

## Angela Merkel's visit to Armenia a historical one: Nikol Pashinyan



*Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan posted a selfie with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on his Facebook page. PM's wife Anna Hakobyan and President Armen Sarkissian are also on the photo. "We are in Northern Avenue", the PM wrote.*

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## Nikol Pashinyan visits Karabakh

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has visited Nagorno-Karabakh and met with its leaders for a third time since taking office more than three months ago.

Pashinyan was accompanied by Armenia's Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan and the chief of the Armenian army's General Staff, General Artak Davtyan, during the low-key visit. The three men met twice on Sunday with Bako Sahakyan, the Karabakh president, and General Levon Mnatsakanyan, the commander of Karabakh's Armenian-backed army.

Pashinyan's press service issued no statements on the trip.

According to Sahakyan's office, the first meeting focused on "various issues relating to cooperation between the two Armenian republics."

The second meeting was held at the Karabakh army headquarters in Stepanakert. A short statement by Sahakyan's office said the two sides discussed military affairs and, in particular, ways of strengthening the army. Also, Mnatsakanyan was reported to brief Pashinyan on the current situation along the Armenian-Azerbaijani "line of contact."



The authorities in Stepanakert said in May and June that Azerbaijan is massing troops there in possible preparation for large-scale hostilities. The conflicting parties have reported few major ceasefire violations on the Karabakh frontlines since then, however.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Elmar Mam-

adyarov and his recently appointed Armenian counterpart, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, held their first face-to-face talks in Brussels on July 11. The U.S., Russian and French mediators co-chairing the OSCE Mins Group, who were present at the talks, expect them to meet again in September.

## German MEP Martin Sonneborn is in Artsakh on a fact-finding mission

On the initiative of the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy (EAFJD), Martin Sonneborn (NI, Germany), a Member of the European Parliament (MEP), his head of office Dustin Hoffmann and journalist Claudia Toursarkissian are on a fact-finding mission in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh, accompanied by EAFJD President Kaspar Karampetian and EAFJD executive director Heggine Evinyan.

Within the framework of the visit, the delegation led by MEP Sonneborn has been received by the President of the Republic of Artsakh Bako Sahakyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Masis Mayilyan, Minister of culture, youth and tourism Lernik Hovhannisyan, the Speaker of the National Assembly Ashot Ghulyan and a number of deputies representing all the political fractions in the Parliament. MEP Sonneborn and his staff also had an exchange of views with members of the "Friendship Group with Europe" of the

Artsakh National Assembly.

During the meetings, the importance of such fact-finding missions was emphasized as a contribution in breaking the isolation imposed on the people of Artsakh and obtaining first-hand information about the reality in the country and the democratic developments in it.

The sides discussed the issue of the Azerbaijan – Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the role that the European Union and its member states should play in the peaceful settlement of the conflict. It was stressed that no sustainable

solution to the conflict could be found without actively engaging the people of Artsakh in the peace process and without listening to them.

The sides mentioned also the extreme importance of having a functioning civil society in the country which can consolidate the democratic institutions.

Commenting on the visit EAFJD President Kaspar Karampetian stated: "As long as the European Union doesn't pay official visits to Nagorno-Karabakh, we have to multiply our initiatives to strengthen the Parliamentary

diplomacy between Artsakh and the European Union and its member states. The fact-finding missions that we organise aim to build bridges and promote the fundamental rights of the people in Artsakh. To give them voice is a top priority for us."

Later, the delegation led by MEP Sonneborn visited the demining international organization in Nagorno Karabakh – the HALO Trust and the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies in Stepanakert.

On August 27, before arriving to Artsakh MEP Sonneborn and his team had a number of meetings in Yerevan, among them with MP Armen Ashotyan, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the National Assembly and the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, with whom they discussed the new political situation after the peaceful transition of power in Armenia and a number of issues related to the stability and peace in the region.





## Government seeks to criminalize vote buying in Armenia

The Armenian government moved on August 30 to make it a criminal offense to buy or sell votes in elections held in the country.

Armenia's existing legislation already bans parties and individual candidates from handing out or promising cash, other material benefits and services to voters during election campaigns. The practice is punishable only by fines.

Draft amendments to the Armenian Criminal Code approved by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's cabinet call for prison sentences

for anyone buying or attempting to buy votes.

What is more, they stipulate that Armenians selling their votes will also face imprisonment. But such voters will avoid prosecution if they confess to taking vote bribes within three days after an election, according to the government bill which is expected to be debated by the Armenian parliament next week.

Vote buying was widespread in just about every major election held in Armenia in the last two decades. Former President Serzh Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia

(HHK) was accused by its opponents and media of heavily relying on the practice in the last parliamentary polls held in April 2017. Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said that they were marred by "many credible reports" of vote buying.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting, Pashinyan said the bill, if passed by the parliament, will help to significantly improve the conduct of future Armenian elections, including municipal polls in Yerevan slated for September 23.

## "Germany will support Armenia" – German Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit

*Chancellor Merkel spoke about liberalizing the EU visa policy, the settlement of the Karabakh conflict and the reforms currently being implemented in the country*

German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived in Armenia on a two-day official visit. She was met by the country's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at the Yerevan airport.

Info: Armenia and Germany established diplomatic relations in 1992.

Chancellor Merkel made her first trip off the tarmac to the Tsitsernakaberd memorial complex dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide. She laid flowers at the fire and planted a tree in the alley of memory.

**In 2016, the Bundestag adopted a resolution on the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire.**

*"In accordance with the letter and spirit of this resolution, I visited Tsit-*



Since then, relations between Yerevan and Berlin have grown dynamically. The trade turnover between the countries amounted to USD 339 million in 2017. Germany is one of Armenia's five top trade and economic partners.

