

Armenian Army is 29



Armenia - PM Pashinyan pays tribute to the memory of fallen soldiers, Yerevan, January 28, 2021

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan visited the Yerablur Military Pantheon on the occasion of the Army Day to pay tribute to the memory of soldiers fallen for the independence of the Homeland.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by Speaker of Parliament Ararat Mirzoyan and members of the Security Council.

Pashinyan laid flowers at the tombs of the Artsakh War heroes, Commanders Vazgen Sargsyan and Andranik Ozanyan and a wreath at the memorial dedicated to the fallen war volunteers.

Later Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan visited the Ministry of Defense headquarters to meet with the military top brass. At the

beginning of the meeting, the government and military officials held a moment of silence in honor of the servicemen who sacrificed their lives for the country.

“The Armenian Army, Armenia and Artsakh and the Armenian people are going through a difficult trial related to the 44-day war,” the Prime Minister said in his remarks referring to the 2020 Artsakh War. “In this environment of bitterness, we should not forget the heroism that numerous soldiers, officers, generals and volunteers did for their homeland. Today we must worthily appreciate the sacrifices

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“Regional stability and peace are in our common interests” - PM receives Iran’s Foreign Minister



The stability, peace and sustainable development of the region are in our common interests, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at a meeting with Iran’s visiting Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

“Of course, the relations between our countries are based on traditional friendship. We are always happy to receive Iranian representatives in our country and in our government,” the Prime Minister said.

Iran’s Foreign Minister, in turn, said “Armenia is a good neighbor of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the relations between the two countries are very warm.

“You are highly respected in Iran for the courage you showed by taking that step towards peace,” Zarif said.

“We share common regional concerns with you. From the very first day of that conflict, we have always been in touch with you and other countries in the region, we

want to maintain that connection, having prospects for cooperation. We have opportunities to cooperate both bilaterally and multilaterally, it would be good to have discussions on these issues,” Iran’s Foreign Minister added.

“You know the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the crisis. It is about the observance of international law, protection of peoples, protection of minorities, as well as territorial integrity and non-use of force. Of course, you are aware of the assertion of our caring leader, which is to protect the security of the Armenians, as well as to ensure their dignified life. You also know that we host our Armenian compatriots in Iran, we are always ready to serve them, we have very good and warm relations with them,” Zarif stated.

The Prime Minister of Armenia and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran exchanged views on the situation in the

region after the Artsakh war. The sides attached importance to ensuring regional stability and constructive cooperation in this direction.

Nikol Pashinyan stressed that due to the regional situation, there are both challenges and opportunities, and only through joint constructive efforts, appropriate environment will it be possible to establish stability and lasting peace in the region.

The Prime Minister noted that many issues remain unresolved, including the status of Nagorno Karabakh, and that Armenia is ready to continue negotiations within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship format.

The interlocutors exchanged views on humanitarian issues, as well. Prime Minister Pashinyan stressed that the return of prisoners of war remains a top priority, and the Armenian side understands that the 8th point of the November 10 statement must be fulfilled without preconditions. Mr. Zarif noted that Iran understands Armenia’s concerns and is ready to support humanitarian efforts.

Nikol Pashinyan and Mohammad Javad Zarif also touched upon the agenda of bilateral relations and the prospects for the development of economic cooperation. The interlocutors attached importance to the unblocking and re-opening of the transport and economic communication routes in the region, which will contribute to the utilization of the existing economic potential. Issues related to both current and potential projects were discussed. The parties reaffirmed their readiness to continue the mutually beneficial cooperation.

Results of Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh cannot create ground for lasting peace – Armenian FM

The region is now facing serious challenges created by Azerbaijan’s dangerous attempt to resolve the Nagorno Karabakh conflict by force, Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian said at a meeting with Iran’s visiting Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

“Armenia does not consider that the results of Azerbaijan’s aggression and use of force against Artsakh can create grounds for lasting peace or serve as an opportunity for regional cooperation,” the Foreign Minister noted.

Minister Aivazian noted that the Armenian-Iranian agenda is indeed quite comprehensive, based on the centuries-old friendship that unites our two peoples.

This friendship between our two peoples is the best example of intercultural dialogue, an example of living side by side with different religions and civilizations, based on mutual trust and respect. That is the cornerstone for achieving peace and stability in the region, the Foreign Minister noted.



Prime Minister, French Secretary of State discuss issues of economic cooperation



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, French Secretary of State for Europe and Foreign Affairs and his delegation.

The Armenian Prime Minister and the French Secretary of State had private talks, followed by an extended meeting.

Greeting the French delegation, the Premier said: “Our meeting follows up on the agreement reached with President Macron. It reflects the privileged relations between France and Armenia. There has traditionally been a sincere top-level dialogue between our two countries, and I want to express our gratitude to President Macron and Foreign Minister Le Drian for showing personal concern from the very first day of the war. Of course, we went through a highly challenging war; we have bitter feelings about it; we had a lot of casualties, and we are facing a very difficult situation.”

“This visit is extremely important in terms of using the opportunities we have to meet the emerging challenges. Our discussions and the agenda also have economic and humanitarian aspects, and I would like you to convey my deep appreciation to President Macron for such a prompt response to our conversations and agreements,” he added.

Thankful for the warm welcome, Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne noted that his delegation comprised representatives from the French Treasury, the French Development Agency, and their visit followed up on the agreements and discussions held between the Armenian Prime Minister and the French President:

“It was very important for our President to respond to each of your needs as quickly



as possible. It was a matter of urgency in December as several charitable plane loads arrived in Armenia, which transported several tons of cargo owing to the joint efforts of different French charities and local authorities, which once again came to testify to the friendship between our two nations. After a period of urgent intervention, as you mentioned, medium and long-term economic programs are being prioritized now. In this regard, I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in intensive meetings in branch offices for a week now,” Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne.

