

Pashinyan Praises Eurasian Union



RUSSIA – Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan gives a speech at the headquarters of the Eurasian Economic Commission in Moscow, January 25, 2019.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan praised the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and reaffirmed Armenia’s continued membership in the Russian-led trade bloc as he visited its headquarters in Moscow on January 25.

Pashinyan met with the Armenian head of the EEU’s executive body, Tigran Sargsyan, and its key members three weeks after his country assumed the EEU’s rotating presidency.

“In the past years the Eurasian Economic

Union has proved its viability,” he said at the meeting. “A positive dynamic has been registered in the main economic indicators and important decisions have been made regarding many directions of Eurasian integration.”

In a separate appeal to the leaders of Russia and the EEU’s three other member states read out at the meeting, Pashinyan said: “Armenia will make every effort to maintain the positive dynamic of integration and to accomplish tasks that could give an additional im-

petus to economic growth in our countries.”

In particular, Pashinyan went on, the Armenian government will strive for a harmonization of their economic regulations which he said are currently hampering greater trade among the member states. He also voiced support for the EEU’s free-trade deals planned or already signed with other nations, including China and India.

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PM attends “Shaping the Future of Democracy” panel discussion in Davos

On the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on January 21 attended a panel discussion, referred to as “Shaping the Future of Democracy.”

Colombian President Iván Duque Márquez, Nepal’s Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, New York Times publisher Arthur Gregg Sulzberger and Director of Management Today project Daniella Ballou-Aares were among the keynote speakers. Martin Wolf, Deputy Editor and Chief Economist for The Financial Times magazine, acted as the moderator.

Answering Martin Wolf’s question, Nikol Pashinyan noted that parliamentary elections were held in Armenia a month ago, which were assessed as free, democratic and transparent.

“And now as we have recorded great success in the field of democracy, we are facing serious challenges, and the biggest challenge is to empower our democracy economically. You may know that we had a big problem for a long time because of electoral bribes that people were forced to take due to their poor living standards. Of course, the revolution liberated people from that obligation. But now we have



to make our citizens even stronger and more independent in economic terms.

We know that there is small and medium-sized business, but we are going to create a new category like micro business and get it rid of taxes in the hope that we will be able to encourage our people by making it clear that overcoming poverty is not only the task of the government: they themselves will have to do something, too. We want to encourage our people by providing opportunities to curb their own poverty.

Thus my answer is as follows: the greatest challenge is to strengthen our democracy economically, and we hope to attract new foreign investments because we have been able to fight corruption, reinstate the rule of law, and we are going to

simplify the regulations in order to attract more investments,” Nikol Pashinyan said.

With reference to media freedom in Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan noted: “You know, I am a journalist, chief editor and former political prisoner. I can assert that media now enjoys more freedom than ever in Armenia. Not all journalists may agree with me because many believe that media is not completely free in Armenia, but I can insist on it. I think it is just normal that media and the government are somewhat at odds as we can witness that there is now little trust in governments around the world due to the fact that people nowadays know much more about high-ranking officials than before.”

Nikol Pashinyan expressed con-

viction that full transparency in government workings is the key to increasing the level of trust towards the government. Nikol Pashinyan next spoke about the role of social media in the modern world. “As a matter of fact, we succeeded our revolution owing social media because we were caught in media blockade, but we managed to bring about a breakthrough in this field. Now, I continue to hold live broadcasts on my Facebook page.

As regards the interconnectivity between media and free, unbiased elections, it is necessary to check the factors that affected the election results, as the release of a couple of biased materials can affect election results, which, of course, is a big problem.

What can be done in this case; it seems to be a serious challenge. I am proud to state that our country has been recognized as a free Internet country, which in turn opens up news exchange opportunities or transparency.

Indeed, it leaves a huge loophole for fake news, which adversely affects our country’s image around the world. Frankly speaking, I do not know what to do in such situations. And I would be happy if anyone could tell us which way to go.”

Armenia, RCC eye development of cooperation

Armenia’s Minister of Transportation, Communication and IT Hakob Arshakyan has held a meeting with Regional Commonwealth in the field of Communications (RCC) Secretary General Nuridin Mukhidinov, who is in Yerevan for the 14th session of the RCC committee on radio frequency and satellite orbits regulations.

The minister attached importance to organizing this type of events in Yerevan and noted that he highly appreciates the committee’s work. He also expressed conviction that the session will give results, the ministry said.

The RCC Secretary General



praised the work of radio-frequency specialists, the development of digital technologies, development and enhancement of cooperation, and the need for creating a platform for it.

Minister Arshakyan emphasized the importance of development of technology and noted that the concepts of this sector must be development in a way that they contribute to raising the quality of

life of people.

Mukhidinov was briefed on the vision of development of high technologies in Armenia, as well as the future activities of the ministry.

The sides touched upon the possibilities for implementing joint pilot programs.

Mukhidinov presented a number of business projects of RCC that might be of interest in Armenia.

He also recommended Armenia to be included in the RCC high level working group at the level of deputy minister.

Both sides expressed hope that the cooperation will further develop and strengthen.

Leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan hold informal meeting in Davos

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had an informal meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

During the meeting the interlocutors exchanged views on the current state of the negotiation process on Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement and the future discussions.

The meeting lasted for an hour and a half, PM Pashinyan said in a Facebook post.

“We have agreed not to avoid each other and exchange a couple of words, when we come across each other during general events,” Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said, commenting on



his recent meeting with President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan.