*sernakaberd today. We are aware of what terrible events occurred in 1915. This fact should not be forgotten. This issue is not a legal problem for me," Merkel said a few hours later to journalists.*

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## Kocharyan eyes key opposition role

(Yerevan – RFE/RL) Former President Robert Kocharyan on August 28 accused Armenia's new government of incompetence and "unbridled populism" and declared his ambition to rally its political opponents.

In an interview with Russia's NTV channel, Kocharyan took a dim view of last spring's mass protests in the country which forced his successor and erstwhile ally Serzh Sargsyan to resign. But he also said that Sargsyan's attempt to extend his decade-long rule was a mistake.

"Do you know of a single revolution which made the people better off?" he said. "Did that happen in Libya or Tunisia or Syria? The lives of the people there have worsened drastically ... I see no reason why things should get better in our country."

Kocharyan claimed that the new authorities headed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan are trying to "settle scores" with political rivals, rather than address socioeconomic problems. "What is happening in Armenia is simply unbridled populism the consequences of which will be restraining the country's development for a long time," he said.

Kocharyan was arrested on July 27 on charges stemming from the deadly breakup in March 2008 of opposition protests staged in Yerevan in the wake of a disputed presidential election. An Armenian appeals court freed him from custody on August 13, saying that he enjoys legal immunity from prosecution. Prosecutors have asked



the higher Court of Cassation to overturn that decision.

Pashinyan, who played a key role in the 2008 protests, strongly defended the ongoing criminal investigation into the post-election bloodshed when he rallied tens of thousands of supporters in Yerevan on August 17. "No one will avoid responsibility for killing 10 people and staging a coup d'état in Armenia on March 1 [2008]," he stated in an apparent reference to Kocharyan.

Speaking to NTV, the 63-year-old ex-president again denied the coup charges and accused Pashinyan's government of waging a "political vendetta" against him. "Those who organized the [2008] mass disturbances and were sentenced for organizing them came to power ten years later," he said, adding that they are now keen to "settle scores with people whom they consider their enemies."

Kocharyan went on to reaffirm his return to active politics. "I understand that I can become a serious consolidating factor for those

people who see the current problems," he said without naming anyone. Nor did he clarify whether he is planning to set up a party or alliance for that purpose.

Kocharyan insisted that he can count on considerable popular support because the Armenian economy grew at double digit rates during most of his 10-year tenure. He predicted that citizens who benefited from that growth will be his primary "electoral base."

"During those ten years, Armenia's GDP grew fivefold ... while its state budget increased eightfold," Kocharyan told the Russian broadcaster. "Every interesting and reconstructed thing you see in Yerevan was built during those years."

"We created 35,000-40,000 jobs each year," he went on. "The share of small and medium-sized businesses in the economy rose from 15 percent at the start of my presidency to 46 percent [by 2008] ... The quality of life improved radically, and we have to remind

[Armenians] of that."

Pashinyan, his loyalists and other critics say that Kocharyan systematically stifled dissent, tolerated government corruption and rigged elections when he ran the country from 1998-2008. The Armenian premier has repeatedly pledged to eradicate corruption and create a level playing field for all businesses. He insisted last week that Kocharyan stands no chance of ever regaining power.

Kocharyan first announced his political comeback on August 16. Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) swiftly expressed readiness to "cooperate" with him. An HHK spokesman said that they have "very similar views" challenges facing the country.

Kocharyan handed over power to Sargsyan in April 2008. The two Karabakh-born men became increasingly estranged in the following years, with Kocharyan criticizing the Sargsyan administration's economic policies as well as constitutional changes that transformed Armenia into a parliamentary republic.

Sargsyan tried to remain in power as prime minister after completing his second presidential term in April this year. That fateful move triggered the Pashinyan-led protests resulting in his resignation.

"I think [Sargsyan] should not have embarked on the constitutional reform," Kocharyan said on Tuesday. "I publicly criticized that reform. And of course he should not have made attempts to hold on to power."

## Sargsyan allies disagree with Kocharyan

Senior representatives of the former ruling Republican Party (HHK) disagreed on August 29 with former President Robert Kocharyan's claim that the recent dramatic change of Armenia's government resulted from HHK leader Serzh Sargsyan's attempt to cling to power.

Kocharyan said on Tuesday that Sargsyan, who succeeded him as president in 2008, should not have turned Armenia into a parliamentary republic and become prime minister after completing his final presidential term in early April.

Sargsyan's bid to extend his decade-long rule sparked huge protests that forced him to resign later in April. The country's HHK-controlled parliament reluctantly chose the protest leader, Nikol Pashinyan, as prime minister under pop-



ular pressure in May.

Vahram Baghdasaryan, the HHK's parliamentary leader, said that his party was right to back Sargsyan's continued rule. He insisted that the protests would have broken out even if the HHK had installed another premier.

"I think that this process would have hap-

pened in case of any [Republican] prime ministerial candidate," said Baghdasaryan.

Eduard Sharmazanov, the HHK spokesman and a deputy parliament speaker, also defended Sargsyan, who remains his party's top leader.

"It seems to me that the main reason [for the revolution] was that we adopted a passive stance, whereas the political minority and its supporters adopted an active stance and changed Armenia's government through blackmail," he told reporters. "I strongly believe that Pashinyan became prime minister on the back of threats and blackmail."

Sharmazanov at the same time reaffirmed the HHK's readiness to join forces with Kocharyan in challenging the current government "regardless of our past disagreements."



## French water operator under corruption probe in Armenia



Law-enforcement authorities in Armenia have launched a criminal investigation into what they call corrupt practices by state utility regulators and a French-owned company running the country's water distribution network.

The company, Veolia Jur, on August 27 angrily denied the allegations made by the Armenian police over the weekend.

A statement by the police said that in late 2017 the then chairman of the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC), Robert Nazaryan, and seven other senior officials from the regulatory body travelled to France on a visit fully funded by Veolia Jur. The water operator, which is part of France's Veolia utility giant, covered their travel and accommodation expenses worth a total of over \$26,000.

