

Head of the Supreme Judicial Council of Armenia resigns



Gagik Harutyunyan, the head of a state body overseeing Armenia’s courts, resigned on May 24, citing recent days’ developments that followed the government’s strong criticism of the Armenian judiciary.

In what may have been a related development, Harutyunyan’s brother Arzumán was dismissed as deputy director of the National Security Service. No official reason was given for the sacking proposed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and formalized by President Armen Sarkissian.

In a letter publicized by his spokesman, Harutyunyan said he no longer finds it “expedient” to head the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) “in view of ongoing developments relating to the judicial authority and courts and my concerns expressed in that regard through the media on May 20.”

“I wish you continued fruitful activities in the establishment of an independent judicial authority befitting a rule-of-law state,” read the letter addressed to members of the council.

The concerns cited by Harutyunyan followed Pashinyan’s May 19 appeal to his supporters to block the entrances to all court buildings in the country. The appeal came the day after a Yerevan court ordered former President Robert Kocharyan released from jail pending the outcome of his trial on coup and corruption charges. The court’s decision angered many allies and supporters of Pashinyan.

Speaking at a May 20 meeting with senior state officials, Pashinyan said that Armenian courts remain linked to “the former corrupt system” and distrusted by the population. He announced

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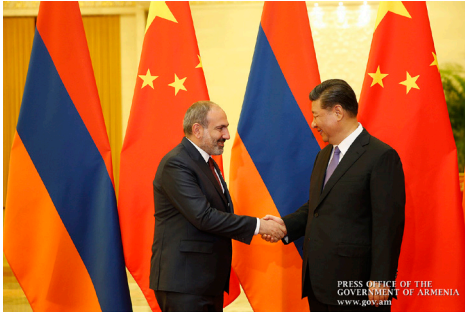
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Armenia, China to scrap visas



One week after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's visit to Beijing, the Armenian government formally approved on May 23 an impending agreement on visa-free travel between Armenia and China.

Pashinyan said that the agreement is due to be signed during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's upcoming trip to Armenia.

"We hope that it will invigorate relations

between our countries and Armenia's citizens will be able to visit China without obstacles," he told a weekly cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

Presenting the draft agreement to the cabinet members, Deputy Foreign Minister Grigor Hovannisyan said it will allow Armenian and Chinese citizens to stay in each other's country visa-free for up to 90 days. He said it also commits the two states to quickly deporting travelers "abusing" the new rules.

"The signing of the agreement is expected to lead to more active commercial, business and tourism contacts between the two countries and a more effective use of the potential existing in this area," added Hovannisyan.

Pashinyan noted that the agreement was

reached during his working trip to China which began on May 14.

The Armenian leader met with China's President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang and took part in an international conference held in Beijing. "Constructive and productive relations with China are very important for us," Pashinyan told Xi.

Xi reportedly reaffirmed his government's desire to deepen political, economic and cultural ties with Armenia. According to an Armenian government statement, he said Chinese firms are ready to participate in major infrastructure projects in Armenia.

China is Armenia's second largest trading partner. According to official Armenian statistics, Chinese-Armenian trade soared by over 29 percent in 2018, to \$771 million.

Government makes decision to raise servicemen's salaries

A Cabinet meeting was held on May 23, chaired by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The Government adopted a decision to establish the exact size of extra payments, define the concept of and the criteria for the exercise of military service under special conditions.

Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan noted that in order to comply with the Prime Minister's directive to increase servicemen's salaries, a bump on wages is envisaged for the exercise of official duties that will increase servicemen's salaries by an average of 10%.

Commenting on the decision, Nikol Pashinyan said: "We are going to raise the salaries of military personnel as of this June 1, and the proposed regulations are meant to



ensure that the actual amount of salaries or benefits be much higher for non-commissioned officers and for those serving under special conditions. As a result, the salaries of junior staff and those serving under special conditions will be much higher as compared to the commissioned staff and the leadership of the Armed Forces. This is a

crucial point in our decision."

The Government approved an investment program presented by New Ida LLC and agreed to the proposal to alienate plots of land through direct sales in Katnaghbyur administrative district of Stepanavan (Lori Marz). The Company is going to invest about USD 5 million in a project for construction of a mineral water bottling plant in Stepanavan.