“This was my third meeting with Ilham Aliyev, and none of them has been preplanned,” Pash-

inyan said.

He said Tuesday’s meeting was arranged by organizers of the World Economic Forum.

“The organizers of Davos asked

us whether we would mind meeting and holding a discussion. We both said we wouldn’t,” the Armenian PM said.

He added, however that the meeting was informal and should not be treated as a start of official negotiations.

“During all three meetings we have discussed the history of the negotiation process. Of course, we also discuss the opportunities, the perspectives of and obstacles to the settlement of the conflict,” Nikol Pashinyan said.

“We have not considered any concrete detail. This is an opportunity to exchange views and get to know each other’s approaches to the negotiation process,” he added.

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According to Armenian government data, in January-November 2018 Russia and other ex-Soviet states making up the bloc accounted for 27 percent of Armenia’s foreign trade, compared with the European Union’s 25 percent share in the total.

Pashinyan criticized Armenia’s accession to the EEU and even called for its withdrawal from the bloc as recently as in November 2017. However, immediately after he swept to power in May 2018, he made clear that he will not pull his country out of the EEU or the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Pashinyan was asked about his past position on the issue at a news conference held at the EEU headquarters. “You know that when I was a member of the [former Armenian] parliament I voted against that decision [to join the EEU,]” he replied. “Since then I have repeatedly said that just because we had thought that it’s a wrong decision doesn’t mean we need to take diametrically opposite actions in order to correct that mistake.”

“U.S. President Barack Obama thought that President [George W.] Bush was wrong to invade Iraq and so he decided to ... withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq. And what did we get? We got the Islamic State,” he said.

“The fact is that Armenia is a member of the EEU and I don’t think that U-turns are good in international affairs. And as you can see, our efforts now are aimed at making the EEU more effective,” added Pashinyan.

In that regard, the Armenian premier made a case for setting up a common EEU market for natural gas and other fuel. He was understood to imply that Russian gas should be as cheap in Russia as it is in Armenia and other EEU members importing it.



Russia’s Gazprom giant raised its wholesale gas price for Armenia on January 1. Pashinyan’s government is now negotiating with Armenia’s Gazprom-owned gas distribution network in hopes of keeping its internal retail tariffs unchanged.

Pashinyan expressed confidence on Friday that the existing gas prices set for Armenian households and corporate consumers will not go up this year. He again insisted that his government will not be subsidizing it.

The gas issue was high on the agenda of Pashinyan’s most recent meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin held in Moscow on December 27. The two men held further discussions on it by phone in the following days.

Pashinyan was not scheduled to meet with Putin during his latest trip to the Russian capital. He was due to hold talks instead with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev later in the day.

Armenian tax agency denies huge bonuses to senior staff

Armenia's State Revenue Committee (SRC) on January 24 strongly denied a media report that said its most-high ranking officials received huge yearend bonuses vastly exceeding their monthly wages.

The Yerevan.Today publication claimed that the SRC head Davit Ananyan and his first deputy Rafik Mashadyan were paid 8.6 million drams (\$17,700) and 9.6 million drams (\$20,000) respectively in bonuses late last month. Two other senior SRC officials got roughly 6.5 million drams each, according to Yerevan.Today.

In a statement, the SRC said that the sums are grossly exaggerated. "There are no such amounts of bonuses in the SRC," it said.



Ananyan rejected the report as a "lie" when he spoke to reporters. "Such large amounts are just not possible," he said.

Ananyan refused to reveal how much extra pay he and other SRC officials received ahead of New

Year's holiday, saying that such information would constitute a privacy violation. He said only that the largest bonus was worth 1.5 million drams.

According to government data, the average monthly salary in

Armenia stood at 169,000 drams (\$350) as of November 2018.

The Yerevan.Today report came amid continuing media uproar over much smaller but still significant bonuses which three Armenian provincial governors paid themselves and their senior staffers.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and other senior government officials have essentially defended the payments, arguing that they have been made for many years and have also benefited ordinary public sector employees. Pashinyan also complained on Wednesday that the government has trouble attracting skilled professionals working for private firms because public sector salaries are too low.

EU, World Bank pledge more funds for Armenian road upgrades

(Yerevan – RFE/RL)- The European Union and the World Bank have allocated over 730 million euros (\$832 million) for investments in Armenia's transport infrastructure that will be made by 2030, a senior EU official confirmed on January 25.

The loans and grants are part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Investment Action Plan announced by them last week. It is designed to "boost connectivity and economic growth" in six former Soviet republics included in the EU's Eastern Partnership program.

"Together, the projects will require an estimated investment of almost €13 billion and foresee a total of 4,800 kilometers of road and rail, 6 ports, and 11 logistics centers," the World Bank and the EU said in a joint statement.

"Those projects will make possible the construction and rehabilitation of new and existing roads, rail, ports, airports as well as logistical centers and border crossing points," they said.

Armenia will be eligible for 732 million euros worth of such funding, added the statement.

"This huge program of connectivity will bring Armenia and the European Union closer together," Piotr Switalski, the head of the EU Delegation in Yerevan, told RFE/RL's Armenian service.



"Some of the projects are already being implemented in Armenia," he said.

Switalski pointed to the ongoing reconstruction of two Armenian highways running from Yerevan to the Georgian border. The EU has contributed over 90 million euros in loans and 15 million euros in grants to the effort, he said.

