

## Armenian-Iranian high-level talks in Yerevan

The Presidents of Armenia and Iran Serzh Sargsyan and Hassan Rouhani held a private meeting, after which they were joined by the delegations of the two countries.

Armenia's President welcomed his Iranian counterpart and voiced hope that the latter's first-ever official visit to Armenia will give new spirit and breathe to the cooperation between the two countries.

"The Armenian-Iranian friendship dates back to the depth of centuries and based on that solid ground we established interstate relations on 1992. Twenty-five years on, we can state that no circumstance has ever cast shadow on our relations," President Sargsyan said. He expressed gratitude to the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the attention towards relations with Armenia.

"We've always been frank and sincere in our relations and are willing to continue the same way," he added. The Armenian President also asked to convey his respect and good wishes to Iran's religious leader Sayyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei.

Hassan Rouhani, in turn, expressed his delight for being in "the beautiful country of Armenia and its capital Yerevan.

"We see Armenia as a friendly country and wish to further deepen and develop our bilateral relations. Our countries belong to the same culture and civilization. The relations between the two nations have always been warm and friendly," Iran's President said.



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## Armenia, Iran ink five MoUs, say keen on developing ties



At the conclusion of the Armenian-Iranian negotiations, which took place at the Presidential Palace, the parties signed documents aimed at the deepening of the cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran in a number of areas.

In particular, signed were the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Sport and Youth of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Field of Sport, Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Interior of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Cooperation in the Field of Emergency Situations, Memorandum of Understanding between the History Museum of Armenia and the National Museum of Iran on Museum Cooperation, and Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism between the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments of the Republic of Armenia and Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Joint Use of Meghri and Nurdooz Land Border Gate. The Parties also adopted a Joint Statement

The Presidents of Armenia and Iran summed up the results of the negotiations in the statements they made for the representatives of the mass media.

Statement of President Serzh Sargsyan for the mass media in the wake of the meeting with the President of Iran Hassan Rouhani

Distinguished Mr. President,  
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to host in Armenia the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and my good colleague, Doctor Hassan Rouhani.

It would be impossible to explicate the entire depth and scope of the Armenian-Iranian relations describing them as solely friendly. There are only few nations who were destined for millennia to walk down the crossroads of history side by side and today too continue to work closely together, holding in high esteem each other's cultures.

Armenia, and I am confident Iran too, is interested to further strengthen and develop friendly relations anchored in the traditionally rich ties. It is testified to by the high level of our relations with Iran after Armenia's independence, joint programs, dynamic reciprocal visits and, of course, the present visit of my esteem colleague, His Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani to our country. There is no doubt that the documents to be signed today and agreements which we have reached will give a new impetus and elevate the Armenian-Iranian cooperation to a qualitatively new level.

Today, we have held comprehensive and substantial discussions on different issues of the bilateral agenda; we have reiterated our commitment to the joint implementation of

the development programs, stressed the importance of holding regular political consultations, discussed issues related to the development of cooperation in the areas of trade and economy, energy, transport, agriculture, education, healthcare, culture, ecology and tourism, and enhancement of contacts between the business circles. With the Honorable Mr. President, we have also referred to the process of implementation of the agreements reached at the 14th session of the intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation.

I express deep gratitude to my colleague for the distinctly respectful and thoughtful attention of Iran towards the Armenian cultural heritage, as well as traditionally caring attitude towards the Armenian community of Iran.

As a result of the agreement reached by the Republic of Armenia and Islamic Republic of Iran the swaps of natural gas and electrical energy between us continue. Taking into consideration the necessity to provide for the necessary volumes, which stems from the mentioned above swaps and quadripartite agreements reached in Yerevan, we have also spoken about the use of the Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Russia energy corridor.

We have also exchanged views on the program related to the establishment of a Persian Gulf-Black Sea transport and transit corridor, which will facilitate the transportation of international cargo, will provide the opportunity for the Iranian goods to enter the European market at the minimal transportation cost, as well as will allow to use it as a transit route for cargos from other countries. This will be not only the shortest and the safest passage via Armenia for the Iranian vehicles but will also become a very serious impulse for the growth of the turnover between our countries.

We have also exchanged views on the



regional integration processes and stressed the importance of the opportunities for cooperation which are provided by Armenia's membership to the Eurasia Economic Area.

The works on the improvement of the business climate and investment regulations for the businesses of the two countries are in progress. With this regard, I would like to stress in particular the importance of the visa free regime for the citizens of our countries. I am confident that mutual recognition of our two nations will also promote the deepening of the trade and economic ties.

With this regard, I am very glad that today concurrently with the visit there will take place a large business forum in Yerevan.

At the meeting, we have certainly discussed pressing regional and international issues. We have exchanged views on the implementation of the historic agreements on Iran's nuclear program. I am confident that they will open new horizons for the hard-working and creative people of Iran and will become a new stimulus for the invigoration of our bilateral as well as a wider regional cooperation.

We have discussed the situation in the Middle East, fight against terrorism and international efforts aimed at the resolution of the situation. With this regard, the resolution adopted two days ago by the UN Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Aleppo is important. There is no doubt that Armenia is first of all concerned with the safety of the Armenian community in Syria, particularly in Aleppo.

As always, this time too I have presented to my distinguished colleague the efforts of Armenia and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group aimed at moving forward the process for finding a peaceful resolution for the Nagorno Karabakh problem, agreements reached at the summits in Vienna and Saint Petersburg and aimed at the elimination of the consequences of Azerbaijan's aggression against Artsakh in April.

We highly value Iran's balanced position on the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh issue through the exclusively peaceful means, based on international law. We have reiterated that the Nagorno Karabakh conflict has no military solution and stressed the inadmissibility of any step meant to escalate the situation in the region and surge of instability.

We agreed with my colleague to continue with this good tradition of having high level meetings.

I thanked the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the invitation to visit Iran next year and said that I would certainly come with pleasure because our relations are simply compelling. Thank you very much.

## Armenia as a link between the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea



There is no military solution to the Karabakh conflict, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani told reporters in Yerevan after his talks with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan.

“Armenia and Azerbaijan are friendly countries for Iran, and we hope to witness establishment of peace and stability in the region. This meets the interests of the region. The issue has no military solution. We want to see a peaceful settlement,” Iran’s President said.

Speaking about economic relations between Iran and Armenia, Hassan Rouhani said there is a huge potential for cooperation, which should be fully utilized. He stressed that further efforts are needed for deepening the cooperation in the field of energy.

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan noted that the gas and power exchange continues under bilateral agreements reached between the two countries.

Hassan Rouhani attached importance to finding new transit routes. In this regard, he emphasized the importance of completing the work to link the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea. He said the implementation of the program will facilitate the international cargo shipments and will make it possible for the Iranian goods to reach the European market through the shortest transport route.

“This will not only be the shortest and safest route for Iranian goods, but will also seriously boost the commodity turnover between the two countries,” President Sargsyan said.

## Iran eyeing rapprochement with Eurasian Economic Union



Iran is aimed at rapprochement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), including at free trade with it, the country’s President Hassan Rouhani said during talks with Kyrgyzstan’s President Almazbek Atambayev on Friday, TASS reports.

“We want to have free trade with this Union,” Rouhani said.

The Iranian side hopes this question could be on agenda of the EEU summit due on December 26, he added.

## President Sargsyan meets Russian lawmakers



Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan received today the Russian State Duma delegation headed by Leonid Kalashnikov, Chairman of the Committee on for CIS, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots. The delegation visits Armenia to hold a joint sitting with the Armenian National Assembly's Standing Committee on Foreign Relations.

The President attached importance to Armenia's relations with its strategic partner Russia and the consistent deepening of cooperation in all directions.

Serzh Sargsyan noted that the Armenian-Russian collaboration within integration frameworks comes to supplement and reinforce the bilateral relations,

opening new perspectives for mutually beneficial cooperation.

The President voiced hope that the results of the joint sitting in Yerevan will contribute to the reinforcement of interstate ties.

The parties noted that despite the negative influence of international economic processes on the economies of EEU member states, there is still a huge potential for economic growth.