Issues related to the development of Armenia-France relations, including in terms of attracting investments and providing financial assistance were discussed at the meeting. The agenda of economic partnership was touched upon. The parties consid-

ered promising interaction in the spheres of transport, reservoir construction, agriculture, high technologies, digital innovations, public sector digitization, as well as cooperation in the development of regional communications.

In this regard, Prime Minister Pashinyan suggested considering the possibility of developing partnerships between the Armenian National Interest Fund (ANIF) and the French Development Agency, which was accepted by the French side.

Nikol Pashinyan next referred to the possibility of expanding the scope of educational cooperation, stressing that the activity of the French University in Armenia is a successful example of such interaction. Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne noted that as represented by President Macron, the French side considers promising cooperation in the field of higher education and believes that efforts should be continued in that direction.

The interlocutors exchanged views on the prospects of the academic settlement. An agreement was reached to set up an interagency communication platform for continued contacts, as well as to continue working closely on mutually advantageous projects.



Status of Artsakh key to conflict settlement – Armenian FM

The Karabakh issue is unsolved, and the key issue to be clarified is the status of Artsakh, Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian told reporters at Yerablur Pantheon.

He said the co-chairing countries have also spoken about the issue on the level of their Foreign Ministers.

“To be able to speak about peace, stability and security in the region, we first of all need to create an atmosphere of trust. Trust-building requires solution of important issues, and



first of all the return of our POWs,” the Foreign Minister said.

“I think Azerbaijan should understand that this is a humanitarian issue, and if the issue continues to be manipulated, it will create problems for Azerbaijan,” Minister Aivazian said.

According to him, an interdepartmental working group is working on the issue on daily basis.

“International pressure is also growing day by day, and I do hope Azerbaijan will understand that the issue requires an urgent solution,” he said.

made by our soldiers, officers, generals and volunteers during this war, and we must be able to look into the future. We must be able to look into the future optimistically. We must be able to ask ourselves what it is that we didn't do right during this period so that our army's resistibility was higher. These questions must be faced," Pashinyan said. He said the military is already looking into the matter to provide answers.

Pashinyan said that the security of Armenia, Artsakh and the Armenian people continues to be absolute priority – just like in the past – and the number one tool of ensuring this security is the Armenian Armed Forces.

Pashinyan went on to speak about the economic impacts on the army and the de-

velopment of the military.

He said the military bears all the traces of "positive and negative occurrences" that a country goes through, starting from economic activities up to the culture of paying taxes.

"After all, what is our army based on, [it is based on] the means which are collected by the economy, society and citizens and are allocated to ensure the needs of the army through the budget. We must assess this agenda in a new way, we must develop new perceptions and understandings. The modern world doesn't have a structure where countries have the chance to ensure their security individually. Even the most powerful countries are seeking alliances, forming alliances and are placing their se-

curity in the logic of mutual-aid. In this regard Armenia is no exception, and we must continue developing our allied relations with our main security partner Russia. We must continue developing it as part of the CSTO and we must ensure the security of our country and people also through international mechanisms. I'd like to say for the record that in the context of our country's security what needs to be done is first and foremost up to us," he said, calling for optimism in building the future security environment of the country.

Pashinyan also felicitated soldiers and officers, veterans, generals and military volunteers whose actions were placed at the foundation of the development of the Armenian Armed Forces. He thanked the troops for their service.

Kocharyan eyes election victory

Former President Robert Kocharyan has said that he and his political allies will participate in snap parliamentary elections and win them even if they are held by Armenia's current government.

"We have a full toolkit and a team necessary for political struggle," he said in a televised interview publicized on January 27.

Kocharyan indicated that he continues to believe that such elections must take place after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's resignation and a certain "time lag."

"But if the authorities manage to force the elections sooner -- and they seem to have enough votes in the parliament -- I don't think that not participating [in them] will be right. I think that participating will be right. Or else, we will enable these people [in power] to reestablish their rule," he told three media outlets.

Pashinyan expressed readiness late last month to hold fresh parliamentary elections after weeks of street protests staged by a coalition of 17 opposition parties blaming him for Armenia's defeat in the autumn war with Azerbaijan. They want him to resign and hand over power to an interim govern-



ment that would organize the polls within a year.

The opposition alliance called the Homeland Salvation Front has rejected Pashinyan's offer until now, saying that the country is not prepared for the vote now and that the authorities would rig it. Some of its leaders have already called for an election boycott.

Kocharyan, who has backed the an-

ti-government protests, said he shares the opposition concerns. "But if these people [in power] do not understand that holding elections in these conditions would be dangerous for the country and take that step after all, I don't think leaving them alone with the public in the elections will be right. That is why we will participate [in the elections] and win."

EU calls for release of Armenian captives held in Azerbaijan

The European Union has welcomed the return of 5 Armenian prisoners of war from Azerbaijan and called on to immediately release the remaining servicemen, Lead spokesperson for the external affairs of the EU Peter Stano said on Twitter.

“The EU welcomes release of 5 Armenian servicemen captured by Azerbaijan in November and calls for the immediate release of the 57 remaining in custody. This would contribute to building



confidence between both countries which is important for lasting peace in the region”, he said.

On January 28, 5 prisoners of war have been returned to Armenia from Azerbaijan by the mediation of the Russian side and the efforts of the Armenian National Security Service. The 5 POWs were among the 62 Armenian servicemen who have been captured by Azerbaijan in Hadrut region in November 2020.

