

Nikol Pashinyan visits Ararat Province



Accompanied by Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Suren Papikyan and Minister of Economy Tigran Khachatryan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan traveled to Ararat Marz of Armenia. The Premier visited several communities where he talked to the locals in order to learn of their problems and concerns.

The Prime Minister first called at Azatavan community, where Nikol Pashinyan got acquainted with the works carried out in the newly established intensive orchard. The owner said that he had founded it using the government's interest-free loan. The 12-hectare-wide orchard features special varieties of pear and cherry trees were planted that have been imported from the Netherlands and Italy. According to the agriculturist, he studied the market and found out that these types of pears and cherries are widely consumed in both domestic and foreign markets. He noted that he wants to expand the orchard, but there is a problem with the land, now he is negotiating with other landowners.

12 people are engaged in maintenance activities, with the number of jobs to be increased to 50 during the harvesting campaign. Part of hail protection nets had been imported from Italy, while others are Armenian products. The farmer assured that the Armenian-make nets are not at all inferior in quality to the Italian ones.

Welcoming the initiative, the Prime Minister noted that the biggest problem is the lack of farmland. He stressed the need for setting up cooperatives in the provinces.

Nikol Pashinyan next visited Verin Dvin community, where he got acquainted with the operations of the anti-hail system. The Premier was informed about the effectiveness of the anti-hail station. He was told that the stations

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Armenian FM presents results of video conference with OSCE MG Co-Chairs to Artsakh counterpart

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh Masis Mayilian held a meeting on May 22 with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, who was on a working visit in Stepanakert, the Artsakh MFA told Noyan Tapan.

The sides exchanged views on the priority directions of cooperation in the foreign policy sphere and expressed satisfaction with the implementation of the plan of consultations signed between the two Ministries.

They stressed the need to exert continued



and coordinated efforts for addressing the foreign policy challenges.

The Foreign Ministers of Artsakh and

Armenia touched upon the process of peaceful settlement of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict. Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, in particular, presented the results of the video conference held on May 19 with the participation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmen and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

The Ministers also exchanged views on the prospects of international cooperation in the fight against the spread of the novel coronavirus, which knows no borders

Armenia and Argentina discuss cooperation agenda

Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan had a phone conversation with Argentina’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship Felipe Sola.

Mnatsakanyan congratulated his counterpart on the upcoming national holiday, wishing the friendly people of Argentina success and welfare.

They discussed the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing the challenges and steps for overcoming the social-economic issues.

The sides reiterated mutual readiness to take practical steps for boosting the bilat-



eral relations and further deepening the historically strong Armenian-Argentine cooperation. In this context both sides especially emphasized the bridging role of the Armenian community of Argentina for strengthening and boosting the ties and rap-

prochement of the two peoples.

Among discussed directions of cooperation were trade, IT, tourism, agriculture.

The FMs were pleased to note the existing effective cooperation in multilateral formats based on common values and approaches. In this context they highly appreciated Armenia’s and Argentina’s close cooperation around the agenda of preventing genocides and crimes against humanity.

International and regional issues were also discussed.

Azerbaijani special forces attempt to attack Artsakh position, suffer losses in ensuing firefight

Azerbaijani troops attempted a subversive incursion on May 22 in the direction of a military base protection area of the Artsakh Defense Army, the Artsakh Defense Ministry said.

“The vanguard units of the Defense Army timely detected the advancement of the Azerbaijani special forces and repelled them back to their starting positions by inflicting losses. The



Defense Army did not sustain losses during the firefight,” the Artsakh military said in a statement.

“The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Artsakh calls on the Azerbaijani side to refrain from the futile tactics of artificially escalating the situation. Otherwise, the Azerbaijani side will bear the entire responsibility of the tension created at the frontline”, it said.

Armenian Health Minister warns of jump in COVID-19 deaths

(RFE/RL) - Armenian hospitals are increasingly struggling to cope with growing coronavirus cases and may soon be unable to give life-saving treatment to all infected people hospitalized in serious condition, Health Minister Arsen Torosyan said on May 22.

Amid the continuing rapid spread of the virus in Armenia, Torosyan again warned of a possible shortage of intensive care beds at the hospitals treating COVID-19 patients. He said that at least 150 of just over 200 such beds currently available in the country are already occupied by patients.

“All of the 50 [vacant] beds might be occupied as early as today, whereas [occupied beds] will be freed up very slowly because citizens kept in our intensive care units ... usually stay there for around 20 days,” he said during a video conference with members of Armenia’s Public Council.

Accordingly, Torosyan acknowledged that doctors dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic may soon have to switch to a “deep sorting” of patients that show severe symptoms of the disease.

“The deep sorting is also done during wars, with mainly those patients who have a chance to survive admitted for treatment,”



he said. “It’s possible that at this rate [of coronavirus infections] we will opt for that in the coming days. But we are doing everything to avoid that, for example, by deploying new beds.”

The minister’s latest stark warning came as the health authorities stopped hospitalizing or isolating infected people showing mild symptoms of the virus or none at all. Such individuals, who account for more than 70 percent of all cases, will now have to self-isolate at home.

Asymptomatic patients currently kept in hospitals or hotels turned into temporary medical care centers will also be sent home.

Torosyan defended this measure, saying that the authorities simply have no other choice. “There is no more room [for asymptomatic cases,]” he said. “That is why we are sending people home.”

Torosyan warned on Thursday that the number of people dying from coronavirus could rise sharply if the highly infectious disease continues to spread rapidly. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan likewise said that the “situation is not good.”

Still, Pashinyan made clear that the Armenian government will stick to its “decentralized” strategy of fighting against the virus which puts the emphasis on citizens’ “individual responsibility.”

As part of a nationwide lockdown imposed in late March, the government seriously restricted people’s movements and ordered the closure of most nonessential businesses. But it began relaxing these restrictions already in mid-April.

The daily numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the country have steadily increased since then. Critics say that the authorities never properly enforced the lockdown and lifted it too soon.

“If there is a two-week total lockdown, not the one which we had [earlier this spring,] then I can practically guarantee that we can completely stop outbreaks,” Torosyan declared on Friday. But he stopped short of publicly urging the government to impose such a lockdown.

➔ page 1 form a chain of neighboring facilities placed 1 kilometer apart. There are a total of 99 anti-hail stations in the region, each of which covers 80 hectares. The Prime Minister next visited an apricot orchard in Qaghtsrashen community, where he was briefed on harvest and irrigation-related problems. The Prime Minister highlighted the fact that the farmers were concerned about the lack of relevant skills in agriculture.