President Sargsyan underlined that Armenia is a supporter of integration processes and attaches importance to the active work towards furthering of those processes.

## Russian Federation Council ratifies deal on air defense system with Armenia

The Russian Federation Council, the parliament's upper house, ratified an agreement with Armenia aimed at creating a joint air defense system in the Caucasus, at a parliamentary session on Friday, Sputnik reports.

The purpose of the agreement is to improve the air defense system in the Caucasus region.

The agreement, signed in Moscow on December 23, 2015, has been concluded for the term of five years, with the possibility of an automatic extension for a further five-year period.

The Armenian parliament, the National Assembly, ratified the agreement on June 30.



## Armenian FM receives Russian State Duma delegation

Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian received today the Russian State Duma delegation led by Leonid Kalashnikov, Chairman of the Committee on for CIS, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots.

Minister Nalbandian attached importance to the continuous reinforcement of close allied relations between Armenia and Russia and hailed the inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The parties stressed the mutually beneficial cooperation between the Armenian National Assembly and the Russian State Duma.

Leonid Kalashnikov briefed Minister Nalbandian on the activity of the

Committee, presented the initiatives aimed at the development of relations with Armenia and the results of the joint sitting with the Armenian National Assembly's Standing Committee on Foreign Relations.

During the meeting reference was made

to cooperation within the framework of the CIS, the EEU and the CSTO.

The Armenian Foreign Minister briefed the guests on the efforts towards elimination of the concessions of Azeri aggression against Artsakh.



## **Armenia DM: War in Karabakh will be a serious threat to the whole of the South Caucasus**

The possible escalation of the Karabakh conflict will not benefit either Armenia or other countries of the region, Armenian's Defense minister Vigen Sargsyan said in an interview with Lenta.ru. He did not rule out the possibility of resumption of armed conflict with Azerbaijan.

"A trilateral agreement on ceasefire was signed between Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia in 1994. Unfortunately, Baku has been torpedoing the peace process for over 20 years now. Moreover, it has been foiling all attempts of the international community in the face of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to seek ways of conflict settlement. The large-scale military adventure against Nagorno Karabakh Azerbaijan undertook this April was a complete failure. We base our work on the presumption of the possibility of resumption of hostilities," the Armenian Defense Minister said.

He added that "it's pretty obvious that



the possible escalation of the conflict will not benefit either Armenia or other countries of the region."

"As the guarantor of security of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, Yerevan will

have to engage in the conflict. It's clear that the resumption of war will become a serious threat for the whole South Caucasus," Vigen Sargsyan said.

## **Armenian Defense Minister visits Georgia**

The delegation headed by Armenian Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan has arrived in Georgia for an official visit.

The Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Georgia Vigen Sargsyan and Levan Izoria had a face-to-face meeting in Tbilisi today, after which they were joined by the delegations of the two countries.

The Armenian-Georgian military cooperation and the future programs were discussed. The parties referred to issues of regional security, as well.

The parties signed the 2017 program of cooperation between the Defense Ministries of Armenia and Georgia.

The results of the negotiations were summed up at a joint press conference.



## Sargsyan, Rouhani attend

The President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan and President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani were present at the closing ceremony of the Armenia-Iran Business Forum which took place at the Radisson Blue Hotel compound.

The Forum was organized by the Armenian Development Fund in the framework of the official visit of the President of the IRI to Armenia and is aimed at the deepening of the Armenian-Iranian trade and economic relations.

At the Forum, the President of Armenia made a statement.

Concluding his official visit to the Republic of Armenia, the President of the IRI after the Business Forum left Yerevan.

### Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Armenia-Iran Business Forum

Honorable Mr. President,  
Distinguished Entrepreneurs,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I cordially salute the participants and organizers of the traditional Armenian-Iranian Business Forum.

Forums and exhibitions such as this one, and among them I would like to mention the Armenia Expo 2016 exhibition, which took place last October in Iran, have become an important platform which bring together representatives of the state and business sectors of our countries and provide them with the opportunity to discuss the existing problems, to develop practical mechanisms



for the expansion of the economic cooperation between our countries, and allow to pre-set new areas for cooperation.

Currently, the existing potential for the development of the economic relations between our two countries is not fully utilized, and to be precise and frank, I need to say that we are using only a negligible part of that potential.

It is necessary to bring our trade and economic relations in line with the high level Armenian-Iranian political relations which will allow to bring to life major economic projects, and we have a positive experience on this, particularly, in the area of energy.

Today I have asked Mr. President to encourage major entrepreneurs working in different areas to come to Armenia and establish businesses here. On my behalf, I promised to encourage the Armenian

businessmen to do the same at the Islamic Republic of Iran. I will keep it under my personal control all the businesses that the Iranian entrepreneurs will establish in Armenia.

We also want for the Iranian capital to be more visible in Armenia which will be mutually beneficial for the economies of our two countries. Certainly, many Iranian businessmen have been doing successful business in Armenia for a long time now, but I hope that this Forum will allow the business circles of Iran to discover new, still untapped investment opportunities in Armenia.

Distinguished Entrepreneurs,

Today in Armenia every prerequisite has been created to make investments and conduct successful business. First of all, I would like to mention that even though Armenia is a country with small and open economy and for that very reason is susceptible to the negative impulses coming from outside, nonetheless thanks to the tax, budgetary and monetary policies we have been able to ensure a stable macroeconomic environment in the country. There is no doubt that the constant improvement of the country's business and investment climate is important. In recent years a great amount of work has been done in that area which have received commendation of our international partners. However, we will not be content with the results. Thus, we intend through the legislative reforms to provide for the national and most favoured nation treatment, to define more clearly guaran-



## Armenian-Iranian business forum

tees provided to foreign investors; we intend to allow the businesses the opportunity to use present and future privileges, and install modern mechanisms for the resolution of investment disputes. To assist the businesses and promote the development of the business climate, we consistently curtail and simplify a number of procedures.

A comparative advantage of making investments in Armenia lies in the fact that our country has preferential trade regime with many countries. Businessmen of these countries working in Armenia can benefit from the wide opportunities provided by Armenia's membership to the Eurasian Economic Union. Goods made in Armenia with zero customs fee, without any administrative hurdles can freely enter the 180 million strong market of the members of the Eurasian Economic Union. Besides, our country has a free trade agreement with almost all countries of the CIS countries. Armenia enjoys also the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) with the US, Canada, Switzerland, Japan and Norway and advantages of the GSP+ system provided by the EU.

As a neighbour and friendly for Iran country, Armenia may also become a gateway and additional transport corridor towards the EU and CIS member states. With this regard, I stress the importance of the North-South highway as the shortest transit route linking the ports of the Black Sea to the seaports of the Persian Gulf.

I will also note that Armenia is actively engaged in the negotiations between the Eurasian Economic Commission and Iran which are aimed at signing the agreement on the free trade zone as soon as possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

There is no doubt that our bilateral economic relations have great potential; however, there are certain difficulties on the road for their disclosure which require us to work daily with diligence and make joint decisions. In particular, the entrepreneurs of the two countries continue to view as rather complicated regulations related to business activities and investments. Among the pending issues I would underscore also the facili-

tation of the procedures related to the import of goods from Armenia into Iran and vice versa, in Syunik marz - issues of cooperation between the free economic zone to be created in the area bordering Iran and Iranian Aras free economic zone.

Nevertheless, I am confident that the close economic cooperation between our countries should be aimed not only at the strengthening of the trade ties but at the development of the science-based economy, with the use of modern technologies.

I would also like to mention that success registered in Iran in recent years, e.g. in the area nanotechnology, and Armenia's achievements in the area of information technologies prove that it is

The areas of pharmaceuticals, medicine, jewellery production, textile, mining, agriculture, food processing, transport can become possible areas of cooperation for the Iranian entrepreneurs, and the list goes on and on. I see great potential for the deepening of cooperation in the areas of culture, healthcare, education, and tourism. With this regard, I attach special importance to the agreements reached by our countries on the visa free regime.