Russian servicemen head for joint monitoring center in Azerbaijan

Russian servicemen have started a march to the Kiyamaddinli region of Azerbaijan, where a joint Russian-Turkish center will be deployed to control the ceasefire and all hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, the Russian Defense Ministry reports.

For several days, at the station of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Stepanakert, the servicemen studied the structure, purpose, tasks and functions, the procedure for organizing the work of the Joint Center, as well as the culture, tradi-



tions and peculiarities of the country where they will perform the tasks.

The personnel of the Joint Center, rep-

resented on a parity basis from the Russian and Turkish sides, will carry out the tasks of monitoring the situation and control over the observance of the ceasefire and all hostilities using unmanned aerial vehicles.

The joint Russian-Turkish center will be deployed on the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan in accordance with the Memorandum signed by the Defense Ministers of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey on

November 11, 2020.

Criminal case filed on committing murder attempt against Lt. General Jalal Harutyunyan

Criminal case has been filed for committing murder attempt against former defense minister of Artsakh, former commander of the Defense Army, Lieutenant-General Jalal Harutyunyan, Head of the PR department at the Office of the Prosecutor General of Armenia Arevik Khachatryan told Noyan Tapan.

She added that the investigation continues. Jalal Harutyunyan has been questioned.

Spokesperson of the Investigative Committee of Armenia Rima Yeganyan stated that according to the aforementioned



criminal case Jalal Harutyunyan has been recognized as a victim and has been questioned.

“As for the claim according to which Azerbaijan could not have known about his movement on its own, the victim didn’t provide such information to the body conducting the proceedings during the questioning”, she said.

Jalal Harutyunyan has been wounded in action in a military position.

On October 27, 2020, he was relieved from the position of Defense Minister of Artsakh.

President of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunyan awarded Jalal Harutyunyan with the Hero of Artsakh title.

Armenian, Russian, Azerbaijani Deputy PMs meet in Moscow

The meeting of Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk and Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev was held in Moscow.

The participants of the tripartite working group decided to set up expert subgroups on railway, road, combined transport, security, border, customs, sanitary, veterinary,



phytosanitary and other types of control.

The formation of the subgroups is scheduled to be completed by February 2, and the first session is to be held by February 5.

It was also decided to hold the next meeting of the trilateral working group in Moscow. The date will be agreed by the Co-Chairs on a working basis.

Servicemen wounded in Artsakh War to receive 500,000 AMD in assistance



Servicemen wounded as a result of hostilities unleashed by Azerbaijan on September 27 will get a financial assistance in the amount of 500,000 (about \$1,000) AMD in 2020. The government approved a relevant decision on January 27.

The assistance is meant to alleviate the financial difficulties caused by the servicemen's temporary incapacity to work due to the injury.

Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Mesrop Arakelyan noted that this is an attempt to settle certain social problems.

About 6,000 citizens are expected to benefit from the program. The beneficiaries will not include persons with

The procedure for providing assistance should be developed by February 3, 2021.

Beneficiaries will be able to receive the money electronically within maximum of 10 days.

Beneficiaries will be able to receive the money electronically within maximum of 10 days.

Armenia improves ranking in Corruption Perceptions index 2020

Armenia is placed 60th (up from 77th last year) among 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions index 2020 released by the Transparency International.

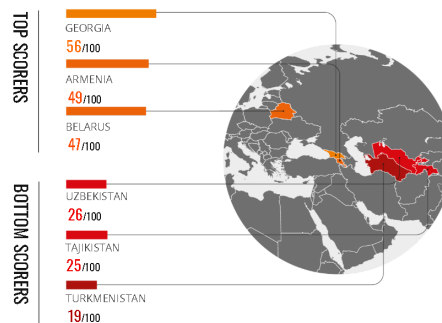
Other countries in the region are placed as follows: Georgia is 45th, Turkey – 86th, Azerbaijan 129th, Iran – 149th.

Armenia's partners in the Eurasian Economic Union Russia and Kazakhstan are ranked 129th and 94th respectively, Belarus is 63rd, Kyrgyzstan is 124th.

New Zealand tops the ranking followed by Denmark and Finland.

The 2020 edition of the CPI ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, drawing on 13 expert assessments and surveys of business executives. It uses a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

With a score of 49, Armenia is a significant improver on the CPI, rising 15 points since 2012. A country to watch last year, Armenia has taken a gradual approach to



reform, resulting in steady and positive improvements in anti-corruption, Transparency International says.

“However, safeguarding judicial independence and ensuring checks and balances remain critical first steps in its anti-corruption efforts. The effectiveness of those efforts is additionally challenged by the current political and economic crisis as a result of a recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the subsequent protests against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan over a ceasefire deal,” the report reads.

The 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released today by Transparency International reveals that persistent corruption is undermining health care systems and contributing to democratic backsliding amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries that perform well on the index invest more in health care, are better able to provide universal health coverage and are less likely to violate democratic norms and institutions or the rule of law.

“COVID-19 is not just a health and economic crisis. It is a corruption crisis. And one that we are currently failing to manage,” Delia Ferreira Rubio, Chair of Transparency International said. “The past year has tested governments like no other in memory, and those with higher levels of corruption have been less able to meet the challenge. But even those at the top of the CPI must urgently address their role in perpetuating corruption at home and abroad.”

Armenia, Iran discuss ways to remove trade barriers



Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (IC-CIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafeie met with Armenian Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan on January 25 to discuss ways of removing barriers to the expansion of economic cooperation, Tehran Times reports.

In this meeting, the two sides underlined the capacities for bilateral cooperation and explored ways for removing the existing challenges and obstacles to the expansion of trade relations and increasing the volume of joint investments by the two sides' private sectors.