Noting that the Government had discussed issues related to privileges granted to investment programs in agriculture a few days earlier, Nikol Pashinyan said no major problems had been identified in this field, with 90 % of privileged imports being compliant with the goals stated in the bids.

Foreign Relations Committee Chair, French Senators discuss cooperation in Paris



Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Armenian Parliament Ruben Rubinyan had meetings in Paris on May 22 with Christian Cambon, Chairman of the French Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations, Defense and Armed Forces, and Jean Bizet, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee.

The lawmakers discussed the ongoing reforms in Armenia, stances around the NK

conflict settlement, as well as regional developments. The Armenia-EU cooperation agenda was also discussed, the Armenian Parliament's press service said.

Rubinyan also discussed with his French colleagues the possibilities of boosting inter-parliamentary relations between Armenia and France. Rubinyan also invited the French Senators to pay a visit to Armenia.

EU Offers Financial Support for Armenian Judicial Reform



The European Union offered on May 23 to help the Armenian authorities carry out a “comprehensive and far-reaching judicial reform,” saying that it is vital for the country’s continued democratization.

“We welcome the unequivocal commitment by the Armenian Government to pursue justice reform in accordance with the Armenian Constitution and Armenia’s international commitments, in particular those stemming from its membership in the Council of Europe and in consultation with civil society and international experts, including the Venice Commission,” read a joint statement released by the EU Delegation in Yerevan and the embassies of EU member states.

“The independence and impartiality of the judiciary is a fundamental pillar of the constitutional order and the rule of law,” the statement said, adding that the EU “stands ready to provide technical and financial assistance” for that purpose.

Thorbjorn Jagland, the Council of Europe secretary general, discussed the issue with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan by phone on Wednesday.

“A delegation of Council of Europe experts will travel to Yerevan in the next days to offer advice and assistance with the necessary reforms,” the Strasbourg-based organization said in a readout of the phone call.

On Tuesday, two representatives of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) expressed concern at Pashinyan’s weekend calls for his supporters to block the entrances to all court buildings in Armenia. They at the same time welcomed Pashinyan’s “stated desire for far-reaching reform of the judicial system.”

Pashinyan urged the court blockade following a Yerevan court’s controversial decision to order former President Robert Kocharyan released from prison pending the outcome of his trial on coup charges denied by him.

The premier said on Monday that Armenian courts remains closely linked to the country’s “corrupt” former leaders and therefore cannot be impartial. He announced plans for a mandatory “vetting” of all judges and said many of them should quit even before the start of such a process.

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plans for a mandatory “vetting” of all judges. Many of them should resign even before the start of such a process, the prime minister said.

Harutyunyan was among the officials invited to the emergency meeting. However, he did not attend it because of being unable to leave the SJC building in downtown Yerevan blockaded by government loyalists.

Two dozen protesters again rallied outside the building on Thursday, demanding the resignation of Harutyunyan as well as judges.

Pashinyan’s calls for the court blockade were denounced as unconstitutional by Armenia’s leading opposition groups. The SJC likewise said in a statement that any pressure on the courts is “unacceptable.”

The SJC was formed just over a year ago in accordance with sweeping constitutional changes enacted in 2015. According to Armenia’s amended constitution, its main mission is to “guarantee the independence of the courts and the judges.”

The council has the power to nominate virtually all new judges appointed by Armenia’s president and parliament. It is also empowered to take disciplinary action against judges or have them terminated altogether.

Harutyunyan, 71, headed the Armenian Constitutional Court before until being elected SJC chairman in February 2018 by the country’s former parliament controlled by Serzh Sargsyan’s Republican Party.

A Communist Party figure in Soviet times, Harutyunyan had been elected in 1990 deputy speaker of Armenia’s first post-Communist parliament. He served as vice-president in the administration of Levon Ter-Petrosian, Armenia’s first president elected in 1991.

Harutyunyan became chairman of the newly established Constitutional Court in 1996 shortly after the post of vice-president was abolished by the Ter-Petrosian administration. The court has rarely handed down rulings challenging the former Armenian presidents.

Dashnaktsutyun Holds Rally, Again Slams Government



(Yerevan – RFE/RL) - The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) accused the government of not delivering on its promises and seeking to establish “one-man rule” instead as it held a rally in Yerevan on Thursday.