“A revolution is taking place in agriculture. This is the first time I have heard a farmer raise the issue of knowledge and skills. I had not heard a talk like this in the past. When we told farmers that perhaps they were doing something wrong, they used to say: We have been growing apricots for so many years now, but you come and tell us we are wrong,” Nikol Pashinyan said, noting that people nowadays have started to acknowledge that there is a problem of knowledge and skills. The Premier stressed the need for the government to provide information on modern farming skills and



technologies.

The Head of Government later visited an intensive vineyard in Narek community. The owner said he was going to expand the facility and eventually create 50 hectares of vineyards featuring purely Armenian grape varieties (aboriginal) varieties, including Mskhali, Voskehut (Kharji), Jilar, Muskat, Areni, Kakhet, etc. The project is part of the government’s plan to provide interest-free credit resources.

On the steeper slopes of the land (about 7 hectares) fruit orchards have been established, which are planned to reach up

to 20 hectares, in particular apricot plantations: Yerjan, Aghjanabad and Saten varieties, peach planting: medium-sized narcissus and Uspek varieties: plum, plum. For the production of dried fruit vodka. The owner told the Prime Minister that an important part of the project is the construction of a 3.5 km long high-voltage power line with pillars, the construction of a bridge, the establishment of a wine and brandy factory, a tractor park and roads. Engineering work on the bridge and wine-brandy factory has

already started. Work on other infrastructure will start soon.

A research and development center will be set up, which will use the most advanced technology in the field of land cultivation, irrigation and winemaking. The project implies the possibility of becoming a unique center of tourism, strong with a wine-brandy-dried fruit tasting facility. Some 20 people from Qaghtsrashen and Narek communities are involved in the ongoing activities.

Nikol Pashinyan welcomed and wished the project every success.

President Sarkissian wants Armenia to be among first countries to have potential COVID-19 drugs

President Armen Sarkissian has called on citizens to follow the national anti-coronavirus guidance, be responsible and think about their parents, or those who have a compromised health.

Sarkissian, speaking in an interview with Yerkir Media TV, said that the coronavirus won't be eliminated anytime soon.

"I think it is very important for each and every one of us to think how we can be useful," he said. "And in this context my office is trying to bring its small contribution to this work. First of all, since the very first day I have been regularly having daily contacts with different top officials, presidents, health ministers or scientific centers, who are dealing with these issues. With several goals: first of all, to understand the type of this virus, and how different countries are fighting it, to learn where the mistakes were made. I was passing on this information to our relevant authorities, the health minister, and giving my advices and what I had learnt.

At the same time, when speaking with various world leaders, I was asking for their support in any form, because especially in



the first months we greatly needed protective gear, masks and gloves".

He mentioned that the UAE had sent an airplane with aid, and that the Chinese president donated large quantities of supplies "as a result of their personal contact". He said his office will distribute a part of the donation to nursing homes, or wherever required.

Sarkissian also recently held a conversation with Armenian-American businessman Noubar Afeyan, the chairman of Moderna Therapeutics, which is racing to develop a vaccine against the novel coronavirus.

The Armenian President said he is following global processes in the direction of preventing and treating COVID-19.

"I'd be glad if [Afeyan] succeeds, but the goal of my conversation or interest isn't simply academic", Sarkissian said. "For example, I've also spoken with Oxford University, they'd already announced that they have found a new potential vaccine, and even AstraZeneca signed a contract with them.

"If there's a drug, I want to try and make Armenia be one of the first to have it. For example, the famous Gilead Sciences company in the US has discovered a medicine which is having some real effect. They have treated around 6000 patients, and the FDA gave them a license to use these drugs. Certainly, these are very expensive drugs, but another Indian company was granted the right to produce it in a cheaper option. Today, this Indian company is in contact with our health ministry and we will have the chance to acquire a very valuable drug on a cheap price," he said.

He said they must try and bring any potential successful medication from around the world to Armenia, because in the event of any of the candidates succeeding, "there will be a very large line".

Armenian government asked to consider naming Zvartnots Airport after Charles Aznavour

Charles Aznavour's son Nicolas Aznavour has conveyed a request by a group of Charles Aznavour fans, asking the Armenian Government to consider naming Zvartnots International Airport after Charles Aznavour.

"In 2018, after my father's passing, we were informed about a campaign to rename the airport after him and the Foundation also received some requests. Our family was in mourning at that time and we did not react to those letters and announcements. But recently we found out that starting from January 11th a new wave of the same initiative has appeared in different media outlets and social media," Nicolas Aznavour said in a letter to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

According to him, a group of Charles Aznavour fans started a petition and received many signatures for renaming the airport



and then wrote a letter to the Civil Aviation Committee and the Zvartnots Airport's management.

"We were informed that Mr. Eduardo Eurnekian himself welcomed the idea and wrote a letter to the Government supporting the initiative. Then public discussions were initiated by the Ministry of Culture; however, we are not aware of any follow ups," Nicolas continues.

He suggests that the best option would

be to keep the same name by adding Charles Aznavour's name to it: Zvartnots International Airport after Charles Aznavour.

"There is a widespread practice in the world and here are some examples: Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, Sheremetyevo Alexander S. Pushkin International Airport, Rome-Fiumicino International Airport 'Leonardo da Vinci', Rio de Janeiro-Antonio Garbbs Joblm/Galeao International Airport, Warsaw Frederic Chopin Airport, Lisbon International Airport after Humberto Delgado, Barcelona-El Prat Josep Tarradellas Airport, etc," Nicolas Aznavour continues.

The Public Council of Armenia has shared the copy of the letter on its Facebook page. The Council has also asked the government to express stance on the issue.

“Armenia has always condemned discrimination and racism” – Ambassador to Switzerland

Armenian Ambassador to Switzerland Andranik Hovhannisyanyan gave an interview to Geneva’s “Artzakank-Echo” magazine.

The ambassador emphasized that the 2018 revolution in Armenia was aimed at building a true democratic society based on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

He said it is natural that in the international arena Armenia is consistent in encouraging the same principles and values which were at the foundation of the democratic changes in Armenia.

Ambassador Hovhannisyanyan also addressed Armenia’s cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

“Armenia has many years of positive cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In recent years, it was especially reflected in the context of aid for the Syrian-Armenians who found refuge in Armenia. The International Committee of the Red Cross was one of the first international organizations to open an office in Armenia. It also has



a permanent mission in Artsakh. Overall, these two abovementioned organizations have significant roles within the framework of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict,” he said.

The ambassador also spoke about Armenia’s contributions to the international efforts for the prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity. He said Armenia’s many years of contributions in the efforts makes it a pioneer in the area.