Considering some problems in the field of transportation, Shafeie proposed the es-

tablishment of a joint transit and transportation company between the two countries to overcome such issues.

The official noted that joint production by the two countries would be a successful solution for removing the existing hurdles for boosting trade relations between the two countries.

He further pointed to Armenia's prominent role in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the country's convenient access to the European market, describing the Armenian market as very valuable for the Iranian private sector's trade and investment purposes.

"Iran and Armenia can reach an agreement to reduce trade costs by negotiating, exchanging trade delegations, and holding exhibitions," Shafeie said.

Stating that the only shared land border between Iran and the EAEU region is the border between Iran and Armenia, the official stated that the fields of cooperation between the two countries are very diverse.

The Armenian minister for his part announced the dispatch of a delegation of Armenian entrepreneurs to Isfahan within a month and proposed the dispatch of a delegation from the Iranian private sector to Armenia.

According to Kerobyan, these visits will make the two sides' private sectors more familiar with each other and their existing capabilities.

During this visit, which was organized by the Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for boosting trade ties.

The MOU was signed by Kerobyan and the Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Alireza Razm Hosseini in Tehran on Saturday.

The Armenian minister also met with the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati and discussed banking issues and ways of increasing the level of trade between the two sides.

Armenian PM meets participants of iGorts program

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with the participants of the iGorts program, under which Diaspora specialists have been involved in the government of the Republic of Armenia. The 49 Diaspora specialists are working for 19 different agencies.

"We have worked out this program with great enthusiasm, great hopes and expectations. I want to thank you all for sharing this extremely difficult period with us from within. And now, this topic and idea, which was initially the basis of the program, is becoming more urgent, because of the chal-



lenges facing our country, of course, can be solved through the consolidation of our national intellectual potential," said Prime Minister Pashinyan.

He also emphasized that the presence of so many representatives within the meeting rooms of Armenian government already speaks volumes about the success of the program.

Chief Commissioner of Diaspora Affairs Zareh Sinanyan noted that the current results of the iGorts program indicate that the program corresponds with the vision underlying it. Afterwards, the program participants openly presented their programs, strategies, and proposals to the Prime Minister.

Armenia, Russia to resume air communication from February 1

Armenia and Russia have agreed to resume air communication between the two countries months after it was suspended due to Covid-19.

Travelers will need a negative PCR test result to cross the border of the Russian Federation, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at the government sitting on January 27.

The test must have been taken within 72 hours before the flight.

Minister of Health Anahit Avanesyan



further clarified that a special app will have to be installed on smartphones.

The list of laboratories where the test

can be taken is available on the "Travelling without Covid-19" app.

The test results will automatically be uploaded into the platform and will be verified through QR code upon arrival.

The program was initiated by the Armenian side and approved by the Russian Government. It was financed by the Eurasian Development Bank.

The platform has been successfully tested.

U.S. Ambassador to Baku Congratulates Azerbaijan for ‘Restoring Territorial Integrity’

ANCA Rebukes Ambassador in Baku for ‘Celebrating Azerbaijani Aggression.’

The United States Ambassador to Azerbaijan Earle Litzenberger has reportedly congratulated Azerbaijan for “restoring its territorial integrity” and has expressed the U.S.’s readiness to take part in rebuilding lands that came under Baku’s control after the war, reported Azernews.az on January 28.

Litzenberger made the remarks during a meeting with Azerbaijan’s Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov, according to a press statement issued by the ministry on Wednesday.

According to Azernews, Litzenberger also said that American companies are



ready to participate in reconstruction efforts, especially in management of water resources, road and other infrastructure efforts, as well as cooperation in the fields of digital and information technologies.

“We are troubled by unconfirmed reports that our Ambassador in Baku is cel-

ebating Azerbaijani aggression and – even worse – enlisting Americans in the commercial exploitation of indigenous Armenian lands,” said Armenian National Committee of America Executive Director Aram Hamparian.

“In light of published accounts characterizing his comments in this regard, Ambassador Litzenberger should set the record straight – explaining whether he is in fact pushing U.S. investments in areas of Artsakh seized by Azerbaijan,” added Hamparian.

Azernews reported that Jabarov told Litzenberger that his ministry is developing programs to attract foreign investors in Baku’s reconstruction efforts.

Azerbaijani military regularly fire in the immediate vicinity of Armenian villages – Ombudsman

The Azerbaijani military fire from small and large-caliber weapons in the immediate vicinity of the villages of Chakaten, Nerkin Hand, Shikahogh, Yeghvard, Agarak, Uzhanis in the Syunik province of Armenia, Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan says.

Civilians and community bodies of all these villages have informed the Human Rights Defender that shootings take place regularly, both during the day and at night.

According to the alarms, the shootings are clearly heard in the villages, aimed at intimidating civilians and, first of all, children and women.

At the same time, the villagers observed that the Azerbaijani servicemen fire when they are drunk. The shooting is usually from large-caliber weapons and more intensive in these cases.



The delegation led by the Human Rights Defender was informed about these shootings on January 9, 2021 during their visits to Tshakaten and other villages of Kapan. At that time, it was directly reported that the shootings were causing tension in villages.

“These criminal, absolutely condemnable acts must be completely excluded. They have become a real threat to the

rights to life and health, physical and psychological integrity and other rights of civilians of Armenia, recognized internationally and guaranteed by the Constitution of Armenia. These shooting grossly violate best interests of the children as well,” the Ombudsman says.

“The mentioned fact further reinforces the Human Rights Defender’s assessment that the presence of Azerbaijani armed forces in the immediate vicinity of Armenia’s civilian border communities, on inter-community and interstate roads is a real threat to the lives and other vital rights of civilians,” Tatoyan adds.