“Armenia’s authorities do not have a program or vision for country’s development and a professional team to address challenges facing the country,” Ishkhan Saghatelyan, a leader of the opposition party, told hundreds of supporters who gathered in the city’s Liberty Square.

“Instead of forming a common national agenda, consolidating the society, establishing social solidarity ... the authorities continue to work, live and breathe with the past,” he said.

Saghatelyan deplored Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s latest verbal attacks on his political foes and allegations that some of them are plotting treasonous acts in Nagorno-Karabakh. He claimed that such statements are only destabilizing the political situation and could even “provoke clashes in the country.”

“Stop looking for enemies among your own people,” Saghatelyan said, appealing to the authorities. “Understand that those who do not share your views or criticize you are also the people. Give up [political] shows, populism, demagoguery and intentions to establish one-man rule on behalf of the people through force and threats.”

“Do not repeat the mistakes of which you yourself had accused others in past. Or else, it could be too late. The people’s patience has limits,” he warned.

Another senior Dashnaktsutyun figure, former Agriculture Minister Artur Khachatryan, attacked the government’s economic record. “Where is the [promised] economic revolution?” he said. “I don’t see results of that revolution.”

“They say there are no oligarchs anymore,” Khachatryan went on. “But has the structure of our economy changed? Which company with dominant positions in the market has ceded its positions?”

Khachatryan was one of the two Dashnaktsutyun-affiliated members of Pashinyan’s first cabinet formed in May 2018 following the Armenian velvet revolution. The prime minister sacked them in October, accusing Dashnaktsutyun of secretly collaborating with former President Serzh Sargsyan’s Republican Party (HHK).

Dashnaktsutyun has since been increasingly critical of Pashinyan’s government. The center-left nationalist party, which is particularly influential in the Armenian Diaspora, failed to win any seats in the Armenian parliament in snap general elections held in December.

In a declaration adopted at a congress held late last month, Dashnaktsutyun’s organization in Armenia said that the authorities have failed to achieve “tangible results in any area of public life.” It also joined other opposition groups on Sunday in condemning Pashinyan’s calls for a blockade of all court buildings in the country.

Pashinyan appealed to his supporters to stage such protests on Monday morning following the release from custody of his bitter foe and former President Robert Kocharyan, who is facing corruption and coup charges. He went on to state that many Armenian judges remain linked to “the former corrupt system.”

Dashnaktsutyun, which was allied to Kocharyan during his 1998-2008 rule, criticized his arrest last year on charges stemming from the 2008 post-election violence in Yerevan. Speaking to reporters after Thursday’s rally, one of the party’s veteran leaders, Armen Rustamyan, described the coup charges as “absurd.”

The goal of transitional justice is reaching public solidarity – President of National Assembly

The goal of transitional justice is the establishment of independent judicial system. It's not aimed at further exacerbating the existing problems, but giving solutions and lead to public solidarity, President of the National Assembly of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan said during the parliamentary hearing on transitional justice, entitled "The Perspectives in the Application of Transitional Justice Instruments in Armenia".

Mirzoyan thanked the participants of the hearing for such a representative participation, noting that the issue is one of the most debated topics of the public in the recent days.

Referring to the issues that are most frequently raised, including what is transitional justice, what are its tools and to what extent is it necessary to apply in Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan said, "First, it's necessary to understand why the existing judicial system cannot meet the demands of the citizens of Armenia to ensure justice that will not be questioned and why we should apply the instruments of transitional justice. It's a fact for all of us, it's not a secret that the judicial system has accumulated serious problems throughout years, which not only have not been solved during the past one year, but have become a challenge for us and stand on the path of future democratic development of Armenia like a great rock",



Mirzoyan said, adding that it's impossible to have a full democracy when courts are unable to ensure justice based on the Constitution and laws of Armenia.

"And in this transitional stage, when Armenia is on the path from pseudo-democracy, or as some experts say, from authoritarianism to democracy, when the people finally formed the legislative power which established the executive power, the judicial system continues living according to the rules of the past", the President of the parliament said, emphasizing that the Armenian public has no trust towards the judicial system, which means that it's time to carry our serious and prompt actions.