The statement charged that these payments

amounted to a bribe which Veolia Jur's director general, Christian Lefaix, and another senior executive paid in return for securing the PSRC's subsequent decision to allow the company to raise the price of drinking water. The police also claimed to have found financial irregularities in Veolia's contracts with Armenian suppliers worth 3.7 billion drams (\$7.7 million).

The preliminary investigation was initiated by an aide to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. It will now be continued by another law-enforcement body, the Special Investigative Service (SIS). An SIS spokeswoman said on Monday that nobody has been formally charged yet in connection with the investigation.

Veolia Jur expressed "indignation" at the allegations, accusing the police of violating the presumption of innocence before the

completion of the probe. "The company does not accept the incriminating tone of the police," it said in a statement. A spokesman for the operator promised to give more detailed explanations by Tuesday.

The PSRC also rejected the "baseless" accusations. A statement by the commission said that the 2017 trip to France was part of "experience sharing" that did not predetermine the commission's decisions.

Veolia managed the water and sewerage network of Yerevan from 2007-2016. It has been in charge of water supply in the entire country since November 2016. Its 15-year management contract with the Armenian government signed at the time calls for annual rises in the water price which can be reversed after 2023. The PSRC statement emphasized this fact.

Earlier this month, Veolia asked the PSRC to raise the price by another 7 percent, saying it needs additional revenue to upgrade the aging water network. Inessa Gabayan, the recently appointed head of the State Committee on Water Resources, strongly objected to the proposed measure. Citing a recent series of water main breaks and other accidents in and outside Yerevan, she said that many Armenians are dissatisfied with the company.

Veolia managed to phase out Soviet-era water rationing in the vast majority of Yerevan's neighborhoods after taking over the municipal network. "By 2030 the entire population of Armenia will be supplied with drinking water [around the clock] thanks to Veolia," the company pledged in November 2016.

## Government allowed to use extra water from vital lake



Armenia's parliament on August 28 allowed the government to increase the amount of water from Lake Sevan that can be used for irrigation this year.

The vast mountainous lake, which is vital for Armenia's entire ecosystem, is a key source of irrigation water supplied to the fruit-growing Ararat Valley through the Hrazdan river flowing out of it.

An Armenian law allows the government to use no more than 170 million cubic meters of Sevan's water annually for irrigation and power generation purposes. A bill put forward by the government last week would raise that cap by 40 million cubic meters for the current irrigation season. Government officials said the measure, opposed by the Armenian Ministry of Environment Protection, is needed to prevent water shortages that could have severe consequences for tens of thousands of farmers and their crops.

The National Assembly passed the bill in the first reading by 68 votes to one. The two largest parliamentary forces, the Republican (HHK) and Prosperous Armenia (BHK) parties, backed it despite criticizing the government's handling of chronic problems with irrigation.

The HHK's Eduard Sharmazanov spoke

of a "choice between the bad and the worst." "We have to choose the bad," he told fellow lawmakers before the vote. "We have to take more water [from Sevan] so that our farmers get irrigation."

Lena Nazaryan of the pro-government Yelk alliance accused the country's previous, HHK-led government of having for years mismanaged water resources and tolerated corruption among officials running irrigation networks. She said Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's cabinet is forced to redirect more water from Sevan to irrigation canals because of that.

Several dozen environment protection activists protested outside the parliament building during the debate. They said that the extra irrigation quota would lower the level of Sevan and worsen the quality of its water. They argued that the level has already fallen since last December.



## Armenia explores arms deals with India

Armenia is exploring the possibility of buying rocket systems and other weapons manufactured by India for its armed forces, the Defense Ministry said on August 29.

“A group of our military officials, who are in India at the moment, are looking into Indian weapons and several of them are of interest to us,” the ministry spokesman, Artsrun Hovannisyan, told RFE/RL’s Armenian service.

“The Indian defense industry has quite interesting solutions on various offensive and defensive weapons which interest us,” he said. “But I can’t speak of any concrete projects or agreements right now.”

The Times of India daily last week quoted a senior executive of an Indian defense firm as saying that the Armenian military is showing an interest in the Pinaka multiple-launch rocket systems manufactured by it.

“We carried out extensive fir-



ing trials for their delegation last month at Pokhran in Rajasthan,” said KM Rajan of the Defense Research and Development Organization. “The results were excellent.”

Hovannisyan said in this regard that Pinaka, which has a firing range up to 75 kilometers, does not represent Armenia’s “sole and greatest interest” in Indian weapons. But he did not elaborate.

Another Armenian Defense Ministry delegation visited India and toured a number of Indian defense enterprises in May 2017.

The ministry said it discussed with Indian officials “mutually beneficial variants of developing cooperation in this direction.”

The Indian ambassador in Yerevan, Yogeshwar Shangwan, said afterwards that his country is ready to deepen relations with “friendly” Armenia “in all areas.” “Even in the area of defense, we are open to cooperation with Armenia,” he told RFE/RL’s Armenian service in June 2017.

India’s arch-foe Pakistan staunchly supports Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,

refusing to not only establish diplomatic relations with Armenia but also formally recognize the latter as an independent state. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said after October 2016 talks in Baku with then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that the two Muslim nations will step up bilateral defense cooperation.

Russia has been by far the most important supplier of weapons and other military hardware to the Armenian army. Hovannisyan said Yerevan now wants to somewhat diversify its arms procurements.

“Of course we seek to work with a single supplier in order to facilitate the process of delivery, maintenance and training [of military personnel,]” said the official. “But there are weapons that should be acquired from other states because opportunities are numerous. And India, by the way, is one of those countries which have made huge progress in this area in the last 15-20 years.”