Reports on these facts will be sent to international organizations, including the OSCE, the UN and the Council of Europe. Separate reports will also be sent to special mechanisms of intergovernmental organizations.

Azerbaijan Exploits Everything for Propaganda, Including Art

By Harut Sassounian

The Calvert Journal published last week an article by Lucía de la Torre titled, “The Aliyev influence: how nepotism and self-censorship rule Azerbaijan’s art scene.”

On October 2, 2020, two days after the start of the Artsakh war, a giant Azerbaijani flag was placed on the façade of Baku’s YARAT Contemporary Art Space gallery with a giant message: “Karabakh is Azerbaijan.”

This did not sit well with the Turkish-born Kurdish artist Ahmet Ogut whose exhibition “No Poem Loves Its Poet” had been displayed in the gallery since May 2020. Ogut requested that the propaganda banner be taken down and boldly declared: “I refuse to allow my work to fall prey to political instrumentalization.”

The gallery refused to remove the banner and closed down Ogut’s exhibit on October 29, 2020, three weeks earlier than scheduled.

According to The Calvert Journal’s article, “This is one example of how Azerbaijan’s apparently thriving art scene conceals something darker: a deeply nepotistic environment which routinely suppresses dissident voices while crafting an international image of Azerbaijan as a free, art-loving nation.”

Artists like Ogut, who refuse to go along with Azerbaijan’s political propaganda, are quickly ostracized and lose all artistic privileges.

Artists worldwide were alarmed by Azerbaijan’s abuse of power, trampling on the rights and independence of an artist. However, this came as no surprise to those who have followed many other violations by the country’s despotic leader. Ruled “by President Ilham Aliyev and Vice-President and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva, the Azerbaijani government has been repeatedly criticized by human rights’ groups for ongoing censorship, a poor human rights record, and rampant corruption. And, like many nearby authoritarian regimes, members of the President’s family are known to own most of the country’s major businesses, earning them millions of dollars since the fall of the USSR and situating Aliyev amongst the world’s richest oil billionaires,” The Calvert Journal reported.

The YARAT gallery was founded by Aida Mahmudova, an artist, curator, and Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva’s niece. The Marriott Hotel in Baku, “which is allegedly connected to Aliyev’s daughters Leyla and Arzu Aliyeva according to reporters for the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, is one of YARAT’s main partners,” The Calvert Journal wrote. “Mahmudova is also the director of another of Azerbaijan’s main contemporary art galleries: Baku’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMa). The museum was founded by Mehriban Aliyeva in 2009, and is funded

by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation (of which Mehriban Aliyeva is the President and Leyla Aliyeva the Vice-President), a charitable organization created in memory of the former president of Azerbaijan and father of current president Ilham Aliyev. Elsewhere in Baku, another star venue on Azerbaijan’s cultural scene is the Heydar Aliyev Center. The current director of the Heydar Aliyev Center is Anar Alakbarov, a former assistant to the Vice President of Azerbaijan and current assistant to the President,” The Calvert Journal reported. Baku has several other smaller art galleries which are controlled by Azerbaijan’s government.

“The Qiz Qalasi Gallery, an art venue in Baku with a branch in Berlin, is headed by Emin Mammadov, who also works as Art Curator for the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. ‘Modern Art of Azerbaijan’ is a travelling exhibition supported by the Heydar Aliyev Center that toured European capitals, where Mehriban and Leyla Aliyeva hosted lavish inaugurations attended by European government officials and diplomats. In November 2020, the gallery launched ‘Armed with the Arts,’ an exhibition allegedly meant to promote peace after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war, while, similarly to YARAT, openly supported the position of the Azerbaijani government and used politically-charged, bellicose language. Kicik QalArt Gallery, a project of the ‘Art ex East Foundation’ and another important smaller-scale venue in the capital, although now closed, used to be owned by Olivier Mestelan, a Swiss art collector and financier.

Mestelan used to sit on the board of Ataholding, an open joint-stock company that managed Atabank, one of the biggest commercial banks in Azerbaijan, now bankrupt and owned by the Azerbaijan Deposit Insurance Fund (ADIF). According to an investigation carried out in 2011 by Radio Free Europe’s Azerbaijani Service, Mestelan was also claimed to be the treasurer of three offshore Panama-based companies linked to Azerfon, a Baku-based telecommunications company with links to Arzu and Leyla Aliyeva,” The Calvert Journal wrote.

Lesley Gray, a scholar researching the development of the contemporary art scene in the Arab Gulf and Caspian Sea region, explained that Azerbaijan and other countries use contemporary art as a tool to reshape the country’s international image.

Azerbaijan’s leaders are not interested in art for art’s sake. “They hope to use art as a tool to attract international attention for something other than imprisoned journalists and crackdowns on free speech,” The Calvert Journal reported.

The Azerbaijani government has also used its investments in contemporary art around the world to project power and establish goodwill. “Mehriban Aliyeva, through the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, has

shelled out generous sums for cultural institutions such as The Palace of Versailles, Paris’ Louvre Museum, and the Vatican Museums, while the Friends of Azerbaijani Culture Foundation, a non-governmental charity which she founded in 1995, routinely organizes art exhibits abroad,” according to The Calvert Journal.