Today, Mr. President inquired what the dynamics are this year with regard to the increase or decrease in the area of tourism. I told him that in the first six months of the year, 260,000 tourists from



possible to have serious accomplishments in the area of high technologies even when there exist external limitations or scarce resources. Undoubtedly, unification of the scientific and innovative potential of the two friendly and neighbouring states will promote the deepening of the economic cooperation and will enhance the competitiveness of our industries. Thus, I view as necessary the establishment of permanent working links between the representatives of the areas of modern and high technology areas.

I would like to mention with satisfaction that during the latest session of the Armenian-Iranian intergovernmental commission there was adopted a decision and have already been created four sub-commissions on concrete areas. I believe it will invigorate the activities in certain areas.

Iran visited the Republic of Armenia, while during the previous year their number was almost the half of it. I hope that at the end of this year, God willing, we will cross the threshold of 300,000.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I truly hope that the Forum will facilitate the discovery of the opportunities existing in our countries and will pre-set the best formats for cooperation.

I invite the Iranian companies to make investments in Armenia in every area of interest. I assure you once again that we are ready to give special attitude to every investment project, based on the needs of the investor.

Thank you, Honorable Mr. President, for your participation and assistance to the developing of the economic ties between our countries as well.

Thank you.

## Armenian Assembly discusses priorities for the 115th Congress with Caucus leaders

As legislators were completing work for the 114th Congress, Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) Executive Director Bryan Ardouny was on the Hill meeting with Members of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues this month recapping the year and discussing priorities for the 115th Congress.

During his meeting with Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Representative Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), Ardouny discussed initiatives for the 115th Congress. He also reiterated the Assembly's deep concerns regarding the atrocities Azerbaijan committed during the military offensive it launched during the April War, as further reported by

Nagorno Karabakh's Ombudsman, Ruben Melikyan.

According to the latest investigations, 3 out of the 31 incidences detailed in the report were citizens and not servicemen, including a 92-year-old grandmother who was also tortured. The report also identified 3 Nagorno Karabakh servicemen who were beheaded, noting that one was executed by ISIS-style decapitation then publicized on social media as a "trophy." The Azerbaijani officer who showcased this Armenian soldier's head was then given a military award from Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev.

In his meeting with Armenian Caucus Vice Co-Chair Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA),

who serves as the Ranking Member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a wide range of issues were discussed, including expanding the Caucus as well as strengthening U.S-Armenia relations.

"As we look ahead to 2017, U.S. leadership remains essential in addressing the challenges before us," Ardouny stated. "The Armenian Caucus, with its bipartisan leadership team, will play a pivotal role and we anticipate a very active and energized Caucus as we continue to advance important priorities in the new Congress and Administration," he added.

## Armenian Embassy in Canada hits back at Turkish Ambassador

In response to Turkish Ambassador to Canada Selcuk Unal's comment on terrorist attacks in Canada in the 1980's by Canadians of Armenian origin, made during his interview with CBS News about the assassination of Russian Ambassador in Ankara on December 19th, 2016.

We condemn any terrorist attack, carried out by anybody, in any location. We believe that by diverting attention from this tragedy and talking about their own assassinated diplomats, the Turkish Ambassador is

attempting to diminish the horror of what happened in Ankara, and that is abhorrent.

We would also like to reaffirm our condemnation of the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottomans during the Armenian Genocide.

We advise the Turkish Ambassador and the relevant Turkish authorities to focus on the investigation of the Russian Ambassador's assassination, to focus on improving the security situation in Turkey, and not to distract the world from their own



## Glendale hires Meridian Consultants for Armenian American Museum site environmental analysis

Asbarez – The City of Glendale has hired Meridian Consultants to perform the environmental analysis for the proposed improvements to the Central Park block, including the potential construction of a new public parking garage, reconfiguration of existing public parking facilities, and development of the Armenian American Museum. These improvements are commonly referred to as the Central Park Block Project.

The Central Park block is located between Colorado Street to the South and Harvard Street to the North and Louise Street to the East and Parking Lot 10 to the West.

Meridian Consultants is a leader in the fields of community, environmental, and natural resource planning. The Meridian Consultants team will be using its extensive experience in land use planning and environmental compli-

ance to analyze the Downtown Glendale site and prepare environmental documentation for the proposed improvements.

The study will help the Armenian American Museum and City of Glendale determine the optimal scope and size for the public parking garage, open space, and educational and cultural center. The Museum will neighbor the Central Library, Americana at Brand, Museum of Neon Arts, and Adult Recreation Center in the heart of Glendale's Arts and Entertainment District.

The vision for the Museum is a cultural campus that enriches the community, educates the public on the Armenian American story, and empowers individuals to embrace cultural diversity and speak out against prejudice. The proposed Museum's exhibition galleries will house permanent exhibitions on the Armenian American experience and traveling exhibitions

on diverse cultures and subject matters that will engage broad audiences. The center will also feature a theater, research center, learning center, demonstration kitchen, and archive space.

Museum and City officials are on schedule to complete the concept design, traffic, parking, economic, and environmental studies in time for the consideration of the ground lease agreement by the Glendale City Council during the first quarter of 2017.

Earlier this month the Armenian American Museum unveiled its concept design at a gathering of more than 400 community members. The iconic design incorporates the rock formations and mountain range found in Armenia with the San Gabriel Mountains rising to the north of Glendale. Museum officials will be organizing community events and meetings to invite feedback on the design and location from the public.

## Pro-Azeri and Pro-Turkish Writers Denigrate Armenia and Diaspora



By Harut  
Sassounian

Publisher, The  
California Courier

Turkish and Azeri circles were displeased with my latest column where I had analyzed Vice President-elect Mike Pence's phone call to Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan.

Azerbaijan's Trend news agency published a ridiculous article by Elmira Tariverdiyeva, titled: "Yerevan's failed phone call or why Trump did not respond." She is the head of Trend's Russian-language news service.

The Azeri article is replete with nonsensical and false assertions. The author, who has a limited knowledge of American politics, calls the Pence-Sargsyan phone calls a "disaster." She

Diaspora. Contrary to her false assertion, most Armenians did not support Clinton!

Tariverdiyeva also claims that Yerevan is frustrated because Trump is more familiar with Azerbaijan based on his investments in that country. In my opinion, it is too premature to make such self-serving and unwarranted assumptions. On the contrary, Pres. Trump has many reasons to be tough on Azerbaijan given its dictatorial regime, serious violations of human rights, and the participation of many Azeris in ranks of ISIS terrorists in Syria. It is ridiculous to claim that Pres. Trump would be more favorably inclined toward Azerbaijan because of his \$323,150 licensing fee from the Baku Trump Tower, which he does not own!

Another more sinister article was written by Alexander Murinson, who is neither Azeri nor Turk, but for some

wing website The American Spectator, under the false premise that Armenians are anti-Trump, therefore, anti-conservative.

I had planned to rebut point by point Murinson's statements, but decided to let his own words expose his faulty judgments. Here are some of his nonsensical gems:

-- American "Armenian lobby's agenda is largely contrary to U.S. national interests and, perhaps counter-intuitively, to the best interests of the Republic of Armenia...."

-- "Turkey [is] a key and indispensable strategic ally of the U.S. in the Middle East...."

-- "This may lay at the core of the deep concern and disappointment of the U.S. Armenian lobby with the election of Donald Trump as President. For observers of the region, the nasty anti-Trump campaign executed by Armenian-American activists is no secret. The online campaign proudly announced that Armenian pop stars Cher and Kim Kardashian are 'pulling all stops' against Trump, while a noted pro-Armenian celebrity Amal Clooney, whose odd list of clients once included Armenia's government and Julian Assange, led the anti-Trump effort along with her husband George."

-- "The Armenian concern seems to stem from the fact that Donald Trump is not beholden to Washington's typical web of special interest groups. He might pursue a more clear-eyed approach to the region, basing it on America's national interest rather than the interests of a particular lobby. He might even take a sober look at the oversold notion of Armenian political influence in the U.S. and notice its increasingly obvious irrelevance."

-- "The next Secretary of State should be different from the once pro-Armenian Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, who favored his Armenian friends...."

In view of such persistent attacks, Armenian-American political organizations should forcefully counter all deceitful and defamatory articles written by the likes of Elmira Tariverdiyeva and Alexander Murinson. It is high time to establish an Armenian Anti-Defamation Committee.



wrongly claims that Pence simply returned Sargsyan's phone call. In fact, it was Vice President-elect Pence who made the call to Pres. Sargsyan.