The diplomat also mentioned the 54 million-euro modernization of Armenia's three border checkpoints with Georgia which was carried out from 2013-2017. The EU provided the bulk of the sum in the form of a grant and

a loan.

According to the joint statement by the World Bank and the EU, road projects launched in Armenia as part of TEN-T are worth more than 200 million euros.

The bank and the 28-nation bloc have allocated much greater sums for similar projects in Georgia and Azerbaijan: 3.4 billion euros and 2.8 billion euros respectively. "What we have as a result, this initial outline, is the reflection of the expectations of the Armenian side," Switalski said when asked to explain the difference.

Government plans to include employed citizens in universal healthcare insurance

The Armenian healthcare ministry is planning to introduce a universal medical insurance system.

Healthcare minister Arsen Torosyan said at a news conference on January 23 that registered employees will join the program in 2021.

“Many issues are yet to be decided”, he said. “For example, what percentage of employed citizens’ salaries must go for insurance. But globally there is a practice of 2-30%. We are inclined to start from lower percentages, in order for it not to be a burden for citizens. We have certain numbers in mind, but since there are political decisions, these percentages will be changed. For example, if it’s decided that pensioners should also be included then this percentage will rise,” he said.

He said that the purpose for launching the program in 2021 is to make accurate calculations to minimize possible failures.

“By introducing the first phase for only



employed citizens and citizens who are already benefiting from state medical insurance today, we are ensuring nearly 50% coverage,” he said, adding that the

number will be gradually increased.

Torosyan said they will also discuss the issue of including pensioners in the program.

Yerevan plans construction of bypass roads to facilitate traffic



Yerevan City authorities are considering several projects for facilitating the city’s transportation traffic.

Yerevan Mayor Hayk Marutyan, accompanied by Minister of Transportation, Communication and Information Technologies Hakob Arshakyan, visited a number of sections of the capital where bypassing roads are planned to be constructed, the City Hall said.

According to the City Hall, the construc-

tion plan under consideration has been designed back in the Soviet years. The M15 project will link the province of Ararat with the province of Kotayk – thus enabling motorists not to enter Yerevan and by bypassing the Erebuni and Nor Nork districts.

“We know very well that today almost all roads pass through Yerevan, we also know the situation regarding heavy traffic”, the Mayor said.

“The goal is for vehicles that pass-through Yerevan now, but whose destination isn’t to reach Yerevan, to have alternative roads and not enter downtown. This is very important not only for the development of the capital, but generally for the development of Armenia’s roads and the economy”, he said.

Another project under consideration is linking Davitashen district with the Kanaker Zeytun district, at the same time enabling to visit Kotayk province.

“We must view Armenia as one whole in terms of both economy, road construction and infrastructure. We are discussing with Mr. Marutyan the issue of bypassing roads for Yerevan”, Minister Arshakyan said, adding that the projects will be studied in detail to determine efficiency.

The roads are envisaged to be multi-lane, with bridges.

According to Mayor Marutyan, the City Hall is also negotiating with the Asian Development Bank for building new road links near the Hayrenik Cinema Theater and the Circus.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, JICA, eBay interested in deepening cooperation with Armenia

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held bilateral meetings with foreign partners in the margins of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

On the morning of January 22, the Prime Minister first met with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries board member Christina Ahmadjian, followed by a meeting with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) President Shinichi Kitaoka.

Addressing Christina Ahmadjian, Nikol Pashinyan said the Armenian government is interested in cooperating with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. He noted that the Government seeks to turn the political revolution in Armenia into an economic one, and real and drastic changes are expected in the economic sphere. Nikol Pashinyan underscored that there is great potential for technological development in our country, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' involvement in our country might be promising in this regard.

Christina Ahmadjian hailed the transformations underway in Armenia in terms of attracting investment programs and expressed readiness to assist the Armenian government in establishing contacts and cooperation with Japanese companies. She noted that she was going to visit Armenia in the near future to discuss further cooperation.

Nikol Pashinyan and Shinichi Kitaoka discussed issues related to JICA's programs in Armenia and the opportunities for future co-



operation. Prime Minister Pashinyan stressed that the Armenian side is keen to expand co-

operation with JICA and stands ready to take all necessary steps to implement new mutually beneficial projects and provide new directions for cooperation.

In turn, Shinichi Kitaoka pointed out that their programs will be continued in our country. He advised that an expert group will arrive in Armenia in the near future to outline the prospects of cooperation.

The parties attached importance to the deepening of trade and economic relations between Armenia and Japan as there is great potential for development.

Nikol Pashinyan next met with eBay Vice President Cathy Foster. Appreciating eBay's activities, the Premier said they go in tune with the global technological transformations. The head of the Armenian government noted that eBay's activities in the field of Internet trading, electronic payments and telecommunications are in great demand in our country and highlighted the expansion of such services in Armenia. Nikol Pashinyan added that Armenia will be hosting the World Forum of High Tech Technologies in October, 2019, and invited eBay to participate in the forum. Nikol Pashinyan underscored the fact that the IT sphere is developing at a faster pace in Armenia.

Cathy Foster expressed readiness to visit Armenia in order to discuss prospects for eBay's operations and investment opportunities in our country.