As a result, “in 2004 Mehriban Aliyeva was designated UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, a laurel given in recognition of her actions to promote international cultural exchanges. Later, in 2010, Aliyeva received a gold medal from UNESCO for her ‘efforts in establishing an intercultural dialogue.’ Over the years, Azerbaijan has had a particularly favorable relationship with the UN body — in October 2015, at the petition of Mehriban Aliyeva, UNESCO hosted an exhibition ironically called ‘Azerbaijan — Land of Tolerance’ at its Paris headquarters. At the opening, when a journalist asked Aliyeva whether the title of the exhibition lived up to the reality in Azerbaijan, considering the country has ‘many political prisoners in jail,’ Aliyeva denied this and turned her back while security guards pushed the journalist away. The relationship was particularly favorable between Mehriban Aliyeva and Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, 2009-2017. Their relationship came under scrutiny in 2017, when Kalin Mitrev, Bokova’s husband, was investigated by the Bulgarian Chief Prosecutor in relation to media publications about payments made by Azerbaijani companies to his [bank] accounts. Bokova then wrote a letter to The Guardian [newspaper] defending the rightfulness of her relationship with Azerbaijan, but never spoke openly about the money allegedly received by her husband or her stance towards Azerbaijan’s human rights abuses,” The Calvert Journal reported.

However, Azerbaijan’s devious use of the arts was exposed in 2011, when “Azerbaijan censored its own entry to the Venice Biennale, the world’s most high-profile showcase of contemporary art, by hiding the work of one of its own artists under a piece of cloth. Moscow-based artist Aidan Salakhova’s work *Waiting Bride*, which showed a woman in a black veil from head to foot, and another sculpture, which showed the Black Stone of Mecca contained in a vagina-shaped marble frame, were hidden under a white cloth. The [Azeri] government later claimed that the artworks were ‘damaged during transport’, while senior sources at the exhibition clarified that the works were censored for being considered offensive to Islam,” according to The Calvert Journal.

Nothing is surprising about the exploitation of art by Azerbaijan. A government, whose soldiers cut off the heads and ears of captured Armenians, can easily abuse art to cover up its corruption and gross human rights violations.

Anti-government demonstrators rally in Yerevan



Anti-government protesters are again rallying at Republic Square in Yerevan, demanding the resignation of the Pashinyan Administration and the formation of an interim government.

The demonstration began with a prayer, and then a moment of silence was held in

honor of fallen troops as the rally is taking place on January 28 – Army Day.

A prominent filmmaker in attendance, Arshak Zakarian, announced that this gathering has no affiliation with any political party. “Of course, here I saw people representing various political parties. But we’ve

all come here as Armenians, as citizens of Armenia. Representatives of national minorities are also here,” he said, adding that the demonstrators will march down the street to continue protesting outside the prosecutor’s office.

Renowned artist, actor Hrant Tokhatyan, who was also in attendance, told reporters: “Many of my colleagues are here. Some of them are not, I don’t know why they aren’t here, perhaps they support the incumbent government. Some of them think that going out to the streets is unnecessary.”



Armenia committed to principles and aims of the Council of Europe – FM

Armenia has been faithful to the commitments undertaken at the accession to the Council of Europe, including the peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian said in a statement on the 20th anniversary of the country’s membership to the Council of Europe.

“By acceding to the Council of Europe, Armenia joined the family of European states, with whom it shares common history, values, and ideals, as well as a vision of a future Europe, where fundamental rights and freedoms are protected for all, without distinction or discrimination,” the Foreign Minister said,

He emphasized that Armenia acknowledges and values the input of this unique organization that has remained the main human rights and democracy watchdog in Europe for over 70 years of its existence.

“The two decades of Armenia’s membership to the Council of Europe were a period of active participation and sincere



cooperation. Armenia has now joined over 70 Council of Europe conventions and partial agreements, essentially building legal bridges with the Member States of the organization. In 2013 Armenia held the Presidency in the Committee of Ministers, steering common European efforts for democratic action,” the Foreign Minister stated.

He noted that democratic reforms remain a key area of our interactions with the Council of Europe, where the organization, with its valuable expertise, has become a trusted partner of Armenia.

“The Council of Europe, its experts, its monitoring and specialized bodies, such as

the Venice Commission, have all had a significant contribution in our efforts to build a just and democratic society, in devising policies that would better uphold human rights and the rule of law,” Minister Aivazian added

“Armenia has been faithful to the commitments undertaken at the accession to the Council of Europe, including the peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The recent war in Artsakh had a devastating impact on the fundamental rights and the livelihood of its people. We trust that the Council of Europe recognizes these challenges and will take steps within its mandate to protect the rights, the freedoms and the dignity of all people living in conflict zones, including in Nagorno-Karabakh,” the Foreign Minister stated.

On this special occasion of the 20th Anniversary, he reiterated Armenia’s dedication to the principles and aims of the Council of Europe.

TUMO to participate in the Venice Architecture Biennale

From May to November 2021, TUMO will participate in the Venice Architecture Biennale, with its own pavilion at the Arsenal, the main area at the Biennale. The Venice Biennale is one of the world's largest architectural exhibitions. It is attended by some of the world's most innovative architectural firms, and some of its most renowned scholars. The title of the 17th International Architecture Biennale is "How Will We Live Together?"

TUMO's "Learning to Learn Together" installation at the Biennale will explore the future of learning and showcase the international network of TUMOs. The installation is based on a forest of computer-generated "lifelines" that give voice to teenagers from Yerevan and Stepanakert to Berlin and Beirut. The participants of the exhibition will be able to "enter into a dialogue" with TUMO students and learn about their daily life, as well as their dreams and aspirations.

This year, the Biennale will focus on the



new challenges currently facing the world, especially those related to architecture, and will propose solutions to these challenges. For this reason, the list of participants is as comprehensive as possible, including not only the entire architectural community, universities and major studios, but also artists, politicians, and journalists. This year's Biennale curator is Hashim Sarkis, Dean of the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"We need a new spatial contract. In the context of widening political divides and

growing economic inequalities, we call on architects to imagine spaces in which we can generously live together," said Sarkis in an opening statement for the Biennale.