The real disaster is that the President of filthy rich Azerbaijan, Aliyev, would have been unable to talk to Pres.-elect Trump or Vice President-elect Pence without the assistance of highly-paid lobbyists in Washington!

The Azeri journalist goes on to make bigger gaffes by claiming that Hillary Clinton's defeat "was a big disappointment for Yerevan. It is known that Clinton maintained fairly close relationships with an extensive Armenian diaspora in the US." Elmira does not seem to know much about either Armenia or the

questionable reason, has written a series of anti-Armenian tirades over the years in various publications. In his LinkedIn page, Murinson describes himself as: "Currently seeking new [job] opportunities.... An expert on Azerbaijan-Turkish-Israeli cooperation.... Considered a leading expert on Azerbaijani Jewry." Murinson serves on the faculty of an obscure school in Washington, D.C., "BAU (Bahchesehir) International University," recently founded by Turkish billionaire Enver Yucel.

In an attempt to seek new job opportunities and ensure that his article titled, "The Armenian Lobby's Tenuous Relations with President-elect Trump," is published, Murinson panders to the right-

# We Continue to Stick to our Principles

*Interview with the Founder and Director of Noyan Tapan Media Holding Tigran Harutyunyan Dedicated to Its 25th Anniversary*



**By Arpy Sahakyan, [www.nyut.am](http://www.nyut.am)**

**Q: Founded in 1991, Noyan Tapan has been the first independent media in Armenia. Tell us about its creation.**

A: 1991 was one of the active phases of the Nagorno-Karabakh war.

Armenia was still officially a part of the USSR and everyone was talking about the media blockage. We started to look for solutions in order to improve the situation and this is how Noyan Tapan was created. During the first months of work we have realised that the term “blockage” was not that accurate. The Soviet media style did not correspond to the media abroad and the news articles written in that style were not comprehended. We have gradually started to change our writing style and approach. The response was immediate – our news started being published in different international media.

**Q: A lot has changed during these 25 years. What are the demands of the media field in Armenia now?**

A: The field has changed a lot. When we first started we truly believed that the media had to be independent. We thought that was the only way for the society to receive truthful information. The political forces make the media write from their perspective nowadays more than before.

**Q: Many experts say that the media often prioritises sensational news stories and tries to be the first to publish something at the expense of its quality. Are you able to find the golden mean?**

A: That problem has always existed. When we received scandalous information we always tried to double check, listen to both sides of the incident and only after that we would publish. The situation is different now. Everyone hurries to publish the news without the fear that the published information might be false. We refuse to work that way. It is more important to us to be a truthful source of information rather than be the first to publish.

**Q: You have mentioned about the independence of media. Tell us more**



## Noyan Tapan Media Holding is 25 Years Old

about it.

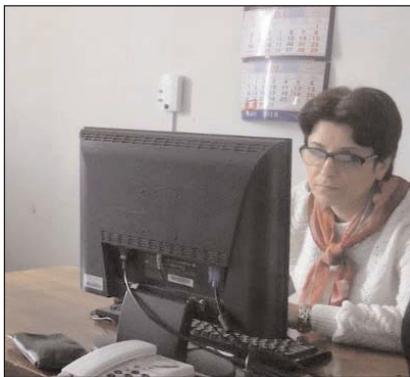
A: Being independent is rather difficult. We have first understood that in 1993 when we started publishing our weekly newspaper. In 1995 the publishing house that used to print our newspaper refused to do so because there was an article criticising the authorities. So we decided to establish our own publishing house to maintain our independence and it turned out to be a right decision. Our own publishing house made us financially independent as well as we used its profit to support our media structure.

**Q: Does the government realise that having independent media is important for the country?**

A: The existence of independent media is very important for the country to be strong. Unfortunately, our authorities do not think that way and do not fully understand the role and importance of independent media in the country.

**Q: Do you think it is because they want to control the media?**

A: That is one side of the question. I think that the current situation is because there is a pressure on our authorities from their so-called friends to take that position. Everyone realises that Armenia can not be strong without independent media.



## The Army News...

*Compiled by Gourgen Khazhakian  
(based on RA Defense Ministry Press and  
Information Dept. releases)*

### The Supreme Commander-in-Chief visited NKR Defense Army bases

On 9 December President of the Republic of Armenia and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces **Serzh Sargsyan** visited several military bases located in the South and Southeastern parts of the border, as part of the program of cooperation between the Armed Forces of the two Armenian Republics. President Sargsyan was accompanied by the President of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic **Bako Sahakyan**, Ministers of Defense of the Republic of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, **Vigen Sargsyan** and **Levon Mnatsakanyan**, respectively, and other high-ranking representatives of the Armed Forces.

At one of the defense positions, the Presidents were given a Commander's briefing, followed along with the conducting of combat duty, and got acquainted with works being held to reinforce defense system. The Presidents talked issues concerning preparation of the troops, and gave appropriate assignments. The President of the Republic of Armenia rewarded the best officers, contract servicemen and conscripts of the base for dedicated and outstanding service. Commander of the

base N, Lt.-Colonel **Aram Hayryan** was awarded with a Second Degree "Combat Cross" Order by the President of the Republic of Armenia, for bravery and dedication revealed during defense of the Nation's borders.

President Sargsyan also attended opening ceremonies of a newly built apartment building for officers, and two barracks. He got acquainted with the living conditions for officers and congratulated them for new apartments. The President of the Republic of Armenia also presented rewards for the best servicemen.

### Military Diplomacy:

#### Poland

On 6 December Minister of Defense **Vigen Sargsyan** received the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to the Republic of Armenia **Jerzy Marek Nowakowski**.

During the meeting, issues of military and military-technical cooperation were discussed. The Minister of Defense expressed the importance of bilateral cooperation in defense, taking into account experience of joint service by Armenian and Polish servicemen during coalition operations in Iraq, as well as existing high level of military and military-technical cooperation.

In turn, Ambassador Nowakowski stressed the importance of Armenian-Polish defense cooperation as well as the will-

ingness of the Polish side to develop this cooperation.

#### European Union

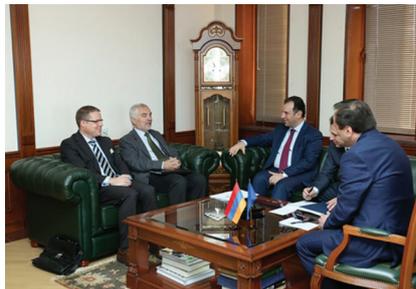
On the same day Minister Sargsyan received the Head of the European Union Delegation in the Republic of Armenia Ambassador **Piotr Świtalski**.

During the meeting, the sides discussed the current level of relations between Armenia and the European Union as well as the potential for their future development. Opinions were exchanged concerning opportunities for cooperation in the context of EU collective security. Vigen Sargsyan noted that Republic of Armenia had bilateral cooperation with several EU member states and stressed the importance of a larger activity in Armenian-EU relations in a broad political context. In his turn, Piotr Świtalski reaffirmed readiness of the EU to continue providing the Armenia with consultation regarding the development of state management and democratic institutions.

#### U.S./U.K. joint expert group

On 7 December Vigen Sargsyan held a meeting with the members of the joint U.S. / U.K expert group assisting Armenia in its defense strategy reconsideration process. The meeting was also attended by the U.S. Ambassador **Richard Mills**.

At the meeting, the process of reconsider-



ing the defense strategy was discussed and the further steps of cooperation were identified. Furthermore, special attention was attached to the Armed Forces management and military education.

## DM Vigen Sargsyan received volunteer fighters who took part in the April combat operations

On 6 December DM Sargsyan received commanders of squads that volunteered in the April combat operations held at the NKR borders at the Ministry of Defense.

The Minister expressed a high regard for the contributions and sacrifices made by the volunteers during the Liberation War (1992-94) and the April combat operations.

During the meeting, the Minister of Defense spoke about the "Nation-Army" concept, emphasizing the fact that volunteers fits particularly well within its format. The Minister also spoke about military education reforms as well as modernization of armaments, and the need for implementation of modern technologies in the military-industrial complex.