Group of businessmen express wish to make new investments in Armenia during meeting with Pashinyan in Davos

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan continues the meetings with the businessmen and investors of different countries on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

On the second day of the Forum Pashinyan met with Arne Sorenson, President and CEO at Marriott International, Inc, during which the opportunities to expand the company's activities in Armenia were discussed. PM Pashinyan highly valued the company's activity in Armenia and stated that the Marriott hotel is very popular in Armenia. The PM said the Armenian government is interested in developing and expanding the famous international hotel network in the country.

Arne Sorenson informed that currently they are discussing issues on implementing invest-

ment programs by the Marriott International and opening new hotel as a result. The company CEO attached importance to the Armenian government's steps aimed at improving the business environment and expressed confidence that these activities will contribute to the effective implementation of the programs.

During the meeting with CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund Kirill Dmitriev, the Armenian PM noted that there are good opportunities and conditions for investments in Armenia after the recent changes. He said the government is ready to assist the ongoing programs of the Fund and discuss the possibilities for implementing new investment projects.

Kirill Dmitriev introduced Pashinyan on the process of ongoing programs in the fields of

agriculture, industry and energy, adding that the Fund will continue the policy of implementing new programs in Armenia. He stated that given the new opportunities in Armenia, they are going to take actions to bring their international partners to Armenia.

The Armenian PM also met with the CEO of Corporation America Martin Eurnekian during which they discussed the upcoming investment programs in aviation and other sectors of Armenia. In particular, they touched upon the expected works in Yerevan's Zvartnots, Gyumri's Shirak airports, the future management and development of HayPost CJSC, as well as the plans related with the previous building of the Armenian foreign ministry located in the Republic Square.

EBRD ready to support Armenian Government's reform agenda – Nikol Pashinyan meets with Suma Chakrabarti

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on January 22 met with President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Suma Chakrabarti on the margins of the Davos World Economic Forum.

Highly appreciative of the ongoing cooperation between the Government of Armenia and the EBRD, Nikol Pashinyan stressed the need for its expansion. Pashinyan said the EBRD-supported programs are crucial to his government's reform agenda and Armenia's economic development. He made a point of those programs supposed to enhance the private sector's competitiveness, develop the capital markets, improve solid waste management and water supply efficiency, provide urban lighting, etc.

The Premier singled out the small and medium-size business-targeted programs. He said the Armenian government seeks to give new impetus to business sector's development and activation. Noting that his government is going to carry out an economic revolution, Nikol Pashinyan stressed that closer and productive cooperation with the Bank could play a great role in this respect.



Suma Chakrabarti assured of EBRD's readiness to continue assisting the Government with the proposed programs and reforms. The EBRD President imparted his intention to visit Armenia this March to discuss the new bilateral cooperation strategy which im-

plies greater focus on SMEs. He pledged the Bank's support for the Government's reform agenda in both financial and technological terms.

The parties exchanged views on various issues related to further interaction.

Nikol Pashinyan, ADB President agree to expand cooperation

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Asian Development Bank President Takehiko Nakao in Davos.

Discussed were a number of ADB projects in Armenia, including construction of roads and in particular, the construction of North-South Highway, infrastructure development, seismic safety, etc.

Hailing the close ties of cooperation between the Government of Armenia and ADB, Nikol Pashinyan gave details of those positive developments taking place in Armenia's economy. The head of the Armenian government underscored that his government is firmly determined to implement drastic reforms and carry out an economic revolution in our country.

The parties discussed issues related to ADB-supported projects for the development of small and medium-sized businesses in our country. The ADB President assured that they are prepared to discuss with the Armenian government ways of implementing ever larger projects that would cover new spheres.

Armenia to have tax-free Micro-Business sector of economy

The government has released the draft amendments to the tax code.

According to the bill published on the e-draft.am governmental online platform, the amendments envisage the creation of a new sector of economy – micro-business. Enterprises or businessmen not exceeding 24 million drams in revenue in the previous tax year can be considered micro-businesses.

Micro-businesses will be exempt from all

kinds of taxes, according to the draft. But the businesses will pay 5000 drams monthly for every registered employee in final liabilities in terms of revenue tax.

Banks, crediting organizations, insurance companies, investment companies, currency market traders, pawnshops, currency exchange offices, gambling venue operators, and other similar businesses cannot be considered micro-businesses.



Riksdag will not delay signing Armenia-EU agreement – Speaker receives Ambassador of Sweden

The parliament of Sweden will not delay the signing of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between Armenia and the EU, Ambassador of Sweden to Armenia Ulrik Tideström announced on January 23 in a meeting with President of the National Assembly of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan.

As the press service of the parliament of Armenia informed, greeting the guest, the Speaker valued the cooperation between the two countries, particularly highlighting the interactions between the legislatures, mutual visits and exchange of experience.

Speaking about the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between Armenia and the EU, Mirzoyan hoped that the Swedish parliament will ratify the document in a maximally short period.

The Speaker also referred to Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement process, noting that the position of the Armenian authorities is clear on this issue – the settlement is possible through exclusively peaceful means in the sidelines of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs' format. "It's difficult to negotiate with someone who regularly makes militaristic announcements



and provokes hatred. It not only hampers the negotiation process but also creates new problems", Ararat Mirzoyan said.

Speaking about the developments in Armenia, Mirzoyan said, "Our devotion to democratic values, protection of human rights and

freedoms cannot be questioned", he said, hoping for international assistance.