“We are committed to the continuation of work in this direction, namely in developing international mechanisms for early response and prevention of new violence and crimes, in order for Never Again not to be simply a motto, but become reality,” he said.

He noted the strengthening of the civil society, protection of women’s rights and creation of equal opportunities as other areas of Armenia’s proactive contributions to the international agenda of human rights. He reminded that Armenia is the elected Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women for 2020-2021.

Ambassador Hovhannisyanyan said that Armenia has constantly voiced condemnation of discrimination and racism.

“We are keeping the issues of protection of national and religious minorities in our focus, especially during times of crisis such as the situation in the Middle East. Great attention is paid to fighting the advocacy of violence and hate speech. Armenia’s approaches in human rights issues are based on the universal commitment of “not ignoring anyone”, according to the principle that everyone has all rights and freedoms, regardless of any differentiation, including the political or legal status of their place of residence. This is our cornerstone approach in the international human rights agenda,” the ambassador said.

Turkey lashes out at Czech Senate resolution condemning the Armenian Genocide

The Turkish Foreign Ministry has called the Czech Senate resolution condemning the Armenian Genocide “null and void.”

“A resolution of the Senate of the Czech Republic adopted on May 20 concerning the events of 1915 indicates that the “twisted mentality built on the one-sided baseless discourses which damaged the relations of the two countries in 2017 is still effective in the Czech Republic,” said the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

“Attempts to define a historical issue in line with politics and the interest of certain circles cannot be accepted,” the ministry said.

“This resolution, which we deem null and



void, is nothing but futile attempts of those who are trying to rewrite history in the pursuit of their daily political interests,” said the statement.

On May 20 the Czech Senate unanimously adopted a resolution, condemning the Nazi crimes against humanity committed during World War II and the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry welcomed the adoption of the resolution, noting that the unanimous decision of the Czech Senate is a “major contribution to the restoration of historical justice and respect for the memory of the victims.”

“It is also a key message in preventing genocides and new crimes against humanity,” the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson said.

In April 2017 the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament had approved a resolution, condemning the genocide of Armenians and other religious and national minorities in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

Yerevan insists on iower Russian gas price

(RFE/RL) - The Armenian government will keep pressing the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to create a single energy market which would lower the cost of Russian natural gas imported by Armenia, Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan said on May 21.

Grigoryan insisted that “the issue is not closed” despite objections publicly voiced by Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this week. “I think that we will continue our attempts to solve that issue in the EEU framework through a joint legal act,” he told RFE/RL’s Armenian service in an interview.

Grigoryan said Moscow has signaled its readiness for a compromise deal on the issue. He did not elaborate.

The gas price is currently significantly lower for consumers in Russia than other members of the Russian-led trade bloc. Two of them, Armenia and Belarus, say this puts their manufactures reliant on gas in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis their Russian competitors. Hence, their demands for uniform EEU energy tariffs.



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan insisted on this idea during a video conference with the presidents of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan held on Tuesday. Putin rejected it, however, implying that Yerevan and Minsk should agree to even deeper economic integration with Moscow before pushing it.

Grigoryan made clear that neither the Armenian side nor the EEU as a whole is prepared for such integration which would lead what Putin described as a “single budget and system of taxation” for all EEU member states. He said it would also raise questions about Armenia’s “sovereignty.”

The Armenian and Belarusian govern-

ments say that Moscow should cut the prices of gas delivered to their countries also because of the recent coronavirus-related collapse in global energy prices.

For the same reason, Yerevan urged Russia’s Gazprom giant in late March to cut its wholesale gas price for Armenia. It hopes that such a discount would at least prevent a sizable increase in internal Armenian gas prices sought by Armenia’s Gazprom-owned gas distribution network.

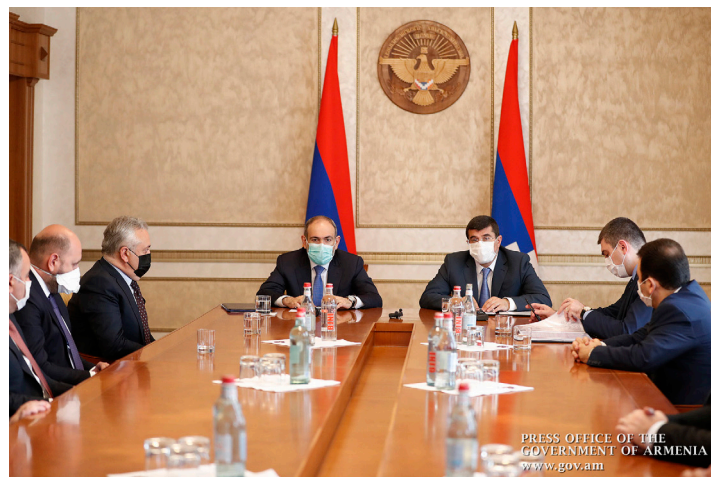
The Gazprom Armenia network argues that they have remained unchanged since Gazprom raised its wholesale tariff by 10 percent in January 2019. The gas operator has incurred major losses as a result. Armenian utility regulators are due to decide by June 17 whether to allow the price hike.

“I have the impression that there are many possibilities of ensuring that gas does not become more expensive for the population [of Armenia] at this point,” Grigoryan said in this regard. “You should consider this a mere impression or opinion because it would be inappropriate if I spoke [definitively] of solutions now.”

Nikol Pashinyan, Arayik Harutunyan discuss economic development and cooperation-related issues with banking system representatives

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President of Artsakh Arayik Harutunyan on May 22 met with senior representatives of Armenia’s and Artsakh’s banking systems in Stepanakert. Arayik Harutunyan welcomed the meeting participants and thanked the Armenian Prime Minister for organizing a meeting in this format. “We should not only continue, but to step up cooperation as we are going to ensure higher development rates in the future. Whereas the two governments’ financial resources will not be enough to do so, we will need to implement more ambitious programs,” the President of Artsakh said.

“Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to state that Artsakh’s banking system has recorded tangible progress over the past



decade, which was instrumental in fostering the country’s economic achievements. The economic ambitions we have set will be impossible to implement if they are not realized by the banking system. In some sense, this content should be formed jointly. We did so during the state of emergency when government, banking system

representatives and lawmakers would come together to discuss agriculture development, social issues and so on. This can be really effective; it should not be viewed as a separate meeting, but a talk that needs to be continued,” Nikol Pashinyan concluded.

The meeting discussed ways of boosting cooperation between financial and banking systems, bolstering Armenian banks’ activities in Artsakh, promoting the funding of prospective business projects, etc.

The banking system representatives expressed readiness to follow the initiatives of Armenia’s and Artsakh’s governments and get involved in those programs aimed at ensuring greater resources with low interest rates for the market.