At the end of the meeting, Minister Vigen Sargsyan answered questions by the volunteers.

## Foreign trips:

### Greece

In the framework of the 2016 bilateral cooperation plan between Armenia and Greece, a delegation led by Defense Minister of Armenia Vigen Sargsyan paid an official visit to Greece on Monday 19 December.

After the official welcome ceremony at the Ministry of National Defense of Greece, the Armenian and Greek delegations met in an expanded format. Thereafter Armenian Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan had a tête-à-tête talks with his Greek counterpart **Panagiotis Kammenos**. Issues related to the bilateral Armenian-Greek cooperation in defense sphere were discussed at the meeting.

Highly appreciating the present level of cooperation, the sides agreed on the deepening and expansion of the bilateral cooperation and exchange of experience in a number of areas of mutual interest.

Issues related to the regional and international security were also discussed at the meetings.

By the end of the talks, Vigen Sargsyan and Panagiotis Kammenos met with media representatives to answer a number of questions of interest to reporters and sum up the results of the bilateral talks.

Within the framework of his official visit to Greece, Defense Minister of Armenia Vigen Sargsyan on Tuesday 20 December met with President **Prokopios Pavlopoulos**.

Two ministers expressed readiness to further intensify and deepen relations between the two friendly countries.

They also discussed the development of Armenia-Greece military and military-technical cooperation, and several other matters of mutual interest.

On 20 December Minister Sargsyan and members of his delegation met with the Armenian students of Greek military-educational institutions.

### Georgia

A delegation from Armenia led by Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan on Wednesday 21 December arrived in Georgia on an official visit.

After the solemn official welcoming ceremony in capital city Tbilisi, the Armenian and Georgian Defense Ministers, Vigen Sargsyan and **Levan Izoria**, respectively, held a tête-à-tête meeting.

Subsequently, an extended meeting was conducted between the delegations of the Defense Ministries of the two countries.

The parties discussed Armenian-Georgian military cooperation and future plans. Also, they reflected on regional security.

The talks ended with the signing of the 2017 Bilateral Cooperation Program between the Defense Ministries of Armenia and Georgia.

Results of the talks were summed up at the joint news conference of the two ministers for Georgian and Armenian mass media reps.

Vigen Sargsyan and members of delegation were received also by Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia **Ilya II**.

During meeting with Georgian PM **Giorgi Kvirikashvili** the sides stressed that cooperation between two countries in various areas including defense is on a quite high level.

Issues of regional as well as international security were discussed at the meeting.

**Davit Tonoyan**, the First Deputy DM accompanied Minister in both trips.



## Youth Orchestra News

### Sergey Smbatyan summed up the 4th Khachaturian International Festival... And the 5th Festival will have a close connection with Aivazovsky's art

Over the past two months, the Khachaturian Festival introduced symphonic, chamber concerts, ballet performances to the music lovers, well-known soloists and conductors arrived in Armenia, master classes were held. At the press conference hall of the Armenpress agency the organizer of the festival, the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia **Sergey Smbatyan** noted on 8 December that the Festival has a very wide coverage and meets the international standards.

Sergey Smbatyan noted that exceptional performances and interesting programs were presented within the framework of the Fest. He also stressed the fact that the concerts were broadcasted live on the Internet, and it proves the quality of the Festival, soloists, and orchestra musicians. He said that in professional terms it was a great achievement.

Maestro Smbatyan also talked about the 5th Khachaturian Festival that will be held in 2017. Smbatyan noted that in 2017 we'd celebrate the 200 birth anniversary of (a great Armenian mariner artist) **Hovhannes Aivazovsky**, and organizers are preparing for the next festival the content of which will be closely connected with the art of Aivazovsky.

The conductor admitted that this idea will be difficult to realize, but the organizers will do their best to represent our heroes and values to the people.

In 2017 the Festival will also present symphonic, chamber programs and will invite well-known soloists to Armenia.

The Head of the Youth Orchestra also noted that next year they will focus on master classes, and their number will increase.

Smbatyan also stressed that it was important for the audience to hear new music: "We build our program around the interests that the Orchestra and the audience have. It is important that the halls were jam-packed. It is also important to present new music, new compositions."

Sergey Smbatyan also responded the journalists' questions concerning the PanArmenian orchestra. "Many people talk about the Orchestra, it inspires all of us. On April 24, in 2015 the best musicians arrived in Armenia to become part of the 24/04 orchestra. For us it was a great achievement. On September 21, a concert of the PanArmenian orchestra and choir "Generation of Independence"



took place. It is necessary to choose the right format for the PanArmenian orchestra. It should serve to its primary task. We must show the world that we are united," - Sergey Smbatyan said.

According to him, if the PanArmenian orchestra is replenished only by musicians who left the country during the difficult years, the orchestra will not contribute to its mission.

"It shall consist of the Armenian musicians that have succeeded in different countries around the world. We need to create a domain with which one could show the world that we can be together. Music gathers different generations living on different continents, people with different ideology," - he said.

### The pieces by Khachaturian summed up the 4th Khachaturian International Festival

The 4th Khachaturian International Festival that is held under the patronage of the President of RA **Serzh Sargsyan**, crossed the finish line on December 10. The Gala concert was attended by the First Lady of Armenia **Rita Sargsyan**, a famous musician, artist, director and producer, Armenian by origin **Stas Namin** (Anastas Mikoyan).

Two months in a row the organizers of the Festival and the musicians presented the audience chamber and symphonic concerts, ballet performances, children's programs as well as master classes. During the Fest numerous world and Armenian premieres were performed, accompanied with overcrowded halls and thunder of applause.

During the closing ceremony the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia headed by Sergey Smbatyan, presented compositions by Khachaturian - "Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia" from the Ballet "Spartacus", Violin Concerto (Soloist **Haik Kazazyan**) and Symphony No. 2 - "The Bell Symphony".

"We have achieved great success! We have presented rather interesting projects and hosted exceptional soloists. For both me and whole our team it is very important that the Khachaturian Festival unites Armenia's best collectives and soloists," - Smbatyan said.

Violinist Haik Kazazyan noted that he always followed the Festival and highly valued the fact that this musical feast hosted not only high class soloists and conductors from all over the world.

According to him, during the recent years the level of musical life, festivals and concerts in Armenia has increased significantly, thanks to the Khachaturian Festival as well. Living in Moscow, Kazazyan also noted that the Yerevan stage delivered special, warm emotions.

**The State Youth Orchestra of Armenia presented the symphony “Centuria S-Quark” by Stas Namin**

The symphony “Centuria S-Quark” by Stas Namin was presented by the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia within the frames of Stas Namin’s creative days on December 19 at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall.

Namin started writing this large-scale work in 2014. In 2016 the author finished the score. This year in July Namin’s symphony was recorded at Abbey Road Studios with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lee Reynolds.



The famous musician, composer, artist, director and producer, Armenian by origin Stas Namin is celebrating his 65th anniversary. As part of the anniversary, from December 14 to December 20 creative days of Stas Namin will be held in Armenia.

Stas Namin is one of the most important figures in contemporary Russian culture, one of the founders of Russian rock. For over 15 years, he is the Artistic Director of the Moscow Music and Drama Theatre.

Speaking of his symphony, the author notes that it makes us think about how a human civilization was build. According to the musician, homo sapiens, unfortunately, does not have a collective consciousness.

“The individual conscience does not allow to demonstrate a systematic approach to the development of civilization. That’s a self-destructive behavior. Thus, the apocalypse is a foregone conclusion, since there is no collective consciousness; such, for example, have bees, which created a scheme for the sake of their own civilization. Bees do not represent anything individually, but together they are serious. It is different when it refers to people. I was trying to present all these through my music. I tried to reveal love and war, complete and beautiful human emotions, maybe even scary, but, nevertheless, clear enough.”

Namin noted that the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia was an unexpected discovery for him. “I am pleased that such a wonderful orchestra and his incredibly modern, smart, talented conductor will present my symphony. That’s going to be a premiere!”- Namin said.