## 100 MW power plants to be built in Armenia by 2020 – Minister



Solar plants with the capacity of 100 MW will be built in Armenia by January 1, 2020, Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources Artur Grigoryan told a press conference, marking his 100 days in office.

The Ministry will submit a proposal to the Public Services Regulatory Commission.

Artur Grigoryan said they seek to develop alternative energy in Armenia. According to him, renewable energy is a priority for the Ministry, considering its strategic importance for the Republic of Armenia.

## Parliament approves measure on additional water release from Lake Sevan

The Armenian National Assembly on August 29 adopted at second reading amendments to the Law on the annual program of restoration, conservation, reproduction and use of Lake Sevan ecosystem.

The measure allows to draw an additional 40 million square meters of water from Lake Sevan in addition to

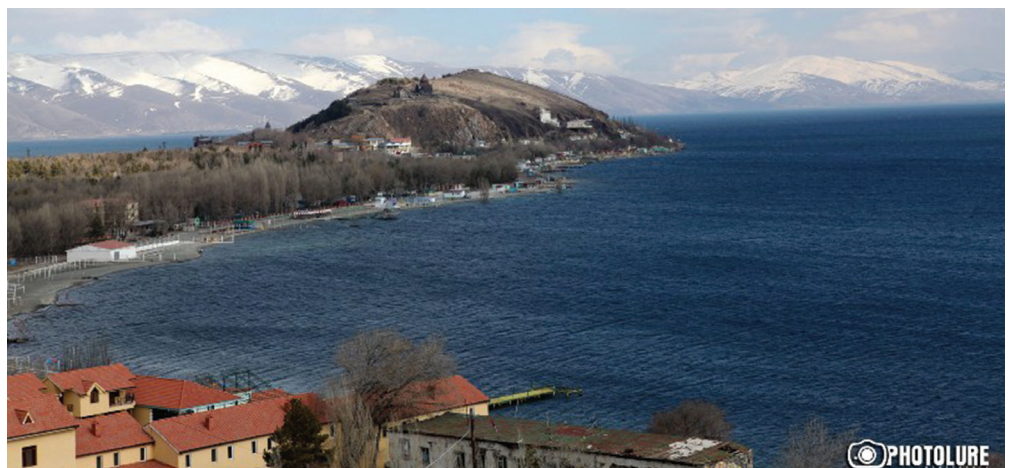
170 million cubic meters allowed.

Addressing the Parliament sitting MP Aram Said water resource management is an issue of strategic importance and should be included in the government priorities.

Hayk Babukhanyan said, in turn, that a number of questions still remain unanswered. “How much money do we

expect to get from the sale of the electricity produced as a result of the additional water release from the lake? What is the damage sustained by the agriculture? What will be the gain?” he said.

Arayik Hovhannisyan noted future parliament hearings should focus on the problems of Lake Sevan, which will result in new offers.



PHOTOLURE



## Armenian military confirms interest in Russian fighter jets



Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan has effectively confirmed recent reports that Armenia would like to acquire advanced Russian fighter jets as part of a planned modernization of its armed forces.

In June, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan photographed himself in the cockpit of a Sukhoi Su-30SM warplane parked at the Yerevan airbase in Yerevan. Russian media reported afterwards that that Yerevan is now negotiating with Moscow on the purchase of such multirole aircraft. The Armenian Defense Ministry did not deny those reports.

A statement by the ministry cited Tonoyan as saying on August 28 that the Armenian military is “planning to acquire multirole aircraft as well.”

“Until now, the Armenian armed forces have had a clearly pronounced character of ground forces, relying only on air-defense systems and ground-based missiles in fighting for aerial superiority,” Tonoyan told military officials, according to the statement. “But times have changed.”

The Armenian army, he said, now needs “fighter-bomber aircraft” because “no missile system can be a substitute for this capacity in terms of flexibility and resilience.” The ministry reported no further details.

Tonoyan met a top executive of Rosoboronexport, Russia’s state-run arms exporter, when he last visited Moscow on August 18.

The Armenian Air Force currently con-

sists of 15 or so older and far less sophisticated Su-25 jets. These low-flying Soviet-era aircraft are designed for air-to-ground missions.

Su-30SM can perform a broader range of military tasks with more potent precision-guided weapons. It is a more advanced version of a heavy fighter jet developed by the Sukhoi company in the late 1980s. The Russian military commissioned the first batch of such warplanes in 2012.

The Russian daily “Kommersant” claimed later in June that a Russian-Armenian deal signed in 2012 called for the delivery of at least 12 Su-30SMs to Armenia but that the Armenian side did not receive them due to “financial difficulties.” The paper said Moscow now hopes to reach an agreement with new Armenian government on implementing that multimillion-dollar deal “as soon as possible.”

Some Russian military analysts estimate the market price of a Su-30SM at around \$50 million. Armenia’s entire defense budget is equivalent to only about \$500 million.

Thanks to its military alliance with Russia, the South Caucasus state has long received Russian-made weapons and ammunition at discounted prices or even for free. In the last few years it has obtained \$300 million in low-interest Russian loans for the purpose of financing such arms acquisitions.

## Yerevan hopes for lower Russian gas price

The Armenian government will ask Russia’s Gazprom giant to cut the price of its natural gas supplied to Armenia during upcoming negotiations, Energy Minister Artur Grigoryan said on August 29.

Armenia currently pays \$150 per thousand cubic meters of Russian gas imported via Georgia. By comparison, the Russian gas price for Europe stands at around \$230 per thousand cubic meters.

The Armenian side and Gazprom were expected to review the tariff late last year. But visiting Yerevan in October 2017, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said the “special price” will remain unchanged until the end of 2018. Alexei Miller, the Gazprom chairman, accompanied Medvedev on the trip.

Grigoryan said that Armenian officials and Gazprom executives will start negotiations on a new gas deal in November.

“We will do everything to get a gas price that’s lower than the existing one,” he told a news conference.