Ararat Mirzoyan said that he shares the opinion of the international experts referring to the period of applying transitional justice, which is that if transitional justice should be applied, this is the best moment

for it and it shouldn't be done earlier, in haste, and the opposite, there should be no delays.

Referring to the goal of transitional justice, the head of the legislative said, "Today it's obvious that the other two power branches do not influence on the decisions of the judicial system in any way, but at the same time it seems that the judicial system continued being influenced by other circles and this is really a great problem. Therefore, the goal of the transitional justice is establishing an independent judicial system. On the other hand, transitional justice is not aimed at further exacerbating the existing problems, but giving solutions and lead to public solidarity".

Ararat Mirzoyan highlighted correctly assessing the extent of using the toolkits of transitional justice, since under or over-use of it can lead to other undesired consequences.

At the end of the speech President of the National Assembly Ararat Mirzoyan once again thanked the participants of the parliamentary hearing, adding that there will be reports and expert assessments after which people who have something to say, will have the opportunity to do it. Mirzoyan hoped that finally they will reach concrete conclusions.

Yerevan University chief resigns



The long-serving rector of Yerevan State University (YSU), Aram Simonyan, stepped down on May 23 after months of pressure from the Armenian government.

Simonian announced his resignation at a meeting of the top professors of Armenia's oldest and largest university.

"Tensions around the university are not easing and are on the contrary rising fur-

ther," he said in a speech publicized by the YSU administration.

"The country's supreme authorities are alleging that I am clinging to this chair to stay on. That's ridiculous."

"Even if I don't resign today that [resignation] will be engineered

through a violation of the law anyway," he claimed. "I am already aware that they are going to fully change the composition of the [YSU] Board of Trustees so that they can revel in firing me. I will not give them that pleasure."

Simonian has been under mounting pressure to step down since last spring's "velvet

revolution" that toppled Armenia's former government with which he had close political ties. Critics, among them Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, have long accused him of placing YSU under the strong influence of the former ruling Republican Party (HHK).

The 63-year-old historian joined the HHK in 1997, nine years before becoming university rector.

In December, a government body implicated the YSU administration in serious financial irregularities. The Armenian police likewise alleged in February that Simonian has embezzled YSU funds and engaged in other corrupt practices over the past decade.

Simonian, who has still not been formally charged with any crime, rejected the allegations as politically motivated. He said that he will not resign before serving out his current term in office in 2020.

Chinese market is open for Armenian goods, assures PM Pashinyan

The Chinese leadership has assured at the highest level to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan that they are interested in making the Chinese market available for goods produced in Armenia.

“We need to work with our businessmen, including the companies operating in wine, alcoholic drinks and other pro-

ductions, food industry and etc. They expressed very clearly their readiness and political will over all types of Armenian goods, and I think that now it’s necessary to be in constant communication with these potential exporting companies and with our Chinese partners because there are problems with certain standards and etc”, the

Armenian PM said during today’s Cabinet meeting.

The PM told minister of economic development and investments Tigran Khachatryan that it is necessary to understand where there are discrepancies which create technical problems so that the Cabinet will take actions to solve them.

“There is no doubt, I assure

you that the Chinese market is open to our goods, and our businessmen can work on this direction. The only problem, as in all cases, is that there are certain standards, and our businessmen and companies should be able to meet these standards so that we can record a major progress here”, PM Pashinyan said.

Armenia, Italy to cooperate to improve control in criminal investigation



Armenia and Italy will cooperate to improve control in criminal investigation and transfer pricing.

On May 21, Deputy Director General of the Revenue Agency of Italy Paolo Barbantini and Deputy Chairman of SRC signed - in attendance of the chairman of SRC and the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Italy to Armenia - a memorandum of understanding on technical assistance to be shown to the State Revenue Committee within the Tax Inspectors Without Borders Programme.

Chairman of SRC Davit Ananyan emphasized the importance of the cooperation between the two countries and pointed out that active cooperation with the tax administrations of leading countries is among the focal areas of the committee’s strategy, which helps identify challenges and work effectively to improve.

Reforms will be carried out at SRC due to the cooperation established between the two countries. Italy’s tax specialists will be involved for 18 months in audits and tax control processes carried out in Armenia in order to reform the functions.