Moscow, Damascus, Krasnodar: Upcoming flights to/from Armenia



Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Avet Adonts received on May 14 Indian Ambassador to Armenia Kishan Dan Deval.

The parties hailed the high level of bilateral friendly relations, emphasizing the close cooperation established within the framework of the fight against the novel coronavirus. They also touched upon the

steps taken to organize the repatriation of the citizens of the two countries.

On behalf of the government of India, the Ambassador conveyed a batch of Hydroxychloroquine drug for the treatment of about 5,000 Covid-19 patients in Armenia.

Reference was made to a wide range of issues of cooperation in various spheres.

“Armenian-Georgian platform for policy development” organized discussions of leaders and experts

In the framework of the EU funded “Armenian-Georgian Platform for Policy Development” project the Yerevan and Tbilisi Schools of Political Studies organized a series of focus group meetings on fight against corruption, anti-discrimination and tourism for economic growth. The third meeting had to be organized in an online format conditioned by the pandemic situation. Armenian-Georgian focus group discussions on anti-corruption took place on 8-10 May 2020 via online platform.

During the three-day online discussions 19 representatives from Yerevan and Tbilisi Schools of Political Studies carried out discussions on practical steps to prevent and fight corruption in Armenia and in Georgia. The group of young leaders looked into the existing gaps and challenges, as well as underlined the importance of education and raising awareness of the population in order to establish perception of justice and “zero tolerance” towards corruption culture in the



societies. The participants attached the importance to the lessons learnt, exchange of good practices and finding new niches for mutual cooperation.

Qualified Armenian and Georgian experts presented the situation, national strategies, legal regulations, policies and effective tools for combating corruption. Debates and discussions included topics like Classification and forms of corruption; Corruption mitigation strategies in the public and private sectors – good practices and new approaches; Growth-enhancing effects of anti-corruption policies; Detecting and in-

vestigating corruption; Corruption in judiciary; Comparative analysis on corruption in Armenia and Georgia: causes, effects and solutions.

The results of the Armenian-Georgian focus group discussions will be reflected in policy recommendations with concrete actions prepared by experts of the Yerevan and Tbilisi Schools of Political Studies, to support the authorities to manage the corruption risks by preventing and detecting it. The policy recommendation will

be presented in June 2020.

“Armenian-Georgian Platform for Policy Development” project is funded by the European Union under the Rapid Response Mechanism of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility. The project is implemented by the Yerevan School of Political Studies in cooperation with the Tbilisi School of Political Studies. Both Schools belong to the Network of the European Association of the Schools of Political Studies.

U.S commits an additional \$1 million to support Armenia’s response to COVID-19

The U.S. Government, through USAID, has committed an additional \$1 million to support Armenia’s response to COVID-19.

This assistance continues to prepare laboratory systems, activate case-finding and event-based surveillance, support technical ex-

perts for response and preparedness, bolster risk communication, and more.

To date, USAID has provided nearly \$2.7 million in emergency health funding to support Armenia’s COVID response.

Arayik Harutyunyan sworn in as Artsakh's fourth President

Arayik Harutyunyan assumed the post of President of the Artsakh Republic, taking an oath with his hand on a 17th century Gospel and the Constitution of the Republic of Artsakh.

The fourth President of Artsakh vowed to unconditionally fulfill the requirements of the Constitution, respect human and civil rights and freedoms, preserve the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and security of the republic for the glory of the Artsakh Republic and for the benefit of its people.

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and National Assembly Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan were present at the inauguration ceremony in Shushi.

Artsakh is Armenia, that's it, Arayik Harutyunyan said after taking office as the fourth president of the Republic of Artsakh.

The roots of this famous historical axiom have been enriched for centuries only thanks to the skills and efforts of the Armenian people to create on their own land, he stated.

“At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Armenian nation found strength to rise again after the tragedy of the Armenian Genocide, to straighten its back after centuries of deprivation and to re-establish a national statehood in the victorious month of May. Even then, the path of the Armenians was not smooth again, including in Artsakh, where the Armenians of Shushi



in particular faced genocide. Artsakh was distorted and divided over the next seventy years under the pressure of Soviet Azerbaijan. At the end of the twentieth century, there was one last step left to take to completely cleanse Artsakh of Armenians following the example of ancient Armenian Nakhichevan,” the newly inaugurated President stated.

“In order to prevent the new genocide, the Armenians of Artsakh stood up with the un-



conditional and unwavering support of all Armenians. The Artsakh movement was a nationwide awakening for the noble cause of protecting the fundamental human rights and freedoms,” he continued.

Arayik Harutyunyan said it was a struggle for the right of millions to live a free and dignified life.

“It was one of the glorious victorious

pages of the Armenian people, the crowning glory of which was the liberation of Shushi. And we feel the daily joy of that freedom with the inviolable and united connection with the motherland, with the Armenian soldiers guarding the borders, with the strong relations restored with our

brothers and sisters in the Diaspora. It is the message of freedom and peace that today we all send to the all Armenians and the world from our historic fortress city.” The President stated.

He said Artsakh has always felt the strong support of the citizens and authorities of the Republic of Armenia. In this context, he thanked the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, who, he said, in a short period of time has not only done a great job in the socio-economic development of Artsakh, but also in ensuring significant participation in all future programs.

“Mr. Prime Minister, I would like to assure you that Artsakh supports the Motherland with all its potential, and together with you I am ready to share the difficulties of solving the problems facing our united homeland and facing the challenges,” Arayik Harutyunyan stated.



Turmoil in Turkey over Gulen Letter Recognizing the Armenian Genocide



By Harut Sassounian

A major controversy erupted in Turkey last week after a pro-Erdogan Turkish Islamist magazine “Gercek Hayat” (Real Life) claimed that the controversial Turkish Imam Fethullah Gulen had written a letter on May 6, 1965 acknowledging the Armenian Genocide. The letter is included in a special 176-page edition of the magazine which belongs to the editorial group of the pro-government newspaper “Yeni Safak,” owned by the family of the Turkish president’s son-in-law.

Gercek Hayat’s article also accused of collaborating with Gulen, the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul Isahak Kahleva, Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, former Armenian Patriarch of Turkey Shnorhk Kaloustian, the CIA, NATO, Zionists, Hillary Clinton, Pope John Paul II, and former Turkish leaders Ismet Inonu, Bulent Ecevit and Suleyman Demirel.