The minister did not specify the extent of the price reduction that will be sought by Yerevan.

Armenia’s Gazprom-owned gas distribution network cut its retail fees for households and corporate consumers in November 2016, more than two months after Karen Karapetyan was appointed as the country’s prime minister. Karapetyan managed the network from 2001-2010 and held senior executive positions in Gazprom subsidiaries in Russia from 2011-2016.

He was replaced as prime minister by Serzh Sargsyan in April this year just a few weeks before mass protests brought down Armenia’s former government. The protest leader, Nikol Pashinyan, took

over as prime minister in early May.

So far the Russian government and Gazprom have given no indications that they are ready sell gas to Armenia at a deeper discount. Some analysts have suggested that with Karapetyan no longer in government the Russians could actually raise the existing price.

Gazprom accounts for over 80 percent of Armenia’s annual gas imports. The South Caucasus country also buys gas from neighboring Iran. Officials in Yerevan have for years insisted that Russian gas is cheaper than Iranian gas.

Grigoryan revealed that Yerevan is now discussing with Tehran the possibility of a lower Iranian gas price for Armenia. “I think that very soon we will have the final gas price declared by the Iranian side, which will certainly be compared with the price of Russian gas,” he said.



## U.S. Ambassador tours ANI Exhibit on YMCA during the First Republic of Armenia

The United States Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia, Richard M. Mills, Jr., recently toured the exhibit, sponsored by the Armenian National Institute (ANI) and the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly), depicting the critical humanitarian role played by two courageous American YMCA officials during the first republic of Armenia.

On display at the Naregatsi Art Institute in Yerevan, the exhibit, entitled American Relief in the First Republic of Armenia, was created by ANI to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Republic. The exhibit highlights the role of the YMCA pair of John Elder and James O. Arroll, who rendered exceptional service during the critical early months of the republic in 1918 when a severe humanitarian crisis gripped the newborn country as it struggled with the consequences and violence of World War I.

"This exhibition captures the spirit of the American people's affinity for Armenia and the Armenian people," said U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Richard M. Mills, Jr. "From those first YMCA volunteers to the more than 1,000 Peace Corps volunteers who have followed in their stead, the American people have been working side-by-side with the Armenian people to overcome turmoil and challenge in pursuit of continued peace and friendship between our two nations."

The exhibit also expressly links the early contributions of the YMCA and other relief workers, who subsequently arrived from the United States in 1919, with the current role of the Peace Corps which has been sending volunteers to Armenia since 1992. Ambassador Mills, whose long association with



Armenia began since serving as the State Department's first Armenia desk officer upon the restoration of Armenian independence in 1991, has been a strong supporter of Peace Corps programs across Armenia.

The exhibit opening and associated events were organized by the Armenian Assembly's Yerevan office, spearheaded by Regional Director Arpi Vartanian. The exhibit was launched on August 8 with the participation of Armenia's Minister of Education Arayik Harutyunyan and other officials, as well as representatives of the U.S. Embassy. Upon stirring renditions of the Armenian and American national anthems by New York Lyric Opera soprano Anoush Barclay, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Rafik Mansour made a compelling statement honoring the memories of John Elder and James O. Arroll for "their American idealism, their connections, and their business savvy."

Additional remarks were made by Armenian National Institute Chairman Van Z. Krikorian, Naregatsi Art Institute Director Nareg Hartounian, and YMCA Europe Programmes Executive Secretary Vardan Hambardzumyan in the presence of government officials, representatives of local, diasporan, and international NGOs, as well as Armenian media which covered the exhibit extensively.

The YMCA in Armenia was represented by a contingent of young members from around the country, as well as YMCA Armenia Acting Director Khoren Papoyan in addition to YMCA Europe Programmes Executive Secretary Vardan Hambardzumyan. Joining them were Peace Corps volunteers, who work with YMCA volunteers in Armenia's regions, and other aid workers. Former Artsakh Foreign Minister Karen Mirozian, Knights of Vartan Yerevan Liason Gohar Palyan, Near East Foundation-Armenia Representative Arpine Baghdoyan, ABGU Armenia President Vasken Yacoubian, ArmComedy Live's Narek Margaryan, Artists' Union of Armenia Director Karen Aghamyan, Aida Khachikyan from the Hayastan All-Armenia Fund, Shant Hovnanian of Hovnanian International, and Sergei Paradjanov Museum Director Zaven Sargsyan, a professional photographer who has documented historic Ani, visited the exhibit. Armenian Assembly summer interns in Armenia along with their families and supervisors also joined the event. The Vozkevez Winery, which has been in existence since 1932, donated refreshments for the reception.

Addressing the audience, ANI Chairman Krikorian encouraged YMCA members, Peace Corps participants, and others en-





gaged in humanitarian services to see themselves in the eyes of the volunteers from 100 years ago.

Upon the conclusion of the display, the ANI exhibit will travel around Armenia and to Artsakh. ANI and the Armenian Assembly are donating the poster set to YMCA Armenia. The YMCA organizations in cities across the country, such as Gyumri, Spitak, and Vanadzor, will bring the story of the original arrival of the YMCA, and heroic tale of Elder and Arroll, to an even wider public. For Armenian audiences, the 24-panel exhibit was augmented with a two-panel Armenian-language introduction summarizing the key events and personalities highlighted in the story. Along with the support of the YMCA of the USA, preparation of the ANI exhibit was strongly encouraged by the YMCA leadership in Armenia and Europe which previously shared the announcement upon the original release of the digital version of the exhibit in April of this year. YMCA Europe shared the news of the display of the exhibit in Yerevan with its audiences on its website.

The exhibit reconstructs the story of the near superhuman efforts undertaken by John Elder and James O. Arroll to rescue Armenians from the many perils they faced during the 1918-1920 independent Republic of Armenia. The exhibit relies upon John Elder's own words from his published journal, along with original records that he personally saved from the time of his service, and the photographs that he made and captioned.