“We shall transfer Italy’s experience to Armenia in 3 main sectors: transfer pricing, aggressive tax planning and criminal investigation. Practical assistance is the best way to improve the potential of tax administrations. I believe that modern tax service should be able to fight tax evasion, and yet assist taxpayers who are willing to pay tax liabilities. Therefore, it is important to take a balanced approach with respect to all taxpayers,” pointed out Paolo Barbantini, and said that they will exchange experience with Armenian partners also beyond the program.

“Italy is quite developed in detecting eco-

nomical crimes and has a powerful analytic, legal and legislative field. Therefore, a close and continuous cooperation is expected with the Italian partners, who in turn expressed willingness to get familiarized with the experience of Armenia’s State Revenue Committee in electronic management,” mentioned Deputy Chairman of SRC Mikayel Pashayan.

Starting May 22, work discussions will launch with the relevant subdivisions of SRC, as well as with stakeholder administrations based on sector peculiarities.

To discuss criminal investigation, experts and SRC specialists will have meetings with Armenia’s General Prosecutor’s Office, the Investigative Committee, the National Security Service, Main Police Department of Fighting Organized Crime and CB’s Special Monitoring Center. From the SRC, the discussions will be led by Deputy Chairman of SRC Rustam Badasyan and they will cover the relation between tax and other financial crimes, as well as the cooperation between departments in counteracting financial crimes.

It is worth reminding that during February 27-28, the delegation led by Chairman of SRC Davit Ananyan visited Italy to discuss matters of cooperation within the Tax Inspectors Without Borders Programme.



Armenia-made TVs to hit the market soon



Armenia-made TV sets will hit the market soon. The joint Armenian-Lebanese-Syrian International Manufacturing Group (IMG) is introducing its ADAMIAN flat-screen TV sets, Armenpress reports.

“The TV sets will be available in major

stores across the country in a few days,” IMG CEO Ramy Judy told reporters at the company’s assembly plant in Armenia’s Merdzavan.

“We are currently assembling 100-150 sets a day,” he said.

According to the CEO, despite the factory’s inauguration having taken place in December of 2018, they began production only in May, since they were awaiting a governmental customs privilege for imports.

“We were waiting for the government’s issuance of customs privileges, because the price that we promised couldn’t have been provided if we were to pay customs duties. The government granted the privilege in April,” Judy said.

Now, the home appliances manufacturer is importing equipment and the TVs are being assembled in Armenia. The company seeks further development.

IMG is planning to start assembling air conditioners, washing machines and refrigerators in the future. The Armenian-made ACs, fridges and washing machines will be marketed under the AIO brand. The home appliances will also be exported.

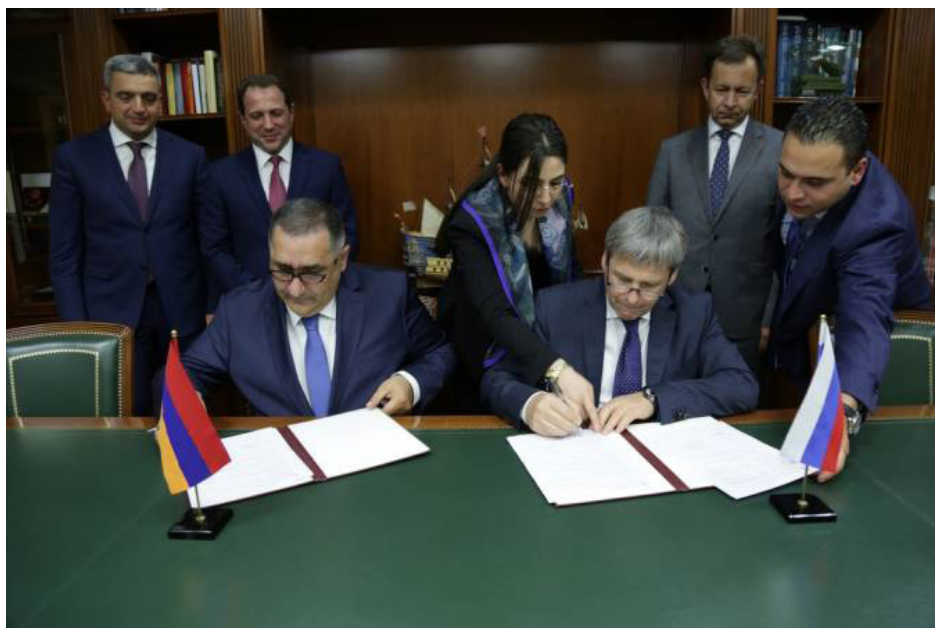
Armenian “Zinar” and Russian “Voentorg” companies sign memorandum of cooperation

Defense Minister of Armenia Davit Tonoyan received the delegation of Russian Defense Ministry’s “Voentorg” company led by its executive director Vladimir Pavlov.