The Architecture Biennale, which is being held one year late due to the pandemic, is part of the Art Biennale founded in 1895. The main purpose of the Biennale, held every two years since 1980, is to offer architectural solutions

to societal and technological problems. Despite the Biennale's international orientation, it also allows architects from around the world to present new projects of local significance.

This year, 112 projects from 46 different countries will be presented at the Biennale. The Biennale is divided into two main sections: The permanent pavilion in the Biennale Gardens as well as the Arsenal, which hosts projects from numerous nations under one roof.

US Commission on International Religious Freedom condemns demolition of Armenian church in Turkey



The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has condemned the demolition of the historical Surp Toros Armenian church in Turkey.

"USCIRF condemns the demolition of the historical Surp Toros Armenian church in Kutahya, Turkey, despite holding status as a protected site," USCIRF Vice Chair

Tony Perkins said.

"Turkey must ensure the protection of its diverse religious and cultural heritage," he added.

The historical Armenian church in Turkey's western province of Kutahya was demolished after it came into private ownership.

Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Diyarbakır MP, ethnic Armenian Garo Paylan has submitted a Parliamentary question regarding the demolition of the Surp Toros Church despite being designated as an "Immovable Requiring Protection" by the Kutahya Regional Board of Cultural Heritage Protection.

Paylan asked the Minister the following questions:

- How was the Kutahya Surp Toros Armenian Church demolished despite the protection order?
- Has an investigation been launched against the person who demolished the church?
- Has an investigation been launched against the public officials who made way for the demolition of the church under protection?
- Why do you remain silent to the destruction of Armenians' cultural heritage?
- Will you take any action to ensure that the church will be rebuilt to its original?

Syrian-Armenian visual artist Kevork Mourad to create immersive installation at Cantor Art Gallery

Photo by Anne Purkiss

The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, will host Syrian-Armenian visual artist Kevork Mourad for an artist residency this February in collaboration with the College's Arts Transcending Borders program.

Using his signature style of spontaneous drawing and printmaking techniques, Mourad will create "Memory Gates," an immersive installation. The work, imagined as a series of doors and passageways that visitors can pass through, will explore themes of cultural plurality and collective memory. "Memory Gates" will be on view from March 4 through April 11, 2021, the *College of the Holy Cross* informs.

During Mourad's residency, students will be invited to work alongside the artist, assisting in the execution and installation of the work as it unfolds. Meredith Fluke, director of the Cantor Art Gallery, says this is a key component of the project: "Our goal is for Holy Cross students to be involved directly in Kevork's process, and to benefit from Kevork's deeply collaborative and generative practice. In addition, students will gain intimate knowledge of the work it takes for an artist to conceive and execute a large-scale work of art in situ."

"Kevork's multi-faceted artistry and generosity of spirit have given us many opportunities to connect with public school students and immigrant communities in Worcester during previous campus residencies, and we're very excited to build on this work together with our partners at the Cantor Art Gallery," adds Yonca Karakilic, director of the Arts Transcending Borders program.

Arts Transcending Borders has previously presented Mourad's onstage collaboration "Home Within" with clarinetist and



composer Kinan Azmeh, and sponsored Mourad's presence on campus as part of the Silkroad Ensemble's multi-year residency at the College. As the sole visual artist member of the Ensemble, Mourad often performs alongside musicians; his drawings, which are created in response to

Namibia; a commission from the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the 2019 exhibition "Armenia!," where composer Vache Sharafyan composed music based on visuals by Kevork Mourad; and an animated film, "Four Acts for Syria," 2019, with filmmaker Waref Abu Quba, honoring the historical and cultural wealth of his homeland. He was recently invited by the Aga Khan Foundation to create a site-specific 20-foot drawing-sculpture called "Seeing Through Babel" at London's Ismaili Center, addressing the importance of diversity in our contemporary times.



the music, are projected onto a screen for the audience. He is inspired by the interplay of musical and visual languages, which he says, "Offers an intensified expression of the cultural legacies I am interested in exploring."

Mourad has a strong history of collaborative work with musicians and other visual and performance artists, including recent projects with the OYO Dance Troupe in

Kevork Mourad has lived and worked in Brooklyn, NY since 1998. He was born and grew up in Syria to a family of Armenian heritage, his ancestors having sought refuge there from the Armenian Genocide. He received his Master of Fine Arts from the Yerevan Institute of Fine Arts in Armenia, an institution which places an emphasis on cultural traditions in addition to its intensive studio curriculum.

AGBU Announces Artsakh Research Grants

In response to the Artsakh war, the subsequent media conflict, and the imperative need for incontestable scholarly research and analysis, AGBU is announcing the Artsakh Research Grants. This newly established initiative will raise awareness and enhance knowledge of Artsakh by expanding both mainstream and scholarly access to the region's history, culture, and current affairs and disseminate this array of information to the public. The AGBU grant will enrich assets on Artsakh studies by adding original published work to a greater pool of primary resources and accurate accountings based on pioneering research and other existing publications. "The genesis of this grant was the concept of knowledge-based identity formation," said AGBU Central Board Member and Education Specialist Lena Sarkissian. "We established the grant to enhance the skills and research methods that help shape the Armenian identity to further understand the Armenian reality, promote awareness, and build reliable knowledge of Armenia and Artsakh. We want to control and spread our narrative to the world with quality data,



verifiable sources, and on-the-ground research that will withstand the test of time."