Elder and Arroll arrived as two enthusiastic young men dedicated to the purpose of sustaining morale among soldiers enduring long campaigns and treacherous conditions as the Great War kept grinding on, year after year, without end. They departed as two celebrated heroes who stood by the Armenian people at the fateful hour. John Elder wrote on May



26, 1918, as Ottoman Turkish forces advanced to the outskirts of Yerevan: "You never can tell what may happen. Just as the end seems at hand the pendulum swings the other way... After a two-day battle at Sardarabad, the Turks have been completely routed." With the decisive battle won, two days later, on May 28, 1918, Armenia declared independence.

The only Americans in Yerevan at the time, Elder and Arroll witnessed momentous events and the unfolding of a heart-wrenching humanitarian disaster as the ravages of war were revealed once the fighting stopped. A year elapsed before a new crew of relief workers reached Armenia to lighten the burden that Elder and Arroll shouldered. In the meantime, their efforts and accomplishments had become legend among admiring Armenians and fellow Americans at home.

The exhibit displays 95 images, 64 from John Elder's photo collection, 8 contemporaneous records and documents, and 4 maps. With 32 quotations from Elder's journal authenticating the photographs, along with introductory and explanatory text, the exhibit opens a window into life during the first year of the

newly independent Armenian republic in 1918. The exhibit includes the entire set of photographs Elder attributed to his time in Armenia.

Several American relief workers are also mentioned in the exhibit, including Reverend Ernest Yarrow, Gertrude Pearson, F. Tredwell Smith, and Mabel Farrington. Mary Kifer, whose life was cut short after leaving the Caucasus, improbably found romance while conducting relief work in Armenia. Her story parallels "A Farewell to Arms" before Ernest Hemingway wrote his WWI era tragedy.

Other American personalities in the region appearing in the exhibit include F. Willoughby Smith, U.S. Consul in Tiflis, who supported the efforts of the relief workers; Robert McDowell, who was at the front when the Turkish forces broke through and invaded Alexandropol (Gyumri); Dr. John H.T. Main, president of Grinnell College in Iowa, who witnessed the horrific conditions in Armenia firsthand on behalf of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East; missionary Grace Knapp; and John Mott, longtime president of the American YMCA, who, with the encouragement of his friend President

Woodrow Wilson, dispatched young Americans wherever they could lend civilian support behind the front to men in combat.

The YMCA digital exhibit is the fifth exhibit developed by ANI. It follows upon other educational material developed for the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, including the four large exhibits displaying hundreds of historic photographs. These exhibits include:

- Witness to the Armenian Genocide: Photographs by the Perpetrators' German and Austro-Hungarian Allies
- The First Refuge and the Last Defense: The Armenian Church, Etchmiadzin, and the Armenian Genocide
- The First Deportation: The German Railroad, The American Hospital, and the Armenian Genocide
- Iconic Images of the Armenian Genocide (also available as a slideshow)
- Survivors of the Armenian Genocide

Founded in 1997, the Armenian National Institute (ANI) is a 501(c)(3) educational charity based in Washington, D.C., and is dedicated to the study, research, and affirmation of the Armenian Genocide.



## Deputy Foreign Minister Alex Ben Zvi: “Relations between Armenia and Israel are Excellent, and in the Knesset Everything is Taking Place as Usual...”

By George Chakhalian

21-22 August was marked by a visit of Deputy General Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Head of Euro-Asia Division of the MFA of Israel, Ambassador **Alexander Ben Zvi** (who, incidentally, was born in the former USSR, in the city of Chernovtsy in Ukraine, and who is a fluent Russian speaker).

Taking into account the fact that the Prime Minister of Israel occupies the post of the Foreign Minister as well, and the day-to-day running of the MFA is the responsibility of the General Director of the MFA of Israel, Alex Ben Zvi can be considered Deputy Foreign Minister.

And even though Armenia has been visited by the Minister of the Regional Cooperation of Israel, the MFA has never sent such a high-ranking diplomat here before.

At midday Alexander Ben Zvi, accompanied by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Armenia to Israel **Armen Smbatyan**, the Israeli Ambassador to Armenia **Elijahu Erushalmi**, and Honorary Consul of Israel to Armenia **Ashot Shakhnazaryan** and Honorary Consul of Armenia to Israel **Tsolak Momjian**, proceeded to lay flowers at the Eternal Flame at the Armenian Genocide Memorial, paying respect to the memory of the innocent victims.

Mr Ben Zvi and his entourage visited the exhibition halls of the Museum-Institute of the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial. In the Book of Distinguished Guests the high-ranking Israeli guest left the following entry in Hebrew that he himself translated: “*The tragedy of the Armenian people has always been and still remains*

*deep in the hearts of the Jewish people. Preserving the memory of what happened prevents it from happening again*”.

Answering the question of The Highlights correspondent on whether his visit

important step towards recognition (long overdue) of the Genocide by the State of Israel, Alexander Ben Zvi said: “*You know, the tragedy of the Armenian people has never been questioned in Israel, everybody knows about it, nobody*

*says it has not happened... I do not think that it is a question for political debate... In the Knesset it is taking place as usual, there it is a political question, but Israeli-Armenian relations are very good...*”

**The Highlights:** - *In other words, you are saying that the question of the Israeli recognition of the Genocide of Armenians has no political subtext, particularly vis-a-vis Israeli-Turkish relations?*

Alexander Ben Zvi: - Any decision has always its own subtext, be it a political subtext or any other... But I must reiterate: there is no subtext in our relations with Armenia, they are excellent... And what the Knesset decides - it is their problem...

