may break down, illustrating the "stop" signal. Just wait for a while. Try not to let it get to you.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

You may be tending to your own or another's healing on either the physical or emotional level. The emotional wound is old and is tied to a previous sense of abandonment that once occurred in your life. Somehow that old ache is being soothed at this time and you feel less alone in the world.

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The Telegraph: Why Armenia might be Europe's best-kept secret

from p. 17

across the border in Turkey. "It used to be ours," lament Armenians.

The mountain, together with its smaller sister, Little Ararat, form a stunning backdrop for the monastery of Khor Virap, meaning "Deep Dungeon". This hilltop fortress is allegedly where St. Gregory the Illuminator was incarcerated for 12 years by a pagan king who was then cursed by sprouting the head of a boar. On a more practical note, my advice would be to get there early to beat the coach tours.

We drive on, to two more jewels in Armenia's cultural crown: the Hellenic-style temple of Garmı and the monastery at Geghard. Both are nearly 1,500m up in the foothills of the Geghama Range where the air is cool and fresh. Buzzards soar on the wind then swoop down into the ravines to snatch prey.

Garmı is a sort of miniature Parthenon, built in the 1st century AD, reduced to rubble by an earthquake in 1679, then rebuilt in the Seventies. It's an extraordinary building in a dramatic setting but Geghard Monastery is, to my mind, even more impressive.

Up a steep, cobbled road, through an archway, past pine trees swaying beneath yellow crags, this World Heritage-listed monastery is named after the lance said to have speared Christ's flesh at the crucifixion.

My driver and I enter the main church, protected by high walls, and suddenly we are plunged into semi-darkness and 800 years of history. Devout Armenians are crossing themselves as they enter and lighting thin candles in a tray of sand.

Outside in the breeze I glance up at the rock face above and can see it is pitted with ancient caves: monastic cells once inhabited by monks. Somehow I can well imagine this place surviving intact for a further eight centuries.

Back at the wine festival in Areni, on my second and final day, the sun is slowly sinking towards the top of the gorge and people are winding their way home in groups, clutching bags and bottles.

I stop to talk to an elderly couple selling necklaces of dried cherries. The old man places one around my neck then resolutely refuses payment. He and his wife ask me to take their photograph and they sit there side by side, this happy old couple, perched on a wall, leaning into each other with this stupendous view behind them, all sunlit vineyards and ochre mountain ravines

And then I feel somebody fiddling with my pocket

My urban antenna immediately makes me think I'm being pick-pocketed, but then I realise it's just a kind old fruit vendor, donating me some apples from his stall. We both laugh.

The apples are crisp and succulent and I eat them one after another on the way back to the car. It is a scene of utter peace and tranquility and I make a vow: next year I'm bringing my family.



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