Gulen escaped to the United States in 1999. Later on, he and President Erdogan became antagonists after a lengthy collaboration during which Erdogan had used Gulen’s contacts and resources to come to power. In 2016, after the attempted coup d’état in Turkey, Erdogan accused Gulen of being the mastermind of the coup. Erdogan jailed and fired tens of thousands of Gulen’s followers. Since then Erdogan has made repeated requests to the US government to have Gulen extradited to Turkey, where he faces certain death.

The US rejected Erdogan’s requests. Even those accused of associating with Gulen, who were living outside of Turkey, were kidnapped by Erdogan’s secret agents and brought back to Turkey to face harsh charges.

Under these circumstances, when a

pro-Erdogan magazine accused the leaders of religious minorities and others in Turkey of associating with Gulen, they became rightly concerned about their physical well-being and possible attacks on their religious and cultural institutions.

Regarding Gulen’s letter, published by the Turkish magazine, addressed to the former Armenian Patriarch, it has been published several times before by the Turkish media.

Here are excerpts of Gulen’s May 6, 1965 letter: “I have known Armenian families and individuals during my childhood and working positions. I will not stop cursing the Great Genocide committed against Armenians in 1915. I know that among the people killed and massacred were many highly respected individuals, for whose memory I bow with respect. I curse with great grief the massacre of the sons of the Great Prophet Christ by ignorant individuals who call themselves Muslims.”

The Turkish magazine reported that in response Shnorhk Patriarch thanked Gulen, stating that the country needs preachers like him: “We believe that the fraternal ties will remain intact in our sacred country where there are valuable and fair-minded preachers like you.”

Gulen’s purported 1965 letter is typed on a paper that appears yellowish, making it look authentic. In 2013, while in the US, Gulen issued another statement which said, “The Ittihadists committed the wrong policy. It is up to us to correct the wrong policy of the Ittihadists. That is why we should be in a very good dialog with Armenians and other nations. For the sake of a dialog, we should use every opportunity in the best possible way.”

The good news is that the religious leaders of minority communities in Turkey had the courage to harshly criticize the Turkish magazine. The Armenian Patriarchate issued a statement in which it “regretted the false accusations against Shnorhk Patriarch. Such writings under the umbrella of freedom of the press cause pain to us and can lead to horrible consequences. These falsehoods are worrisome to the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey and the Armenian community. Racist manifestations, as elsewhere, also seen in this country, make it impossible to escape from their consequences... Such baseless mud-slinging is unacceptable to us. We believe that the relevant authorities will stop this injustice and hope that the rules will be enforced, taking the necessary steps against the authors.”

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate also condemned the Turkish magazine calling the published information “completely false and biased.... The publication of these claims cause distress among Christians, Jews and Muslims and are particularly serious and irresponsible, because they undermine the unity of our people.... Such information is extremely dangerous and could be the cause of dangerous acts of racism and intolerance. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew feels very bitter and resentful for the accusations that have been made against him, despite his efforts for the good of our country.”

The Jewish community in Istanbul also criticized the Turkish magazine: “We condemn the discrimination and provocation caused by these publications, with baseless accusations against our Chief Rabbi. These hate publications are damaging Turkey. For our part, we hope for an immediate restoration of the truth against these publications of hate — through correct information and legal means — as they influence our Turkey, of which we are an integral part.”

Meanwhile, the Armenian member of the Turkish Parliament, Garo Paylan, referred the controversy to the Parliament by writing to the Vice President of the country, Fuat Oktay: “Can’t the expressions of hatred used periodically by the news media close to the Turkish President result in crimes based on hatred?”

I would like to conclude with three key points:

Fethullah Gulen was the ally of Erdogan before the latter asserted his dictatorial powers. The publications close to Erdogan, rather than blaming the leaders of minority religions and others, should first of all blame Erdogan for his long years of association with Gulen!

If Gulen’s letter is authentic, he has done nothing wrong. He has simply acknowledged the truth about the Armenian Genocide. Erdogan is the one to be blamed for lying about the Armenian Genocide!

The minority communities in Turkey are terrified by the article in the Turkish magazine because they know that there are plenty of extremists in Turkey who will resort to horrible acts of violence against Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, Jews and Kurds. Their fear is justified. These minority community leaders should be commended for boldly speaking out against the threatening article in the Turkish magazine.

Azerbaijani Ombudsman distorts words of the Armenian Human Rights Defender

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia, when presenting the 2019 Annual Report to the National Assembly of Armenia, stressed that human rights are universal categories and that rights of all persons, including children, women, people with disabilities living in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), should be protected, regardless of the political status of the territory or other political factors, whether it is a conflict or postconflict area. This is a well-known concept driven by a status neutral principle within International Human Rights Standards.

Additionally, in response to the question from a member of the Armenian Parliament regarding whether the Human Rights Defender of Armenia anticipates cooperation with his Azerbaijani counterpart on human rights issues, Mr. Arman Tatoyan noted that he has not yet met the new Ombudsperson of the neighboring country, but he is ready to meet his counterpart, for example, within international meetings, should such an opportunity present.

Thus, the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia expressed his readiness for the meeting. Moreover, the Defender emphasized that he believes it would be appropriate if the Human Rights Defender or civil society of Artsakh participate in human rights related international discussions or discussions on rights of Armenians living in Artsakh.

Immediately after parliamentary discussions, the Commissioner for Human Rights of Azerbaijan (Ombudsperson) Sabina Aliyeva made an official statement, accompanied by inaccurate, political comments clearly atypical of a Head of a Human Rights Institution, quoting the official positions of her country's political authorities, even considering the issue from the



perspective of the OSCE Minsk Group's activities dealing with the political solution of the conflict, also using expressions that generate aggression and hatred. Moreover, the statements of the Azerbaijani Commissioner for Human Rights were accompanied by public insults addressed to the Armenian Human Rights Defender, noting that the Armenian Human Rights Defender "turned legal issues into objects of political manipulation and organized a cheap show by primitive methods."

Besides, the Azerbaijani Ombudsperson put forward a political precondition for meeting with the Armenian Human Rights Defender, stating that "the negotiations with the Human Rights Ombudsman of Armenia will be possible only after the elimination of occupation."

The Armenian Human Rights Defender has to respond to these political and insulting statements of the Azerbaijani Ombudsperson, to prevent distortion of statements and position, as well as presentation of false information to international partners.

The Armenian Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan regrets that his Azerbaijani counterpart makes political statements. Nonetheless, we refrain from commenting on the statements, given that it is not ap-

propriate for a human rights institution to do so. We regret that the Commissioner for Human Rights of Azerbaijan sets a political precondition for the cooperation between the two institutions, obviously following the political framework of the Azerbaijani authorities.