Answering the question on the future of Armenia-Israel relations, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia in the State of Israel **Armen Smbatyan** said: “*It is excellent, because there are many things in common between our peoples... Today relations between our countries are being built in a new way.*

*Unfortunately, in the past our relations have been lagging behind for some reason or other, but now we must fill that gap both in the political and the humanitarian spheres... It is high time we did it...*

*As to the recognition of the Genocide of Armenians, there is a large group of deputies in the Knesset, and I think in the foreseeable future they will*

to Armenia, and especially paying respect to the innocent victims of the Genocide of Armenians should be considered as an





complete their work”.

The Israeli official, joining Armen Smbatyan, said: “I can put my signature under everything that Ambassador Smbatyan says... Yes, there was a period when our relations were developing very slowly, but now the situation is different.

And you will see it very soon. For example, this year both in Armenia and in Israel we are organising big events to mark the Centenary of the First Republic of Armenia and the 70th anniversary of proclaiming the State of Israel”.

Later that day Alexander Ben Zvi met the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Z. Mnatsakanyan, and on Wednesday the 22nd he met Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II and Deputy PM Mher Grigoryan.



## “Germany will support Armenia” – German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s visit

from page 3

She then met with Armenian President Armen Sargsyan.

“We want to participate in the reforms in Armenia, closely follow the changes and processes that took place in your country this spring. We are ready to continue cooperation on this

Merkel said that Germany will do everything in its power to promote the issue of liberalization of the visa policy for the citizens of Armenia:

“You know that for citizens of Georgia and Ukraine, who have an association agreement with the European Union, the visa-free policy is already in effect. This issue is closely con-

Prime Minister Pashinyan emphasized that Yerevan does not build relations with any country at the expense of relations with another:

“We said that after the ‘velvet’ revolution there will be no reverse in foreign policy. We intend to, and are realizing this intention. [We intend to] develop relations with Russia,



difficult though important road,” Merkel said.

She also visited the Tumo Creative Technologies Centre for a chat with teenagers who are learning animation, game development, robotics and programming at the facility.

Thereafter she visited PicsArt, Armenia’s biggest start-up.

She concluded her first day in Armenia after a meeting with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The meeting was followed by a joint press conference.

nected with migration policy. We expect progress on this issue, and we, on our part, will do everything possible to achieve this progress.”

Merkel also re-confirmed that Germany is ready to contribute to the settlement of the Karabakh conflict:

“Germany is a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, and we talked about the importance of resolving the Karabakh problem in a good atmosphere. Germany will support Armenia in this issue.”

including within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty [both structures operate under the auspices of Russia – JAMnews]. However, we are also developing relations with EU countries, in particular, Germany. We do not see here the need for contradictions and balances.”

Source:  
JAMnews



## Encouraging Future under a Strong Roof Building a Home in Tatul Village

The large family of Mkrtchyan lives in the village of Tatul, on the south-eastern foothills of the Arteni Mountains. For about 10 years the family has lived in a half-built panel house with a deteriorated roof and lacking basic housing conditions; the walls

ing from tuff does not look like the old house at all; it's already several months the family father, Volodya, is doing construction work day and night in the frames of the housing project implemented by VivaCell-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Arme-

*"You can't imagine what a happiness it is when you can't and don't want to sleep because of being too tired, you want to sooner finish the construction of the house you have been dreaming of for so many years. Here is now, with each stroke of ham-*



of the house have become moldy and blackened due to cold and dampness. Now, the new half-built build-

nia. He has already managed to not only to strengthen the walls but also to create new housing conditions.

*mer the hope and belief for a better future also grows. I am so thankful," said the family father, Volodya.*



The teams of VivaCell-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia joined the family to do the concreting of the floors. As a result of the support from partnering sides the Mkrtchyan's house will have a new and solid look.

*"Together with our partners we have been striving to provide roof and shelter to families in need, for a properly tied roof symbolizes strong family ties. I hope the volunteers' devotion on the*

*construction site and their efforts will convey positive charges to both volunteers, and equally to the people who will be living in this house,"* VivaCell-MTS General Manager **Ralph Yirikian** said.

*"It's already 10 years we are working with families in housing need. We have so far recorded that the hope and the positive emotions the families get as a result of the project are*

*even more important than the building of the house in itself. It's important that the families supported believe in themselves, find solutions and by receiving a dignifying*



*assistance they also express willingness to help other families in housing need. It's very valuable,"* said Fuller Center for Housing Armenia President **Ashot Yeghiazaryan**.

## Armenian Museum in Watertown to open new gallery on November

The Armenian Museum of America in Watertown is updating its space under the leadership of new Executive Director Jennifer Liston Munson. The museum will open its new gallery to public in November, Wicked Local reports.

Munson has an extensive art background and worked as a senior member of the Exhibitions and Designs department at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Before becoming executive director, she had collaborated on many projects and exhibitions with the Armenian Museum.

Munson wants the museum to be a place of discovery. A place where Armenian-Americans can connect to their heritage, and also a place where people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds can learn how integrated the Armenian experience is with American culture and identity.

"We are creating a space to welcome people, to educate, and to enlighten," she said.

Munson is also introducing new exhibition concepts. She wants to create a space that is dynamic rather than stagnant. To do this, she is organizing cultural events. Some might feature Armenian music, of Armenian cooking, but the idea is to bring art alive.

Munson is also creating an introduction gallery. The gallery will be at the front of

the museum entrance and will highlight different Armenian artifacts every month. The artifacts will be accompanied by descriptions narrating their different histories, and how each came to the museum.

The museum has permanent collections that highlight Armenia's ancient history and the genocide. Munson is also working to integrate more about the Armenia

diaspora which is not a well-known tale.

Munson is a non-Armenian trying to tell the Armenian story. However, she believes that sometimes it takes somebody from the outside to help tell the story in a way that will connect with everyone. Her museum background and expertise, she believes will allow her to do this successfully.





## CHRISTOPHER OKEMWA

Christopher Okemwa is a poet, actor, dancer, playwright, story-teller, short-story and children's writer.