The Speaker of the Armenian parliament also thanked the Swedish for adopting a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

Congratulating Ararat Mirzoyan on being elected Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia, Ulrik Tideström expressed confidence that the Armenian-Swedish cooperation will expand in various spheres.

The Ambassador emphasized that the revolution that took place in spring 2018 in Armenia is perceived in Sweden as key factor for democracy.

He noted that Sweden highlights expansion and strengthening of the cooperation with Armenia in various spheres and is ready to support the implementation of new initiatives.

The Ambassador of Sweden assured that the parliament of his country will not delay the signing of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between Armenia and the EU.

The sides highlighted the role of the Swedish-Armenian community for the deepening of the Armenian-Swedish relations.

Armenia's early parliamentary elections enjoy public trust – PACE report

Fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly and movement were fully respected during the campaign of December 9, 2018 elections of Armenia, reads the reports of the PACE observer mission. The report refers to pre-election period, voting and post-election period.

Open political debate, including in the media, contributed to a vibrant campaign. The peaceful so-called "velvet revolution", in conjunction with the political will of the current authorities, enabled the holding of democratic elections. The campaign largely focused on affirmative elaboration of party programmes, visions of Armenia's future and, in the regions, on issues affecting local communities, although most candidates also engaged in some negative campaigning. While the campaign was marked to a certain degree by inflammatory exchanges in the media between some candidates, the tone and civility of the ways parties and alliances addressed voters and each other generally improved as the campaign progressed. The election campaign discussions were generally dominated by the internal policy issues. For the first time in Armenia, the campaign culminated in a three-hour, live genuine debate on

5 December on the public television channel, during which the leaders of all national lists, including the acting Prime Minister, as "Head of the My Step Alliance", discussed in a mutually respectful and generally congenial manner, issues such as national security, anti-corruption, independence of the judiciary, transitional justice and economic development. Inflammatory rhetoric was however noted during the campaign in the comment sections of online media. Some IEOM interlocutors also indicated that "fake" Facebook accounts were sources of provocation, disinformation and insults directed at individual candidates.

Many IEOM interlocutors noted the political will expressed by the authorities to strongly punish the selling and buying of votes and other electoral malpractices. Nevertheless, several interlocutors claimed that one of the candidates engaged a large number of campaign workers and citizen observers on short-term contracts in order to indirectly buy their votes, without violating the law.

The PACE observation delegation noted, based on information received from different interlocutors, a clear progress concerning the media coverage of the election campaign

compared with the previous elections. The neutral and impartial coverage enabled also the electors to make a well-informed choice. This work should be consolidated in the future by reinforcing the legal framework and good practices in the field of media coverage.

Election day proceeded calmly, peacefully, free of pressure on or intimidation of voters, and was assessed positively by the majority of IEOM observers. A significant number of polling stations (71%) were inaccessible to voters requiring mobility assistance, so some of these voters may have had difficulties in expressing their vote. After the closing of the polling stations, the CEC reported the turnout at 48.6%.

Voting was assessed positively in 99% of observations, reflecting adherence of the PECs to procedures. Presence of party proxies (in 93% of observations) and citizen observers (53%) in polling stations safeguarded the transparency of the election process. However, in a limited number of cases (3% of observations) proxies and observers interfered in the process.

The vote count was assessed positively in all but two polling stations observed, indicating that the counting process was conducted without significant procedural violations.

Everyone in Armenia is proud of Legrand’s global fame, French ambassador says

Everyone in Armenia is proud of the global fame of Michel Legrand, French Ambassador to Armenia Jonathan Lacote said on Facebook in connection with the passing of the renowned composer.

“Michel Legrand’s melodies today in Armenia’s cafes and homes will remind that here no one is ignoring the Armenian origin of

this universal artist and everyone is proud of his worldwide fame,” Lacote said.

Renowned composer Michel Legrand has died on January 26 at the age of 86, French media reported.

Michel Legrand won three Oscars and five Grammy awards during a career spanning more than half a century.



He has more than 100 albums in his discography.

Legrand worked with the brightest stars of 20th century Hollywood, including Frank Sinatra

and Barbara Streisand.

Legrand was of Armenian descent: his mother was Armenian.

The cause of death wasn't immediately clear.

Experts from Armenia’s Matenadaran to restore damaged manuscripts from Middle East

Manuscripts that have been damaged during recent years in Middle Eastern countries will be restored with the assistance of Armenian experts, according to Matenadaran Director Vahan Ter-Ghevondyan.

Matenadaran, officially the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts is a museum, repository of manuscripts, and a research institute in Yerevan, Armenia.

“We are planning to carry out a new major project that has been initiated in 2018. With the assistance of UNESCO, nine experts on restoration of manuscripts arrived to Armenia from Lebanon and Syria, and Matenadaran experts organized a one-week training for raising qualification and deepening knowledge. Let me say that our colleagues were very pleased from the results. UNESCO found it to be one of the successful projects,” Ter-Ghevondyan told ARMENPRESS.

Based on the work, a larger program was initiated – In recent years, cultural values in Syria and Iraq have been greatly damaged, and Ter-Ghevondyan plans to make Matenadaran a regional center for restoration of such manuscripts.

The manuscripts will be brought to Armenia batch by batch, and will be returned after restoration.

“This, I believe, will have both cultural and political significance”, he said.

According to him, Armenian President

Armen Sarkissian and UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay have discussed this issue during their most recent meeting. “We are waiting for the final confirmation of the project”, Ter-Ghevondyan said.