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia was hoping that the new Ombudsperson of Azerbaijan could adopt new approaches for cooperation that could be in accordance with international human rights principles and standards; however, by presenting an approach identical to the official political propaganda shows that nothing has changed in this regard.

Political neutrality of ombudspersons and national human rights institutions is one of the basic principles of their apolitical activity. This cooperation is to ensure the effective protection of human rights. Hence, there should be no political preconditions for cooperation between ombudsperson institutions in establishing and guaranteeing an agenda for human rights.

Human rights protection is of the universal nature. Hence, the guarantee and protection of the human rights of people living in Artsakh should not depend on the disaccord related to the political status of Artsakh.

Women, children, persons with disabilities, who live in Artsakh cannot be deprived of legal protection; that would contradict the international legal principles. Participation of the Human Rights Defender of Artsakh and the civil society in international human rights discussions and meetings has an irreplaceable role because political factors should have no impact on human rights.

Congressional Armenian Caucus raises alarms over Azerbaijan’s military exercises

A bipartisan group of U.S. Representatives joined Congressional Armenian Caucus leaders yesterday in ringing alarm bells over Azerbaijan’s large-scale military exercises this week, sharing with U.S. leaders and international mediators their “grave concerns” that Baku’s reckless actions amidst a global pandemic can destabilize the Caucasus.

“We want to thank Congressman Pallone and all who joined with him in this Armenian Caucus initiative to alert the Administration and the international community to Azerbaijan’s reckless march toward a renewed regional war amid a global pandemic,” said ANCA Government Affairs Director Tereza Yerimyan. “This powerful bipartisan legislative initiative reflects and reinforces the thousands of messages that concerned Americans are sending to Washington via the ANCA’s [online platform](#).

In two separate letters – the first to Secretary of State Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Esper, and the second to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-Chairs – Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Frank Pallone and Congressional leaders noted that “these exercises are dangerous, violate diplomatic agreements and have the potential to destabilize security in the South Caucasus at a time when the COVID-19 global pandemic has taken hundreds of thousands of lives and threatened the health of many more.” The letters call on the U.S. Administration and OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to publicly condemn Azerbaijan’s military exercises.

Joining Rep. Pallone in cosigning the letters were Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Jackie Speier (D-CA), Vice-Chairs Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Adam Schiff (D-CA) and Representatives Judy Chu (D-CA), Katherine Clark (D-MA), Jim Costa (D-CA), T.J. Cox (D-CA), Anna Eshoo (D-CA), Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), James Langevin (D-RI), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Grace Napolitano (D-CA),



Linda Sanchez (D-CA), Albio Sires (D-NJ), Tom Suozzi (D-NY), and Juan Vargas (D-CA).

The letter to Secretary Pompeo and Esper specifically expressed concern about a \$100 million allocation in U.S. security assistance to Azerbaijan, noting that “the aid appears to have allowed Azerbaijan to shift resources toward offensive capabilities and further threaten Armenian lives and regional stability as the Co-Chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues warned in letters sent to you in September and November of 2019.”

Azerbaijan’s Armed Forces are holding large-scale tactical military exercises this week from May 18th to 22nd. In the announcement about the event, the Azerbaijani army stated “massive artillery, air, and high-precision weapons will be fired at the enemy’s operational depth,” calling the exercises “offensive” in nature. The Armenian Defense Ministry condemned the exercises noting that they “exacerbate the security environment in the region, under the conditions of a global imperative for joint actions against the COVID-19 pandemic and despite the call for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to establish a global ceasefire.”

Text of Congressional Letter to Secretary of State Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Esper

Dear Secretaries Pompeo and Esper:
We are gravely concerned about the military exercises reported to be held by the Republic of Azerbaijan from May 18 to 22, 2020. These exercises are dangerous, violate diplomatic agreements and have the potential to destabilize security in the South Caucasus at a time when the COVID-19

global pandemic has taken hundreds of thousands of lives and threatened the health of many more. We strongly urge the Department of State and the Department of Defense to condemn these egregious actions taken by the Azerbaijani military.

Even in normal circumstances, these exercises would be unacceptable due to their offensive nature and the failure to follow diplomatic notification practices. On May 14, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry released information describing military exercises that would take place from May 18 to 22. Azeri reports state that the exercises are expected to include 10,000 servicemen, 120 artillery and armored vehicles, 200 missile systems, 30 aviation units, and various unmanned aerial vehicles. The failure to provide adequate notification as prescribed under the 2011 Vienna Document and the size of the exercises demonstrates Azerbaijani President Aliyev’s intention of further aggravating historical tensions with the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

We are especially concerned that over \$100 million in security assistance the United States has sent to Azerbaijan over the last two years through the Section 333 Building Partner Capacity program has emboldened the Aliyev regime. This taxpayer funding defies almost two decades of parity in U.S. security assistance to Armenia and Azerbaijan. The aid appears to have allowed Azerbaijan to shift resources toward offensive capabilities and further threaten Armenian lives and regional stability as the Co-Chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues warned in letters sent to you in September and November of 2019.

We cannot allow Azerbaijan to use the global coronavirus pandemic as cover for these dangerous military operations. We urge you to immediately condemn the reckless actions of the Azerbaijani military and to work with our allies and international partners to halt the provocative actions being taken by the Aliyev Regime.

Constantine Orbelian: “When at Least One Theatre in the World Finds a Safe Work Model, All of Us will Follow That Example”

“Irates.am”, 19.05.2020

Edited and translated from Armenian
By Gourgen James Khazhakian,
Chief Correspondent

When and in what format will the Opera Theatre resume its work,



which programmes have been cancelled and what news can we expect? General and Artistic Director of the Alexander Spendiaryan National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet of Armenia, Honored Artist of the Russian Federation Constantine Garrievich Orbelian answers our questions.

- Dear Maestro, how long the non-performing period will last?
 - Under today's circumstances all the theatres



are facing enormous problems. Everything depends on the exact way in which theatrical work can be resumed. Not a single orchestra in the world has come up with a solution of the problem of “social distancing”. It is impossible to have a rehearsal with musicians wearing masks and positioned two metres apart.

Say, the Metropolitan Opera has cancelled all their performances until autumn, and

Carnegie Hall - until October 7. All our colleagues, as ourselves, are on standby. The most important problem is how to hold safe rehearsals. It goes without saying that we want to avoid infecting people in the process of our work. We will strictly follow the Health Ministry guidelines to prevent further spread of the disease.

- In which format do you intend to hold rehearsals so that your artists are not endangered?