As Noyan Tapan was informed from the press service of the Defense Ministry of Armenia, a broad scope of issues referring to bilateral cooperation was discussed during the meeting.

Based on the results of the meeting, a memorandum of cooperation was signed between “Zinar” company of the Armenian Defense Ministry and “Voentorg” company of the Russian Defense Ministry.

In the sidelines of the working visit, the Russian delegation also visited the Russian 102 military base and Yerevan Plant of Mathematical Machines.



We are convinced we will succeed in building a reliable judicial system in close cooperation with our international partners - PM meets with Armenia-accredited ambassadors



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Armenia-accredited ambassadors of foreign States and organizations on May 24, Noyan Tapan was informed from the Office of the Prime Minister.

Greeting the foreign diplomats, the Premier said he was pleased with the opportunity to hold such a meeting. Nikol Pashinyan pointed out that a year after the formation of his government, he deemed it expedient to impart the past one year's results, problems and challenges with our international partners.

Presenting his assessment of the government's year-long efforts, Nikol Pashinyan first referred to economic challenges, dwelling on the solutions and the results recorded so far.

"The first problem we had in terms of economics was to maintain macroeconomic stability. Not without some difficulty, we were able to solve this problem because in September last year, just three months after the revolution, we approached the threshold of recession and the economic situation could be strained. But we managed to overcome these negative trends, and we had a 7.1% gross domestic product growth in the first quarter of this year.

I must say that although this growth is pleasing to us, we understand that the statistics is a little bit lower for the proposed economic revolution. At least we should try to increase the rate of growth by 2-3%. As an exciting trend in the economy, I would highlight the reduction of the black econ-

omy. In fact, 51,000 new jobs appeared in Armenia over the past one year. These are the jobs that employers themselves declared to tax authorities, that is, they are not the result of an analysis, as often our political rivals try to present themselves, but specific figures stated by business entities that have led to fiscal liabilities.

Our estimation is that 1/5 of these 51,000 jobs were generated during the past year. This makes some 10,000 jobs, which I think is not a bad indicator.

The next index that I would like to mention is the over-fulfillment of the State budget revenue target. We have already declared that this year the State budget receipts will boast a bump of 62 billion drams, which makes USD 130 million. And here, too, as I first stated it, our opponents reacted that not until by the end of year we could see whether this was true or not.

But I would like to say that we actually made a little cunning: we already have that amount as a matter of fact. And there is no doubt that the State budget surplus will be much bigger by the end of this year.

Trade is the next indicator that I would like to mention. 84 million more cash-register receipts have been recorded in our country since last May, which means that more transactions have been made out of shade, which accounts for the bulk of our extra budgetary revenues.

Foreign investment is the biggest challenge we are facing today in the economy. We do our best to make our country more

attractive for foreign investment. But there is also conviction and understanding that without a truly independent judiciary we will not be able to address this problem because any investor wants to safeguard his or her investment, and such guarantees can only be provided by a truly independent judicial system," the Head of Government said.

Coming to his political achievements, Prime Minister Pashinyan singled out 2 main results. "The first is that we have been able to ensure stability and normal democratic developments in our country and, ultimately, we held extraordinary parliamentary elections that were assessed by the international community as free, fair, democratic, and transparent

This was unprecedented at least in terms of parliamentary elections. As regards the parliamentary elections, I can say that I myself hoped that the number of political forces represented in Parliament would be much greater, but people chose the way they chose, and I think that today the political palette is represented truly there. And we consider that our greatest political achievement is that we were able to hold free, fair and democratic elections.

I repeatedly emphasized in my speeches and articles when I was still an opposition politician that the greatest mission of a democratic government is not only to sweep to power through free and fair elections, but also to leave power through free and fair elections. And in this regard, I think we cannot and will not deviate from this vision because I have repeatedly counted it as my biggest political mission. It is now just a matter of political process and people's determination," Nikol Pashinyan said.