Yerevan Home Care is the first and the only one company launched in 2011 in Yerevan. The company is providing a 24/7 qualified care service to older adults, disabled people, people suffering from chronic diseases or those who need postoperative care, as well as to people with dementia.

Creating the company we concenter to support many families that live abroad and have their elderly family members staying in Armenia. We succeed in supporting these families to have not only a solution of the raised problem but to have a deep feeling of satisfaction that their relatives are in good hands.

The organization's greatest wealth is educated, professional, skilled, experienced staff and people with high values and psychological knowledge.

We treat each patient with a strong sense of responsibility and show an individual approach to the families, at the same time maintaining the accepted norms and using contemporary approaches.

Taking your relative's care on our shoulders, we bring harmony between the different generations.

Apart from the professional knowledge the company pays a great attention to the humanitarian qualities of the serving staff, to their kindness, patience,



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care aides, home care aides, and home health aides. Home health aides might also provide limited assistance with things such as taking blood pressure or offering medication reminders.

Nursing care is more related for patients after surgery, traumas, different chronic diseases

Rehabilitation service is for people who need professional rehabilitation in their recovery periods after some types of diseases and surgery. Dementia / Alzheimer /special care is for people with dementia in all stages when you worried about their safety or a health problem.

Yerevan Home Care provides all type of medical equipment that will increase the quality of like of your loved ones. (rent of the equipment is acceptable)

Transportation is a key issue for older adults and for people with temporary or permanent disabilities especially in Armenia where the streets and buildings are not adjusted for disabled people. Yerevan Home Care is providing a transportation service for people that are in wheelchairs.



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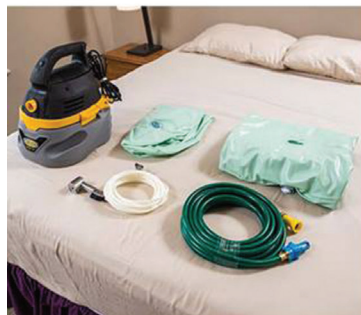
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attention and courteous manner.

We assure that we will be your irreplaceable assistant in helping and surrounding your relative with care and support.

We provide service to all type of patients who needs care assistance.

Personal care is for elderly people who are alone and need support in daily living, such as dressing, bathing, feeding, or meal preparation. This type of care includes personal



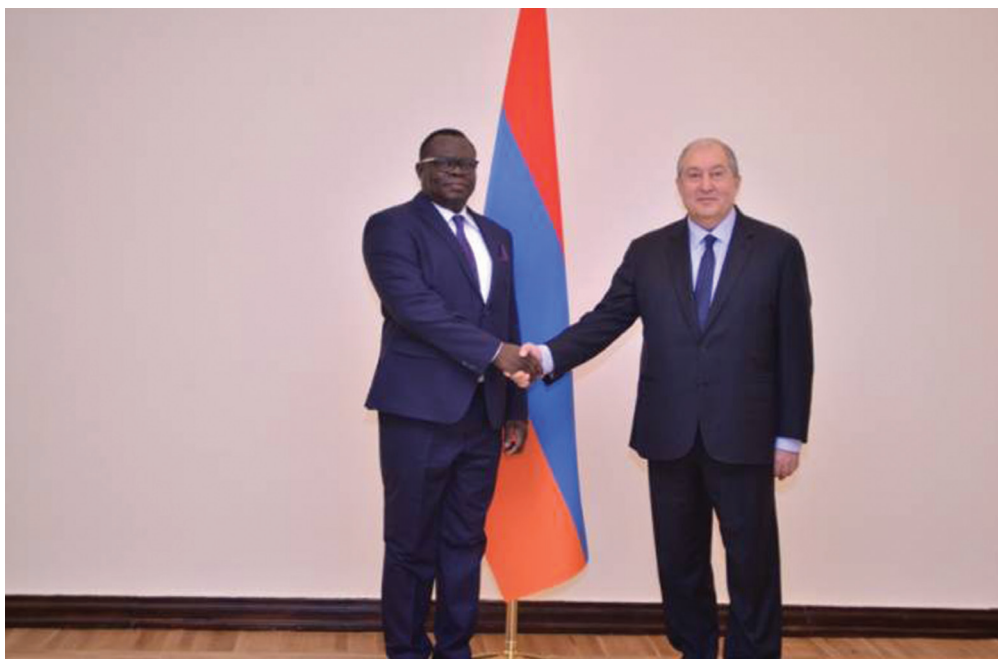
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Armenia seeks to boost cooperation with francophone African countries, Sarkissian tells new Beninese ambassador

Benin's new Ambassador to Armenia Noukpo Clément Kiki (stationed in Moscow, Russia) has presented his credentials to President Armen Sarkissian on January 22, the president's office said.

During a meeting following the ceremony, President Armen Sarkissian congratulated the new ambassador on taking office and wished productive work, expressing conviction that as an experienced diplomat the ambassador will serve his skills and abilities for the development of cooperation between the two countries.

Noting that Armenia seeks to boost partnership with African states, namely Francophone countries of the continent, the President attached importance to outline the directions and sectors where true prerequisites and mutual interest for partnership exist.



Armenian jazz genius Tigran Hamasyan to perform in Oxford



Master of jazz piano, Tigran Hamasyan will perform at St John the Evangelist Church in Oxford on January 25, Oxford Mail reports.