Christopher Okemwa is the winner of 2015 Burt Award for African Literature (Kenya). On 25th Sept. 2015, at Villa Rosa Kempinski Hotel Nairobi, his novella, *Sabina and the Mystery of the Ogre*, won him a certificate and cash prize of 9,000 Canadian dollars (Ksh. 765,000) and a payment of Kshs. 153,900 from his publisher.

He graduated from Kamagambo Teachers' Training College and has taught for several years in Kenya. He later graduated from the University of Nairobi with a Bachelor of Education degree, specializing in English and Literature. He also holds an MA degree in literature from the same University. His doctoral study at Moi University in Kenya focuses on the 'Literary-Gangster' Performance Poetry in Kenya. He currently teaches Creative Writing at Kisii University, Kenya.

He has published three collections of poetry: *Toxic Love* (2004, Watermark, USA), *The Gong* (2009, Nsemia Inc. Publishers, Canada) and a bilingual (French/English) poetry collection *Purgatorius Ignis* (2015, Poesie Premiere-Online). He has also authored and published three collections of children's stories: *The Village Queen*, *The Visitor at the Gate*, and *Let Us Keep Tiger* (2010, Paulines Africa). The latter was nominated for Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 2011. Okemwa has also published a collection of adult short-stories, *Chubot, the Cursed One and Other Stories*. His Oral Literature text, *Riddles of the Abagusii People of Kenya: Gems of Wisdom from the African Continent* was also published in 2011. His other oral literature text, *The Proverbs of the Abagusii of Kenya: Meaning & Application* was published in 2012. In 2014, Okemwa rolled out a series of twelve titles of Abagusii folktales, namely *Ogasusu na Oganochogu*, *Ogasusu na Okanyang'au*, *Ogasusu na Okanyambu*, *Ogasusu na Egetondo*, *Okabaki na Okanyambobe*, *Okangombe na Ogasimba*, *Ogasusu na Abana B'Oganochogu*, *Kerangeti na Kerantina*, *Nyamege na Omoiseke Omonda*, *Getiro na Rirabwoni*, *Abamura Batato* and *Omoiseke Omonyakieni*.

Okemwa is well known as a playwright and an actor. He has scripted and presented at Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals award-winning plays and poems. He was sponsored by the National Operatic & Dramatic Association of England to attend and participate in a theatre course, held at Churchill Hall, University of Bristol, from 20th to the 27th July 1991, where all aspects of theatre techniques—including voice, improvisation, text appreciation, stage management, dancing etc.—were studied.

In the same year he was again a student at the Association's Technical Summer School, held at King Alfred's College, Winchester, from 27th July to 3rd August 1991. In this school he studied all aspects of technical theatre—including stage management, lighting, properties, set construction etc. --- with the emphasis on the management of resources.

In addition to the acquisition of theatre skills, Okemwa is also a respected drama and literary critic who has published numerous articles in the dailies, journals and newsletters.

Okemwa is most reputed as an international performance poet. He attended a poetry workshop in Northern Ireland in 1993 sponsored by Poets' House. For three weeks he wrote and studied poetry under distinguished Irish and American poets.



In 2010 he attended XX International Poetry Festival in Medellin, Colombia, where he performed poems from his two poetry books. In 2012 he was a guest poet at the 27th Biennale Poetry Festival in Liege, Belgium. Okemwa is the founder and current director of Kistrech International Poetry Festival in Kenya, whose inaugural edition was in 2013.

Okemwa has won several awards in poetry: In 2002 he won an Editor's Choice Award for Outstanding Achievement in Poetry, presented by the International Library of Poetry. In 2006 he won Changamoto Arts Fund award of KES. 76,000 for the performance of his poetry in Secondary Schools in Kenya. In 2015 his novella, *Sabina and the Mystery of the Ogre* won the prestigious Burt Award for African Literature. The award came with a certificate and prize money of Ksh. 918,900 (765,000 from the award and 153,900 from the publisher).

### The Pie Just Lie There

When you die, my dear friend  
Do not try to petition  
Do not ask why you can't live longer  
Or why you and not someone else  
Died  
Just accept and pass on

When they stash you in the casket  
Dear friend  
Do not grumble  
Do not mumble  
Or try to peep through the wooden box  
Desiring to live on  
Just lie there  
For you will be in a different space  
A different wavelength  
A different existence

When they scream around the casket  
Dear friend  
Do not shed tears with them  
Do not sympathize with them  
Just look on and lie still  
Let your mouth gape  
Let your eyes stare  
Your cheeks sink into your mouth  
Your teeth stick out of your lips  
Like a warthog  
Remain frozen  
Remain withered  
Just lie there

If you hear them lowering your  
body to the soil  
Dear friend  
Do not grumble  
Do not mumble  
Or try to break open the casket  
To protest the cold abode  
The soil-made walls  
Just lie there  
For you will be in a different world  
A different space  
A different time-line

When you start to rot and decompose  
Dear friend  
Do not pinch your nose  
Do not throw up either  
Stench is part of the new design  
Maggots your companion  
Worms your new kith and kin  
Silence the ambience of the new home  
Loneliness the ultimate destiny  
Just lie there



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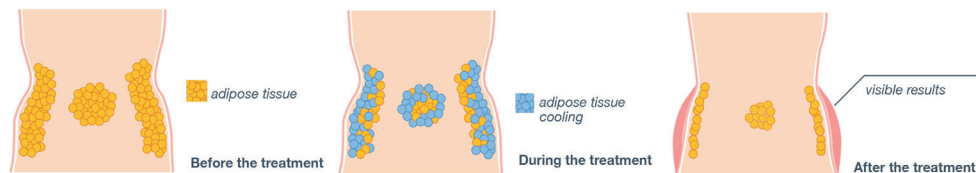
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