- When at least one theatre in the world finds a safe work model, all of us will follow that example. So far nobody has come up with the solution of how to rehearse with a choir, as wearing masks makes it impossible. How can wind and brass sections of the orchestra participate in a rehearsal, taking into account their particular way of music-making? How can we solve those problems? Many questions remain unanswered. I hope that the overall situation improves in the nearest future and we will be allowed to resume our work. When the government accepts that the threat is no longer there and that theatres, concert halls and cinemas may reopen, we will reopen our Theatre. Needless to say, everything will be done in strict conformity with the guidelines issued by the Health Ministry, as well as by the Ministry of education, science, culture and sports.

- Which programs have been postponed or cancelled so far?

- We had ambitious programs for the period in question - we planned the premiere of Vache Sharafyan's ballet “Ancient Gods”, an entirely new staging of the legendary “Anush” opera by Armen Tigranyan. We had dozens of programmes in our schedule, but today our priority is to safeguard the health and well-being of all the people, and we will reopen only when we have the go-ahead from the appropriate authorities. Only the musician who is constantly engaged is a truly happy musician, therefore it is vital for us to resume our work ASAP and meet our Public again.

- Which projects have you managed to transfer online? Is it possible for you to retain such projects, such online-oriented activities even after the self-isolation is the thing of the past?

- The online activity of our Theatre has opened new opportunities for interaction with the audience, which will be used even



after the pandemic is over. We have done everything in our power to maintain our contact with the Public, and I must say that we have noticed great interest in the work of our Theatre.

We have already published our statistics showing the increase in the number of viewings of the Theatre videos, but I must update you on those figures: April 24 registered 320 000 visits of the Theatre's Facebook page, Alexander Spendiaryan's Memory Day viewings reached 100 000, and our Victory Day celebrations of May 8 and 9 exceeded 250 000 viewings. Total number of visitors of our Facebook page topped 5 million! I think that even those figures suffice to demonstrate the amount of work done and interest created. Of course, all our achievements in this period of online work will be used in the future for the mutual benefit of both the Audience and the Theatre.

From The Highlights:

Dear Maestro Orbelian!

All of us, your grateful listeners and spectators, first of all wish you great health, and second of all we want your soonest return to Motherland Armenia, whose Chief Theatre you have managed to turn in such a short time into one of the best theatres of East Europe (and not only Europe...), so that you could treat us to one masterpiece after another!



Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator News...

“The Unprecedented Challenges of our Times”: the next webinar by “At the Crossroads” Discussion Platform

On 22 May “At the Crossroads” Discussion Platform (dedicated to Armenia and Armenians’ future in the 21st century) organized its next webinar entitled as “The Unprecedented Challenges of our Times” The webinar hosted the following speakers:

Hovik Musayelyan, Director of “Synopsys Armenia” (Moderator)
Armen Baldryan, CEO of “Unicomp” CJSC

Ralph C. Yirikian, VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager

During the discussion, the speakers discussed the following issues:

- ◆ What is happening to the world today?
- ◆ Transformation of education – how to train specialists in the current situation?
- ◆ What new opportunities will appear in the IT and telecommunications sector?
- ◆ What lessons should we learn from the epidemic?
- ◆ What image of an Armenian businessman has developed in Armenia today, does the society sympathize with successful people?
- ◆ What do we mean by “a small country – a global nation”?

By the end of a pretty interesting and active opinion exchange between the honorable speakers, as usual, they were asked numerous questions.

In The Highlights next issue details of this online discussion will be presented, now we put The Highlights question to Ralph C. Yirikian, Viva-MTS Founding General Manager and Mr Yirikians answer:

The Highlights: *Isn't the current economic-decline situation impacting your business and thus your plans of social investments whereby you are obliged to eliminate some of the projects if not the majority of them?*

Ralph C. Yirikian: *“Alike other Armenian companies, Viva-MTS has been experiencing difficulties under COVID19 pandemic, so we have some decrease of revenues, however, I might point out that we have experience how to work effectively in similar situations, to keep revenues on the normal level, with cutting our expenses in some extent.*

And so when we keep our Company profit on such a level, we find the way to keep all our corporate social responsibility programs on the same level, so on all such

FUTURES STUDIO

THE UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES OF OUR TIMES

MAY 22 19:00
YEREVAN TIME

Hovik Musayelyan
Director of "Synopsys Armenia"

Armen Baldryan
CEO of "Unicomp" CJSC

Ralph Yirikian
Viva-MTS General Manager

Icons for YouTube, Facebook, and Live.

projects we have contracts signed for 2020, and all of them will be implemented”.

Asked about his vision of Armenia’s future in 20 years, Mr Yirikian raised up his thumb and said “Excellent !”

The full video of the discussion could be seen here: <https://youtu.be/SjLwWt6lCwQ>

Applications for the First Traction Programme are Now Open The European Union and Viva-MTS support New Startup Growth Programme by Armenia Startup Academy

Yerevan, May 15, 2020 - We are pleased to announce the call for applications for the first Traction programme of Armenia Startup Academy - a 10-week mentorship-based programme designed to help companies at post-prototype stage with early traction to accelerate their growth and raise their first or follow-on rounds. The programme is implemented by **Catalyst Foundation** supported by the **European Union's EU4Business** “Technology

ARMINIA STARTUP ACADEMY

TRACTION PROGRAM

APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN • DEADLINE: MAY 31

Development for Armenia” project implemented by GIZ. **Viva-MTS**, Armenia’s leading telecommunications operator joins the initiative as a corporate partner and supporter.

The Traction Programme will offer hands-on transformative mentorship in **Sales, Growth Hacking** and **Fundraising**. Over the 10 weeks of the programme, participating startups will have the opportunity to work closely with leading professionals in Sales and Growth Hacking, establish their growth frameworks, refine

and validate their strategies and get support for expanding in international markets. Each participating company will pass through a need-based individual development programme and have weekly or biweekly meetings with the mentors.

All startups that identify themselves in the following categories are welcome to apply:

- Managed to gain **early traction** (in terms of revenue, sales, user base, etc.);
- Have already **launched the product** (or an MVP/working prototype) or at least ready to launch by May 31st;
- Have raised a minimum of **€20K funding** in the form of grants, angel or VC financing, or bootstrapping, or is already generating revenue (not mandatory, but preferable)
- Previously graduated from an incubation/pre-acceleration programme (not mandatory, but preferable).