Hamasyan will be performing favorites from his surprisingly lengthy repertoire (given that he is still only 30) along with tunes from 2017's *An Ancient Observer* – in which he reflects on his return to Armenia after more than a decade

of living in the United States.

Tigran left his hometown of Gyumri and moved to Los Angeles as a teenager, acquiring his own piano – an upright Yamaha – at the age of 16. There he developed his unique style of Armenian-accented jazz.

He has been back in independent Armenia for five years and is one of its greatest cultural

ambassadors. His journey inspired latest album *An Ancient Observer* – on which he reflects on his return to Armenia after more than a decade of living in America. The album will form the basis for tomorrow's concert.

"Armenia is Eden on earth," he told Oxford Mail's Tim Hughes.

"It's a mountainous country with rich nature from high altitude desert-like places to lush green mountainous regions."

"It is full of ancient and new culture. It's a place where, up until industrialization, every single bit of daily life was accompanied by music. It's the place where people first embraced Christianity – it's the state religion."

"It is also a country where there are water fountains everywhere for people to drink spring water; a place where numerous poets, musicians and architects created masterpieces that are still standing and are part of our daily life; a place where monasteries were built on unreachable mountain tops and where a poor person will invite a stranger in and offer all he has.

"It's the place where Noah's ark landed."

Tigran says he is not putting Armenia on the musical map. "It's the country that's putting me on the map."

1st Aurora Forum to be held in Armenia in October 2019



The first Aurora Forum will take place in Yerevan, Armenia on October 14-21, 2019.

The Forum will bring together the world's leading authorities on social, scientific-technological, educational, and humanitarian innovation, marking the first program of its kind in the region, the IDeA Foundation informed

The weeklong series of activities will provide an opportunity for thought leaders to compare best practices, lessons learned and, in some cases, disruptive thinking around issues ranging from infrastructure challenges to healthcare breakthroughs to women's empowerment.

The sweeping week of events will include the fourth Aurora Prize Ceremony, the second Global Innovation Forum, an Educational Forum and series of open lectures to celebrate the fifth anniversary of United World College (UWC) Dilijan, and a set of roundtables and cultural activities. The week will culminate in a grand closing concert event in Yerevan.

"The Aurora Forum has the potential to serve as a bridge between international progress and local developments with measurable impact. But that potential can only be advanced with the participation of

change-makers who share Aurora's vision through their own global deeds," said Vartan Gregorian, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

The Aurora Forum will be powered by partner institutions with a shared vision:

- FAST, established in 2017, harnesses scientific, technological, and financial resources within national and international communities to advance Armenia as a nation with a thriving ecosystem in STEM-related sector;
- Scholae Mundi Global Educational Platform promotes education through the United World College system, including and especially at the United World College Dilijan;
- IDeA Foundation committed to transitioning Armenians from survival to prosperity through long-term infrastructure and development projects that aim to strengthen Armenia and enable it to make a lasting contribution to the world;
- Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and its internationally recognized The Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, which empowers modern day heroes and recognizes the exceptional impact their actions have made on preserving human life.

The combined capacities and efforts of these groundbreaking organizations will be supported by the commitment of the Aurora Forum's Goodwill Ambassadors—100 plus luminaries from business, civil society, and academia, who volunteer their services to advance the goals of establishing Armenia as a regional humanitarian, educational, technological, social, and cultural hub.

Working together, all the organizations and the individuals involved with the Aurora Forum will strengthen the prospects of achieving a meaningful and sustainable national and global change.

"The Aurora Forum is based on our belief that global Armenians and all global citizens who aspire to tackle the world's most-pressing challenges, can do so by embracing the best in humanitarian, educational and technological practices to make lasting advances in social, cultural, and scientific spheres," said Noubar Afeyan, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. "We hope that the Aurora Forum will engage international networks and also allow new linkages to be made for maximum impact."

"The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is a respected presence among humanitarians who see the impact of the Initiative's work to protect children, above all. But the Armenian presence on the global stage stretches into every sector, and every arena. The Aurora Forum will further promote and expand the Gratitude in Action concept by bringing together leaders and innovators from various fields to inspire and be inspired by others. What started as a story of thankfulness of 100 people whose ancestors were saved during the Armenian Genocide, has become a global movement showing the world that humanity can be better," explained Ruben Vardanyan, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

The October 2019 Aurora Forum events will be held across Armenia with major events in cities from north to south.

City Spa, one of the founders of Aesthetic medicine in Armenia, that was established 14 years ago, is still following the main principles that were implemented since the launch: to use only clinically and scientifically approved, highly effective and safe with FDA approval products and equipments imported mainly from UK and Europe.

Depilation: Last year City Spa launched a very safe, painless and fast acting new machine for permanent hair removal. It is the “Primelase” produced by Cocoon Medical. The machine has an innovative



international leading brands such as ZO Skin health (Beverly Hills US), GLO therapeutics (ColoradoUS). Skin Ceuticals (US) etc.

And that's not the all: pedicure, manicure and massage will make your day.