According to the Prime Minister, stability was achieved in foreign policy, too. "Our relations continue to be of strategic nature with the Russian Federation, we are a member and the presiding country in the Eurasian Economic Union. We succeeded in finding specific solutions within the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and I believe that our relations in the CSTO and the Russian Federation are developing normally.

We managed to develop our relations with the European Union as well. We are at the final stage of the roadmap to the Compre-

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hensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, which will be finalized in the coming weeks and we will be working in that direction.

We have established normal relationships with our other partners. We managed to maintain and develop a good atmosphere with our immediate neighbors - Iran, Georgia. We have established a very good working atmosphere with the People's Republic of China.

During this time, the Francophonie Summit was held in Armenia, which was a true success for both the Republic of Armenia and our government. I paid an official visit to the Federal Republic of Germany. I was in France on a working visit and, of course, in Brussels on several occasions - in the Council of Europe.

I think that a good atmosphere has been shaped to develop our future relationships in the Eurasian continent.

We are also building normal relationships with the United States. The strategic dialogue with the United States kicked off recently, and we hope and are convinced that we will have good results there.

We are developing active relationships with other partners: we work very closely with the United Arab Emirates, India and our European partners, and we are convinced that this constructive atmosphere will be maintained."

Prime Minister Pashinyan next referred to the situation in the judiciary, highlighting the imperative of reforms to be carried out in that field and the importance of cooperation with international partners.

"Indeed, the judicial system is our biggest problem today. You know that specific events have taken place recently and are still happening. The political bottleneck that faced the government during the past year, and I personally encountered the same reality that our public opinion, our society holds the government responsible for all irregular judicial decisions.

Although I have repeatedly made it clear that I am not involved in judicial processes and have no desire to do so, society keeps putting the blame on the government for all judicial decisions, considering that the court rulings comply with the Prime Minister's personal decisions. This is a very complex inertia inherited from the past. At times, the government is forced to simply disassociate itself from such rulings because otherwise it can face a certain crisis of confidence.

And, of course, at this stage, we hope to cooperate closely with our international



partners to have a truly independent judiciary in Armenia because I have long been analyzing what is the reason for such an attitude and such a public perception. And it was clear to me that there is some disbalance in the current situation.

This imbalance is expressed as follows: today the National Assembly represents the people and reflects the people's choice. I mean that the incumbent MPs are in the National Assembly simply because the voters have opted for the political force represented by these people.

I am now Prime Minister for a simple reason that I was first nominated as Prime Minister by the political force which won the absolute majority of the votes. From a political point of view, one particular issue arises, namely who is represented by the judiciary after the revolution and whose power it is exercising in the Republic of Armenia.

I say this because the second and unchangeable article of the Constitution of Armenia states that in the Republic of Armenia, the power belongs to the people. The people shall exercise their power through free elections, referenda, as well as through state and local self-government bodies and officials provided for by the Constitution.

The courts are among those public bodies prescribed by the Constitution, and our Constitution clearly provides that these State institutions should be directly associated with the people, that is, they should have the mandate and authority to act on behalf of the people. And the problem is that, as a matter of fact, we have not had such a situation during last year's political developments. And due to this, court rulings are causing discontent in our society; the public simply does not have trust in the

judicial system and this can become a permanent source of crisis.

I am convinced that the time has come to deal with this problem, but I am also convinced that we cannot reproduce the previous judicial system we had.

I have written about it for many years and have even been condemned by that judicial system and my conviction is that political changes will be absolutely pointless if we do not build a truly independent judicial system, the rulings of which could be accepted as decisions made on behalf of the Republic of Armenia and its people. However, there is no such an atmosphere in the country as of yet. Therefore, considering that the executive power enjoys the people's trust in Armenia, I feel that the time has come either for the judicial power to enjoy the people's trust.

I do not mean the government's trust in the judiciary, but the people's trust, because should the government wish to have an abiding judicial system in Armenia, it would be free to do so, especially as the judicial system used to work under conditions when there was a perfect trust between the government and the judiciary. But this way is unacceptable to us, because it is against the values on which we have been implementing changes in Armenia. And we hope and are confident that we will succeed in building a reliable judicial system in close cooperation with our international partners," Nikol Pashinyan said.