The author also noted that his mother graduated from the Yerevan State Conservatory, and later continued the post-graduate studies in Moscow. Sharing his memories, Namin mentioned that their family was lucky to host such prominent classical musicians as Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Penderecki and many others.

“Falling in love with rock and roll, I left the classical art. But in the late 1980s I tried to do something in the symphonic genre. I created the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, the first private orchestra in Russia. For a while, the Principal Conductor of the Orchestra was *Ohan Durian*, he conquered Moscow with his talent. And he had a clear system of writing symphonies “- Namin said.

Durian passed all the secrets of this unique system to Namin. The latter admits that he never planned to write symphonic music. “I wrote a suite of 8 parts, but the symphony is a serious step, and I never thought to reach that level. 3 years ago I decided to write a symphony, and now it will be presented to the audience.”

The Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia Sergey Smbatyan noted that the composition by Namin is unique.

“It is important that the symphony by our famous compatriot Stas Namin was recorded jointly with the London Symphony Orchestra by the Abbey Road, one of the world’s most famous recording studios. This is a very serious standard. The composition shows the composer’s vision of life. Namin and his symphony raise very serious

issues. I think, we have managed to overcome all the difficulties of this rather complicated score, both in technical and musical aspects”, – maestro Smbatyan said.



ARAM KHACHATURIAN  
INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

#akhic13

## VivaCell-MTS: As Usual, Supporting the Nation

### Hippotherapy...

The Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) and VivaCell-MTS hosted children with disabilities and their parents participating in one of the joint projects of FPWC and VivaCell-MTS - in the second round of the hippotherapy program in Yerevan Zoo.

In June 2015, with the opening of the first inclusive playground in Yerevan Zoo, in the frames of the tripartite partnership of FPWC, VivaCell-MTS and Yerevan Municipality, a series of multi-component events was launched, the main objective of which is to integrate children with disabilities and to assist their rehabilitation.

This year's hippotherapy program started in October. Due to VivaCell-MTS support, the number of days for the hippotherapy trainings has increased: instead of the previous two, now the children have three training days. This allows the participation of not only the beneficiaries of the last year, but the newly registered children as well. More than 80 children were registered for participation in this program this year.



Hippotherapy is a variety of therapeutic physical trainings, a form of rehabilitation, which is carried on through the contact with horses and horse riding. During the last decades the hippotherapy has been recognized as one of the most efficient means of rehabilitation of people with disabilities, especially children.

*"This type of exercise therapy is very interesting and important. Of course, there are many known to the medicine ways of getting the desired result. However, this approach is special. Children join in the process of own rehabilitation, perceiving it as a game, rather than an intervention. This way children help reach the anticipated result. I think the program based on the ties between humans and the nature has positive psychological impact on parents as well. I am glad to state that our cooperation makes implementation of such program in our country feasible,"* said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph Yirikian**.

The children involved in this program have had an opportunity to participate in free of charge hippotherapy and riding courses, as well as had a chance to feed and take care of the horses.

One of the main advantages of this program is the venue of the hippodrome. Unlike hippotherapy centers, which, as a rule, are located outside the city, the hippodrome in Yerevan Zoo is much closer and provides an opportunity to join the program without additional travel expenses, especially for those participants who live in Yerevan.

In the last year, over thirty children participated in this program.

Taking into account the importance of the program and the number of newly registered children, the authors of this initiative decided to make it permanent.

### Yet another Open Doors Day in the frame of cooperation with universities

The culture of management and customer care, as well as the continuously improving services and innovations presented by Armenia's leading telecommunications operator remain in the focus of students' attention. Yet another open class was organized at the headquarters of VivaCell-MTS for the students of the Department of Services of the School of Geography and Geology, Yerevan State University.

The students specializing in the customer care familiarized themselves with the model of business administration of the Company, basics of mobile communication technologies and the system of values – the role of the responsible approach in success and achievements.

*"Success in business requires new ideas, flexible marketing solutions, accurate calculations, analysis and forecasts at equal proportion. The tool embracing all the above is the culture of civilized customer care. Our competitive advantage is the sum total of it all,"* said VivaCell-MTS General Manager **Ralph Yirikian**.

A tour was organized in the headquarters of the Company. The students visited call and service centers. Their meeting with the General Manager rounded up with a Q/A. Organization of similar events in the frame of cooperation with universities is valuable in terms of experience exchange.

### A new irrigation system in Chinari border village

A new irrigation system, including one river water intake and 650m-long pipe, has been launched in Chinari village of Tavoush region, which has a 28 km-long common border with Azerbaijan. This is the second joint project of the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) and VivaCell-MTS implemented in Chinari during the current year.

As a result of the cooperation, a new water supply system was launched in the village in spring: a new water reservoir, a pumping station and a 300m-long pipe were built. The water is now being collected and pumped into the main regulating reservoir.

In the frames of the second project, due to the launch of the new irrigation system, the unused water is now pumped for the irrigation of the 33 hectares of cultivated land. The new irrigation system has been connected to the former one, benefiting to the inclusion of more arable lands. Another advantage of the new system is that now 15-25 liters/second more water is used. Moreover, in the past the supply of the irrigation water was done by a schedule. Owing to the new irrigation system, the village now has a 24/7 water supply.

The launching ceremony of irrigation system was attended by the General Manager of VivaCell-MTS Mr. **Ralph Yirikian**, the General Engineer and Project Manager of FPWC **Martin Maralchyan**, Chinari community head **Samvel Saghoyan**, and the residents of the community.

In terms of existing problems, the borderland villages are more vulnerable. Some places of this village are within a distance of 600 meters from the adversary's location. This village is a key focus of at-

tention for the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets and VivaCell-MTS, as evidenced by the investments made in recent years with the aim of improving the social life of the village.

*“Borderland villages remain within the focus of our attention, and not just in terms of the network development. We are guided by responsible attitude as we clearly understand that it is the way for the long-term development of the country. We should mention that this attitude has been adopted by our employees, too. Maybe this is the reason the members of our family contribute personal means in various projects implemented now and then. Sometimes those efforts are made on a voluntary basis. Chinari is one of those villages supported by both the organization and its employees. This is a village, where the residents are cultivators of their soil, and equally guards of our borders. Care and attention to this target group are a must. And there should be a unified approach in this no matter if it comes from the state or the private sector,”* said VivaCell-MTS General Manager **Ralph Yirikian**.



The implementation of such projects in Chinari is aimed at preventing the migration, and relieving the burden of the residents. The main activities of the locals are growing vegetables, producing tobacco, and gardening.

**“Hover” has presented a new choir project**

“Hover” State Chamber Choir continues appearing with experimental projects in various genres. This time the choir has presented non-conventional arrangements of Aparan folk songs in collaboration with Vahagn Hayrapetyan Jazz Trio. It is planned to present this special project also in regions of Armenia, in particular, in borderland communities and abroad.

Founded a quarter century ago, the choir had implemented projects for 18 years with their own resources till 2009, when it gained state status. A few years later, in 2013, Armenia’s leading telecommunications operator VivaCell-MTS undertook the general partnership of the choir promoting its creative activities. Owing to its professional musician-performers, “Hover” has reached unprecedented results for choir genre: 40-50 concerts and performances annually in prestigious concert halls around the world, a wide list of partners, new projects dedicated to the Armenian choir music, contemporary projects and more.

*“Our partners’ success is our success. We are glad to state that we have contributed to the development and improvement of choral art with our targeted partnership. “Hover” completes the mission of representing Armenia in the authoritative concert halls of the world and the responsibility of serving to our national culture,”* said Viva-

Cell-MTS General Manager **Ralph Yirikian**.

Over the past four years “Hover” has appeared with concerts in Belgium, France, Russia, Germany, Lebanon, Poland, China, US, Italy, Switzerland and other countries. By the way, “Hover’s world premiere of a choral setting of “Psalm 3” by Krzysztof Penderecki composed in remembrance of the Armenian Genocide, gained great appreciation by the “New York Times” daily.