The grant is open to students and scholars of all heritages. Graduate students, academics, researchers, post-doctoral scholars, independent writers, freelance journalists, and others interested in developing an expertise and understanding of Artsakh are encouraged to apply.

Research may include but is not limited to historical and/or contemporary work examining social, cultural, psychological, legal, economic, technological, humanitarian, and environmental issues of the region's past, present and future. Published work may include articles, reports, papers,

as well as high-quality videos and podcasts.

Grant proposals must include samples of previously published work, a resume/CV, and a proposed budget with strategy for the on-the-ground research project. Proposals and completed works can be submitted in English, French, Spanish, or Russian.

Applications are in English and will be accepted on a rolling basis until April 30, 2021.

To learn more about the AGBU Artsakh Research Grants, visit www.agbu.org/artsakhgrants.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is the world's largest non-profit organization devoted to upholding the Armenian heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs. Each year, AGBU is committed to making a difference in the lives of 500,000 people across Armenia, Artsakh and the Armenian diaspora. Since 1906, AGBU has remained true to one overarching goal: to create a foundation for the prosperity of all Armenians. To learn more visit <http://www.agbu.org>.

System of a Down launch 'Genocidal Humanoidz' video

System Of A Down premiered the video for Genocidal Humanoidz. Co-directed by bassist Shavo Odadjian and Adam Mason, the new video features animation in addition to performance footage.

The premiere followed a live fundraiser for wounded Armenian soldiers.

The money System of a Down raises with the livestream will help provide prosthetic limbs to soldiers who lost limbs as a result of the Artsakh War and laser therapy for people burned by chemical weapons.

The group released its first new songs after 15 years — "Genocidal Humanoidz" and "Protect the Land" — in November as a means of raising awareness about Ar-

menians' plight during the country's conflict with Azerbaijan.

"I have been to Artsakh twice," frontman Serj Tankian told *Rolling Stone* in November at the peak of the battle. "It's just beautiful countryside, and it's just really sad seeing all of that destroyed right now and the people having to move. The people are just incredible there. They're the old Ar-

menians. They have been living on those lands since 500 B.C. They're very strong and beautiful and funny. They don't get scared, man. They've seen this before, but it's really, really fucked up."



Francesco: New film documents Pope's 2016 visit to Armenia



Francesco – a documentary that gives unprecedented access to Pope Francis and the individuals who know him – will be premiering in March 28, Discovery has announced.

Produced and directed by Oscar nominated filmmaker Evgeny Afineevsky, *Francesco* provides an intimate look at Pope Francis and how he approaches challenging and complex issues, including climate change, religious intolerance, LGBTQ rights, sexual abuse in the

Catholic Church, and more.

In addition to featuring Pope Francis, *Francesco* also includes interviews with the people who know and have interacted with His Holiness.

The film also shares Pope Francis' efforts to educate the world about the Armenian Genocide and documents his pilgrimage to Armenia in 2016, Emmy-nominated film producer Eric Esrailian informs.

Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio on December 13, 1936 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Pope Francis became the leader of the Catholic Church in 2013 following the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI. He is the first Pope born outside Europe since the 8th century, as well as the first Jesuit pope.

The film shows us the world as it is

today and a path to understanding a better future for tomorrow, through the remarkable work of Pope Francis. It is a search for hope, humanity, compassion, unity and redemption inside the darkness of our times.

Francesco's producers, in addition to Afineevsky, are Den Tolmor, Eric Esrailian and Teri Schwartz. Its executive producers are Ted Hope, Colleen Camp, Mark Monroe, Tomas Srovnal, Michelle Bertan Neve, Svetlana Chistyakova, Bonnie Abaunza, Bohdan Batruch, Regina K. Scully, Elba Luis Lugo, GERALYN WHITE Dreyfous and Robert Fyvolent. It is a production of Afineevsky-Tolmor Productions with the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television and PFX – Postproduction and Visual Effects Studio, in association with Diamond Docs.

Mariinsky Theater to dedicate performance to Armenian opera singer Gegham Grigoryan



The Mariinsky Theater in Saint Petersburg will dedicate *The Queen of Spades* performance to the memory of opera singer, People's Artist of Armenia Gegham Grigoryan (1951-2016).

Valery Gergiev timed the performance to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the singer's birth, the press service of the theater reported.

"Gegham Grigoryan was invited to the Leningrad stage in the late 1980s. As a leading soloist, Grigoryan was engaged in most of the opera premieres of the Kirov (Mariinsky) Theater, went on tour and took part in the recording of the operas *The Queen of Spades*, *Sadko*, *Iolanta*, *Prince*

Igor, *War and Peace*, *The Power of Destiny*. The performances of Gegham Grigoryan as Herman in *The Queen of Spades* are memorable for the St. Petersburg audience," said the press service.

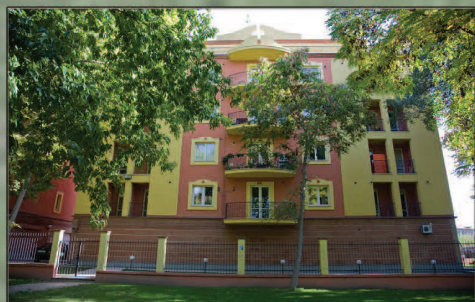
The part of Lisa in the performance will be performed by the singer's daughter Asmik Grigorian, who has already sung at the Mariinsky. A major achievement

in her career was her performance in the Salzburg production of Richard Strauss's *Salome* at the 2018 Festival. For this work, the International Opera Prize and the German magazine *Opernwelt* awarded her the title of "Singer of the Year." Tenor Nazhmiddin Mavlyanov, whose repertoire at the Mariinsky Theater includes a dozen roles, will perform as Herman.



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