Ashot Arzumanyan, Co-founder at Catalyst Foundation said, *“We see the Traction Programme as a response to an existing need in the ecosystem for a next-level programme. We designed the program for companies that are working on raising investment and establishing effective growth or sales frameworks. We are thrilled to help these companies to expand and grow beyond Armenia”*

Johanna Michaela Weber, Team leader of EU4Business Technology Development for Armenia project considers the advanced level of Startup Academy Programme as an exclusive opportunity offered to Armenian startups ready to step to the next level of growth leading them to the global stage: *“EU4Business has been supporting Armenian startup ecosystem since 2016 onwards having contributed about EUR 1.28 mln. as direct funding in form of grants and technical support, including the establishment of the Armenia Startup Academy and its first 4 cycles implemented by our entrusted partner Catalyst Foundation. Hence, we gladly continue this support aiming at opening new prospects of development for Armenian startups”, she said.*

“During the recent years we have experienced a rapid growth of start-ups in Armenia. There have been both successful undertakings and failures. Initiative and creativity alone are critically important, and yet, not sufficient conditions for setting up a successful start-up. Viva-MTS joins this important

page 13 

project aimed at pushing the development of start-ups to the next stage, for them to grow into sustainable business structures, attractive for international investment,” **Viva-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph C. Yirikian** said.

“This new programme is different from our previous batches in a sense that we aim to heavily engage some high profile mentors in order to set up relevant growth frameworks for selected companies,” stated **Hambardzum Kaghketsyan, Co-founder at Catalyst Foundation**, “This structure allows participants to have deeper exposure to the mentors’ unique expertise and get the maximum out of the mentorship process.”

The Call for Applications will be open until **May 31, 2020**. After the screening of applications, interviews will follow to finalize the roster of participating companies. Meanwhile, an **Information Session** will be held on **May 25th** (registration for the session is available here). The programme as well as the Info session will be held **remotely** on account of COVID-19 outbreak and the state of emergency in the country. More information about the programme can be found [here](#).

About the European Union

The Member States of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

About EU4Business Technology Development for Armenia Project

EU4Business “Technology Development for Armenia” is part of the EU4Business “Innovative Tourism and Technology Development for Armenia” project, which is co-funded by the European Union and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by German Development Cooperation GIZ through the Private Sector Development and TVET South Caucasus Programme. It aims at creation and further development of investable and innovative ventures in Armenia leading to stronger and competitive tech and innovation ecosystems with potential export orientation, increased number of Science2Business2Education cooperation platforms and higher participation in HORIZON 2020 and HORIZON Europe innovation programmes.

About Viva-MTS

Viva-MTS (MTS Armenia CJSC) is Armenia’s leading telecommunications operator, having the widest network reach and spreading a wide range of Voice and Data services all across Armenia. Having the best of the Armenian people interest at heart since its launch on 1st July 2005 and in a short period of time Viva-MTS has managed to build a nationwide network and a considerable customer base. Viva-MTS drives innovation and aims at always being at the forefront of any development serving the Armenian mobile communications market. The company follows the guidance provided by ISO 26000 (International Standard of Social Responsibility) and ISO/IEC 27001:2013 (Information Security Management System). For more information visit www.mts.am

About Catalyst Hi-Tech and Entrepreneurship Development Foundation

Catalyst Hi-Tech and Entrepreneurship Development Foundation aims to contribute to the development of the tech entrepreneurship ecosystem in Armenia. The Foundation has a number of initiatives aiming to fuel the Armenian startup ecosystem with competitive skills and develop a pipeline of capable companies, including [Hero House](#), [Armenia Startup Academy](#), [AI Incubator](#), [Entrepreneurial Assistant School](#), [Startup Boost Weekends](#), etc.

Construction of a half-built home in Gomk, yet another achievement of the partnership

By the end of the year, the problem of some 15 years will be solved in the village of Gomk in Vayots Dzor. Construction of a half-built house will be finished and the homeowners will finally forget the memories of their life in a damp basement. The eldest of the five children who were raised in these conditions is now 15; the youngest one is 2.

The leaking roof of the house was replaced long time ago; yet, the construction half-built structure remained unfinished. In several months, though, the family will move into their sun-lit finished house, where the necessities will no longer be a luxury.

Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia support the homeowner, Artash Ghazaryan to fulfill the long-cherished dream. The partners are unable to join the construction works at the moment, but are fully engaged in the process. They remotely shared words of encouragement with families with an unexpected video call

waiting for the opportunity to work on the construction site together again.

“I am reaching you remotely because I cannot be physically by your side hand in hand with you and helping your family. But you are in my mind and my heart. I hope you will stay strong despite our absence, which, I am sure, is temporary, and will complete the construction works in the set time. Stay strong and always strive to reach your long-cherished dreams,” Viva-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** said in a video call.

The Ghazaryan family has already started the construction works. Hamlet, the 15-year-old son of the family, whose childhood and adolescence passed inside the damp walls, more than ever recognizes the necessity of finishing the construction as soon as possible. He is proud to be his father’s help. He wants to be a real support for his mother and sisters. The Ghazaryans work while making plans about furnishing the home and dreaming of a life free from current worries.

“Gomk is a wonderful village. I could have left the village in search of a better life, but I didn’t. No one will be left in the village, if people start thinking that way. Here, I build my house with my own hands. I would never imagine hearing words of encouragement with a surprise video call. Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia support even they are physically not here. The call inspired me and I feel even more obliged to finish the construction in the set time,” **Artash Ghazaryan** said.

Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia solve the social problem of housing and strive to change the lives of people at the same time.



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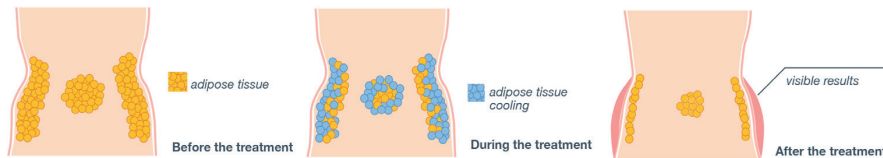
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The publisher: NT Holding LTD
Լրատվական գործունեություն իրականացնող՝
ՆՏ Հոլդինգ ՍՊԸ

Ծավալը՝ 2,25 մամուլ, տպաքանակը՝ 1500
Circulation: 1500 print copies and
15600 copies by e-mail list in PDF format

Weekly Newspaper, Since May 4, 1993

President of the NT Media Holding:
TIGRAN HARUTYUNYAN
Editor-in-Chief of the Media Holding:
GAYANEH ARAKELYAN
Director of the weekly:
MARINA HARUTYUNYAN
Chief Correspondent: **GOURGEN KHAZHAKIAN**
Computer Design: **Ashot Khalapyan**
Համարի թող. պատ.՝ Մ. Հարությունյան

ISSN 1829-0604

Գրանցման վկայականի համարը՝
03Ա898368, տրված՝ 11.01.2013թ.
Registration certificate and the date:
273.110.00512, 15.12.1995

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URL: www.nt.am

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