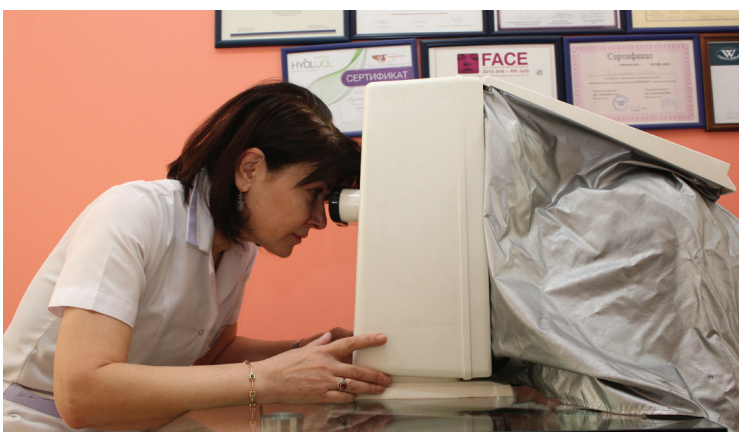
You are welcome to City Spa. The aesthetic doctor's consultations and skin diagnostics with Skin Scanner is fee. The atmosphere in City spa is full of love and peace. The pricing strategy is very flexible and discounts for good long term clients are available during whole year as well as different Gift Cards.

method (dynamic mode) which allows to treat very large areas of the body within few minutes.

Localized fat removal: In Armenia the first cryolipolysis method was implemented by City Spa in 2016. Cooltech is an innovative machine that acts as a none surgical lyposaction, with a new method of cryolipolysis for permanent localized fat removal and body reconturing. It is safe, painless and very effective. City Spa is equipped also with the Wellshape machine for anti-cellulite treatment.



Anti aging Facial treatments and Care: City Spa offers the latest scientifically approved anti aging treatments and products for care. The doctors are regularly improving their qualifications in London and Paris, bringing the new inventions to Armenia. The products used in City Spa are only



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Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

You have increased self-confidence this week. There are favorable aspects related to travel, dealings with people who are at a distance, marketing your point of view, educational pursuits, and legal interests. Even romance is on the A list. What's not to like?



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

This week and next may bring you positive news concerning resources that you "share" with others. This includes one or more of the following resources: inheritance, debt payment, tax returns, invested money, payment from insurance or windfall money. It also includes the resources of your partner.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Give close attention to the lead paragraph. Mercury is your planetary ruler and avatar. Concentration on details of business will be a necessity. Think carefully about what is truly important to you now, at this time in your life. Don't allow old habits or rules from the past to make your decision for you.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

There may be one or more developments this week that seem to drag you back to past times, memories, and people. It could be the temptation to fall into habit patterns that you have long since outgrown. As soon as your toes hit that water, stop and evaluate. Do you really want to go there?



Leo (July 22–August 21)

There is a bit of magic this week, or perhaps you would prefer to think of it as coincidence. You will be the right person in the right place to say just exactly the right things that will help others connect to you and to each other. What you have to offer may be the fulcrum of a new beginning for one or more others.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

The "rules" and the world's expectations have you tied up like a pretzel right now. The harder you struggle, the tighter those binds seem to become. It's like a Chinese puzzle. Sometimes if you relax on the control issues, the solution comes through. Give it some space.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

Your natural gift for tact and diplomacy will be useful at this time. Your words will flow like water and people are receptive to your point of view. Give attention to the lead paragraph because Mercury, planet of travel and communications is riding alongside your planetary ruler, Venus.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

You stumble across a work opportunity that will improve your financial resources. This comes through people you have known or worked with in the past. Your concentration is good and you will be able to balance a plethora of ideas.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

This is the week in which a business or career opportunity shows signs of coming together. Hopefully, you have been preparing for this a long time, which insures you become a winner. Maturity of viewpoint will be applauded. Aspects are positive for social and romantic interests as well.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

This is a week in which you will tend to be thinking obsessively. It is an opportunity to learn how to better control your mind. Shift your attention to something less dramatic, such as whatever is happening only this moment, rather than worrying over what might happen in the future. That will reduce stress.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

Mercury enters your sign on January 23 and it races through your sign until February 17. (Please note the lead paragraph.) Don't allow anyone to press you into a decision you aren't ready to make. However, if you have been cogitating for a long time, then this might be the moment you decide to plunge forward.)



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Whatever is worrying you at the beginning of the week will evaporate to the ethers after a couple of days. Give it less energy. You are probably much more sensitive to what others think right now. Don't ask anyone else to evaluate you or critique your work. Wait until you are finished with your creative efforts.

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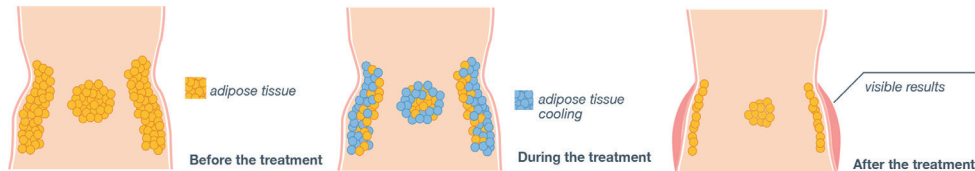
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The publisher: NT Holding LTD
Լրատվական գործունեություն իրականացնող՝
ՆՏ Հոլդինգ ՍՊԸ

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**
Proofreader: **SUSANNA MKRTCHIAN**
Layout: **DIANA GRIGORYAN**
Համարի թող. պատ.՝ Մ.Հարությունյան

ISSN 1829-0604

Գրանցման վկայականի համարը՝
03U898368, տրված՝ 11.01.2013թ.
Registration certificate and the date:
273.110.00512, 15.12.1995

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