The repertoire of the choir has always been versatile and diverse. “Hover” is the first performer of a number of choir works by Armenian composers. The choir has performed in prestigious concert halls such as the “Strathmore” (US), “Cité de la Musique” (France), Warsaw Royal Concert Hall (Poland), Carnegie Hall (US) and other. The artistic achievements of “Hover” have been highlighted by the Armenian and West European media.

**The water system supply project continues in rural communities**

The Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) in cooperation with VivaCell-MTS has built a 2050-meter-long water pipeline in Gnishik community in the frames of “Water supply improvement” program. In frames of the program dividing joints and water pressure regulators have been installed. As a result, the entire village is provided with constant water supply. If the water was available for only 30% of the community in the past, moreover, 2-3 days per week for 2 hours, then now the water supply is 24/7.



The former water supply system of the community was in a very bad condition for many years. Because of the dilapidated pipes, the mud was mixed to the water, increased the leakage and the frequent accidents caused unforeseen financial costs. The village budget funds sometimes were not enough to eliminate these issues. The residents used to be deprived of drinking water for weeks. The project of water supply system in rural communities enables the 24-hour water supply in the village without increasing its amount.

The launching of water supply system was attended by the General Manager of VivaCell-MTS **Ralph Yirikian**, the Founder of FPWC Ruben Khachatryan, Gnishik community head Ara Levonyan, and the residents of the community.

*“This village is one of those villages included in our joint project where we have tried to solve the existing problems step by step. Last year we installed an outdoor lighting system, this year the problem of potable water has been solved. The development of rural infrastructures has always been the focus of our attention. It is important not only in terms of our commitment as a socially responsible company,*

*continued on p. 18*

## VivaCell-MTS: As Usual, Supporting the Nation

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but also in terms of investing in the well-being of our compatriots, communities and the country in general. It is inspiring to see that the system of values adopted by VivaCell-MTS serves as an example for other organizations," - said VivaCell-MTS General Manager Ralph Yirikian.

As a result of the cooperation between FPWC and VivaCell-MTS, the streets of the village were provided with a light-emitting diode (LED) system. 37 columns of lighting were installed.

The Gnishik community has 72 inhabitants. The locals are mainly engaged in agriculture, cattle-breeding and bee-keeping.

The region is especially known for its historical and cultural values, as well as its rich nature. The cross-stones (khachkars) of 4th-5th centuries have been found here, as well as chapels, tombs and many caves. The unique geographical position of the surrounding contributed the formation of flora and fauna, joining the list of specially protected areas of Armenia. The locale is a corridor for the Armenian mouflon, registered in the Red Book of Armenia, Bezoar ibex, brown bear, lynx, Caucasus leopards and other species.

### The Hour of Code: from coding to cyber security

On the initiative of Ayb School and MIC Armenia (Microsoft Innovation Center Armenia), Ayb High School hosted the third Hour of Code event. The general partner of the event was VivaCell-MTS.

The event organized already for the 3rd time in Armenia aims to teach a variety of programming languages, develop logic, creativity, and problem solving skills. And all of this can be learned through games in just a few hours.

Workshops by leading IT experts were held in parallel with the event. They taught participants how to design and implement games, talked about systems engineering, cyber security, and the importance of strong passwords.

*"Programming is cool. From year to year, more and more people are excited about programming. There is no age limit for learning programming; each one at any time can start to learn. Today there are many ways to learn programming without a significant cost. Through*



the Hour of Code, we want people to start their exciting journey with us," said Ayb School Head **Aram Pakhchanian**.

*"Living in a tech millennium, it is very important to make children not only technology consumers but also technology creators. What we consume online, we can also create. Such activities stimulate interest towards programming, and new ideas and innovative solutions among schoolchildren,"* said **Artashes Vardanyan**, director of Microsoft Innovation Center.



*"VivaCell-MTS provides continuous support to the organization of the Hour of Code event, based on the imperative of creating awareness and encouraging the interest of the youth toward Information and Communication Technologies, as well as based on the vision of Armenia as a country having competitive advantage in this sphere,"* VivaCell-MTS General Manager **Ralph Yirikian** said.

For the organization of the Hour of Code event, Armenia's Leading Telecommunications Operator provided internet access with 150Mbps of speed in both uplink and downlink, through Wi-Fi coverage. This ensured simultaneous connection for 300 participants, with every user being provided with internet connectivity speed of 3Mbps, on the average.

The official hashtag was #HourofCodeEVN. The "tasty" partner of the event was Menu.am.

The Hour of Code is an international global movement reaching more than 280 million participants from over 180 countries. Happily, we can state that the interest toward this event is growing. In 2015, the Hour of Code gathered more than 250 participants aged from 5 to 18 from different regions of Armenia. In 2016 the number of participants exceeded 300.

## Vahe Andonians: “We Live in Very Exciting Times Now...” Founder of SCDM, a leading way risk management services company speaks on the major trends in the world financial services

Written by Gourgen James Khazhakian  
Chief Correspondent

For several times The Highlights has written on SCDM company providing risk management services for central/commercial banks, insurance companies, other institutions founded by a Diasporan Armenian *Vahe Andonians* in Armenia in 2003 as a team of just two and turned up to now to a global market leader with entities in Germany and the US.



Recently your correspondent talked to Mr Andonians on the major trends in the world financial services, role of digitalization and other related issues.

According to Vahe Andonians, the single biggest trend in the financial services sector continues to be **Blockchain**. He says that in essence, it is a foundation for transactional applications that establishes trust, accountability, and transparency while increasing efficiency in processes drastically. It has an enormous disruptive potential in each one of these aspects – trust, accountability, transparency, and efficiency, which indeed occupies established banks, trying to cope with the ever increasing efficiency pressure, as well as FinTechs, rethinking banking fundamentally, equally.

Mr Andonians trusts, however, that summarizing Blockchain just with these words leads to underestimating its potential drastically. And... “*Just think of it this way - in essence, a computer network is just a telecommunication network which allows computers to share resources. Yet, it also serves as the foundation of the internet which has touched the way we live in every aspect by disrupting*



*many industries or wiping them out entirely. The increased digitalization built on this technology that reduces marginal cost in services to near zero, is even a threat to capitalism, as shown by (a prominent American economist and social issues analyst/activist) **Jeremy Rifkin**”.*

The same goes for Blockchain. Through democratizing trust, it has – at very least – an enormous potential to disrupt many sectors and change the way we live and organize resources fundamentally, Vahe Andonians states. For example, it is readily foreseeable that smart contracts (an extension of Blockchain) will revolutionize the music industry again and finally allow the artist to grab most of the value chain rather than labels 20 years ago and technology providers now.

“*At SCDM, we are not only building applications on top of Blockchain and its extension to smart contracts, but we are also researching this area on a theoretical and practical level*”, - the company founder says.



And, in Andonians’ opinion, the second trend that continues to be prominent is **artificial intelligence (AI)**. “*Although we see more actual applications of AI in our life, such as self-driving cars, we are still at the tip of the iceberg here. Open sourcing Tensorflow by Google has given another boost to integrating AI into applications in the financial sector*”.

In his opinion, whereas the employment of AI is rather easy now, there are many open issues in this area. Ethical questions that have occupied us for centuries pop up in the context of AI again. For example, the trolley problem (introduced by **Philippa Foot**), and all its related dilemmas, have to be rethought in the context of self-driving cars that actually might be forced to make equally difficult decisions in reality.

Andonians thinks the same holds true for the financial services sector. For example, questions like how regulators will judge the fitness of robot advisers are yet unsolved.

In the end of our conversation Vahe Andonians is to recap by the following: “*...In general, we are living in very exciting times now. As we are in the early stages of Blockchain and AI, every decision matters and potentially changes the future trajectory of many sectors significantly...*”

## "Appropriation and destruction of cultural and religious heritage of the Armenian people, political neo-osmanienne of Turkey: challenges and threats"



By Julie Gyuloyan,

*Head of the Cultural Affairs Committee, member of presidium of the International Women's Association of Hamshen Armenians "Amshenka"*

One of the obvious manifestations of the policy of neo-Ottomanism of the Turkish Republic at the present stage is a continuation of the policy of appropriation and destruction of the cultural, historical and spiritual heritage of the Armenian people. These are policies that have been in place at various times throughout the history of the Turkish state - whether initiated by the Sultan, Young Turks or Kemalists.

A particularly vicious example occurred during the Armenian Genocide in 1894-1923 perpetrated by the Turkish government in Western Armenia, Cilicia, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Since a timely condemnation of this horrific crime against humanity from the international community has not yet occurred, and compensation for damages has not been fully realized, the genocide continues to this day taking various forms, including that of a cultural genocide.

In this context, it is necessary to pay attention to the future heritage of the Armenian civilization, which is often referred to as "the cradle of civilization," given that it denotes the foundation of spirituality, humanism and culture of the world.

Consequently, a significant portion of this ancient cultural and spiritual heritage belongs to the Armenian people. Today, this heritage is in the unfortunate hands of the Turkish state, and since it solely responsible for the horrific crime of the Genocide, it therefore intentionally shows the world this ferocious attitude toward the culture of another people - the creator of these values.

In the tradition of the Young Turks, the Turkish state continues to exemplify

the politics of cultural appropriation with the thorough, consistent and methodical destruction of the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Armenians.

After the physical extermination of a great part of the indigenous Armenian population during the Genocide in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was an even more intense process to eradicate all that was considered to be of Armenian origin.

Starting in 1928, the process of renaming historical and national landmarks in the territory of Western Armenia began to take root. Over 90% of Armenian geographical references in Western Armenia were replaced with Turkish equivalents. Hundreds of architectural monuments of the Armenian people were modified, some converted into mosques, resulting in the vast destruction of all that is of Armenian origin, culture and history.

Monuments, churches, and architectural masterpieces continue to be utilized by the Turkish army as targets during military exercises, which is unheard of in modern history, not to mention completely barbaric. The only recent example of such behavior can be seen in the rise of the Islamic State, specifically the destruction of the historic sites in Palmyra.

The few churches that remain intact

serve as stables, warehouses, and prisons. Falsified official documents encourage pseudoscientific publications in which Armenian history and culture is distorted or forgotten altogether. This results in a form a legal framework of the so-called "lawful vandalism" which in turn legalizes the demolition of monuments, their use as construction material, and the illegal excavation of buried Armenian riches. Gold miners under the auspices of the Government of Turkey destroy all without exception.

Such sites do not "belong" to Turkey in the classical sense, for they are the heritage of humanity and should be considered as such. Their loss is irreparable, and should not be continued to be ignored by regional actors. The destruction and appropriation of Armenian cultural monuments can thus be more accurately described as a modern continuation of the Armenian Genocide.

Here are just a few examples:

Mount Nemrut - a pantheon to the gods of ancient Armenia, Greece, and Persia. Erected in 62 BC in honor of king Antiochus I Theos, the Turks have presently appropriated this heritage, presenting it as their own.

Gobekli Tepe - A temple/shrine complex within an ancient settlement located in the Armenian highlands. It consists of



*Mount Nemrut*

some of the oldest and largest monumental structures in the world. Dated at around 9500 BC, it is considered to be one of the most important discoveries of our time.

City of Ani - a medieval Armenian city that was once the ancient capital of the Armenian kingdom of Ani. Due to the number of historically-significant religious constructions within the city, it is colloquially known as the City of 1001 Churches. Yet today, it is an abandoned ghost city that has fallen victim to vandalism, neglect, and target practice at the hands of the Turkish military.

Turkey even encroached on the biblical values to include one of the main symbols of Armenia, Mount Ararat, renaming it "Agra."

According to official data, in the beginning of 1914 the total number of churches and monasteries on the territory of Western Armenia and the Ottoman Empire was 2549 (including unique early Christian monuments), most of which were looted, burned and destroyed during the Genocide. According to UNESCO, after 1923 of the remaining 913 Armenian historical and architectural monuments 464 were completely destroyed, 252 are in ruins, and 197 are in need of major rehabilitation.

The modern politics of neo-Ottomanism is reflected in the reluctance of the Turkish state to return to the Holy See of Cilicia the residence of the Armenian Catholicosate, located in Sis, or modern Adana. After the Genocide, with the local Armenian population of Sis was wiped out, the Holy See was forced to relocate to Lebanon.

This policy has led to a precarious situation in which the Western Armenian language is under threat of extinction due to the deportation of the Armenians of Western Armenia, since Turkey has yet to allow the return to their historical homeland.

A good example of the Ottoman policy of assimilation in modern Turkey is related to the Hamshin Armenians, most of whom were forcibly converted to Islam. Many have lost their roots and national identity, do not recognize themselves as descendants of the Armenians, and continue to call themselves Hemshin. Reading prayers at the Western Armenian language (such as the Lord's Prayer), some are convinced that this Hemshinli prayer is uniquely Turkish. Architectural



masterpieces such as the exceptional Hemshin medieval arched bridges have been shamelessly attributed as Turkish achievements. All opportunities must be pursued in order to help the Hemshin peoples return to their Armenian roots.

The Turks are known for their uniquely-Armenian rugs and carpets, going so far as to import them from Armenia or blatantly copying them, despite the Armenian symbols, ornaments, etc. They claim that above all else these works of art are the property of the Turkish people.

"Zartir lao," a popular Armenian folk song that is a wake-up call for the struggle against the Turks, and perhaps the only lullaby in the world in which a mother calls on her son to defend the motherland, has similarly been appropriated by a Turkish football club. The song was once assigned as the anthem of the club, with the original Armenian being replaced with the Turkish equivalent.

Ancient Armenian national cuisine has also been expropriated by its neighbor, and is easy to spot once the preparation and ingredients of a dish becomes evident. An example is wheat, as it is known that wheat comes from the Armenian Highlands. Even now, 3-4 types of wheat have been considered native Armenian. Since ancient times, it was the Armenians that have engaged in pre-treatment of wheat. All different types of wheat are treated differently, and used in Armenian cuisine. All those dishes that the Turks and other neighbors appropriate with the help of UNESCO - are as Armenian as the invention of the Armenian oven, such as that of the "tonir." The same applies to the uniquely

Gobekli Tepe Armenian bread baked in the "tonir," such as "lavash," and "matnakash." The tonir is considered dual-use as it also has the ability to heat a home.

The above instances illustrate specifically how Turkey has given itself the opportunity to wash away ancient Armenian history, and proclaim the Turks as the original population of the Armenian highlands.

No matter how Turkey tries to falsify its own history, whether through various international organizations or lobbying groups, they will not succeed. History will forever remember the Turks as nomads, seizing the lands of others in an effort to assign others property and cultural values as their own.

It is high time for UNESCO and other international organizations to adhere to the principles of historical justice, law, and ethics. When it comes to the matter of the Republic of Turkey, itself a member of UNESCO, double standards appear to be the norm when dealing with Turkish revisionism. It is hoped for that honesty and faith will prevail among the international community to stop the ongoing vandalism of Armenian cultural history within the borders of modern-day Turkey. Only with hard work will Turkey recognize its own relevant history on the world stage, and not a history invented by Turkish nationalists in an attempt to bring about unity after the calamity of the Armenian Genocide. For it is not only the history of the Armenian people that's at stake, but also the cultural and spiritual history of the entire world.



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## All-Armenian Orchestra set to performs first concert on April 24

The idea of creating an All-Armenian Orchestra is materializing with the first concert set to be held on April 24, 2017. The orchestra plans to perform abroad, as well.

The issue of our unity lies in the basis of the idea of creation of the All-Armenian Symphony Orchestra. "It aims to unite world-spread Armenians around music, around one orchestra," Armenian Minister of Culture Armen Amiryanyan told a press conference today.

Armenian musicians from about 20 countries have already been invited to play with the orchestra.

"It's hard to bring together Armenian musicians living in different countries in a short period of time, because any of them has his/her own plans," said Ruzanna Simonyan, Director of the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra.



The orchestra will be led by three conductors – Edward Topchyan, Sergey Smbatyan and Karen Durgazyan.

"The concert program will include works by Armenian composers – Aram

Khachatryan, Avet Terteryan, Edward Mirzoyan and others. Tigran Mansuryan will compose a work dedicated to the heroes of the April war," Armen Amiryanyan said.

## HAPPY NEW YEAR 2017



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