In conclusion, the Prime Minister answered the questions asked by the ambassadors in attendance, which bore on the proposed judicial reform, transitional justice, the structural changes within the system of governance, the ongoing public administration reform, etc.

Federica Mogherini: EU is a crucial partner for Armenia's reform agenda



Armenia has stepped up its efforts to reinforce and enhance its partnership with the EU and acknowledged the significant role the EU can play in the smooth implementation of the country's reform agenda, the European Union said in a report on developments in Armenia and EU-Armenia relations between June 2018 and early May 2019. The report comes ahead of the EU-Armenia Partnership Council on 13 June.

The EU added, however, that the reform process remains at an early stage. The government's roadmap for the implementation of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement will be an important instrument in advancing reform plans.

"The European Union has been and will continue be the biggest supporter of the Armenian government's ambitious reform plan, which is consolidating democracy, the rule of law and promoting human rights in the country", said the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini.

"Armenia is an important partner for the European Union, and together we are focused on implementing our wide-reaching bilateral agreement, as well as delivering

concrete results within the Eastern Partnership. We always keep firmly in mind that our aim is bringing tangible benefits to our citizens," she added.

"The EU and Armenia are strong partners and we stand ready to support concrete reforms, including in the area of justice and education, which are key for the people", said the Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn.

"The swift implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement offers new economic opportunities for all Armenian citizens," Commissioner Hahn noted.

After the political changes in Armenia last year, early parliamentary elections were held in December 2018. The EU was the largest single contributor to the elections, providing technical equipment and supporting actions in favour of democracy and civic participation. According to the International Elections Observation Mission, the elections respected fundamental freedoms and enjoyed broad public trust. In addition, the Government highlighted the need for independence, accountability and efficiency of the judiciary.

In September 2018, the EU and Armenia launched the EU-Armenia Strategic

Policy Dialogue in the Justice Sector. The EU stands ready to support reform in this crucial field. Total EU-Armenia trade increased by 15% over the past year reaching a total value of €1.1 billion. Armenia benefits from the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences plus (GSP+), which is a special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance. More than 96% of EU imports eligible for GSP+ preferences from Armenia entered the EU with zero duties in 2017.

The extension of the core Trans European Transport Network (TEN-T) to Armenia was finalized in November 2018. The Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan was published in January 2019 and also includes road safety as one of its priorities. An EU-Armenia Education Policy Dialogue was inaugurated in March 2019 to support the reform in the education sector.

Thanks to the support of the Erasmus+ capacity building projects, Armenian universities have been able to upgrade their administrative and organizational structures and modernize study courses. More than 2,700 students and university professors have benefited from EU-Armenia academic exchanges and mobility projects through Erasmus+ since 2015.

At the end of 2018, a new 'EU4Innovation' programme worth €23 million was launched aimed at matching the skills of university graduates with the requirements of the labour market. The programme will create a EU4Innovation Centre for universities and an EU Convergence Centre to bring together universities and private sector, complemented by an incubator for technology start-ups.

The EU is the biggest provider of financial support and a key reform partner in Armenia. The EU stands ready to continue engaging in Armenia and provide support through political dialogue, financial and technical assistance, to support the Armenian government ambitious reforms for the benefit of the citizens of Armenia and EU-Armenia cooperation.

Armenia committed to alleviating sufferings of the populations in areas affected by crisis



Armenia has shown consistent commitment to help alleviate the sufferings of the populations in areas affected by crisis, Armenia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Mher Margaryan said at a UN Security Council open debate on "Protection of civilians in armed conflicts."

He said the commitment is reflected in Armenia's national humanitarian mission in Syria in response to the request of the Syrian authorities and the Armenian community.

"Currently, demining specialists from Armenia operate in the southern communities of Aleppo and our medical team provides assistance in four hospitals, as well as in a medical facility under the Armenian Relief Cross in Aleppo," Mher Margaryan said.

"Promoting the norms of international humanitarian law and raising awareness in this regard is an important element in Armenia's security sector governance. International humanitarian law is incorporated in the curricula of Armenia's military educational institutions," Armenia's Permanent Representative said.

He added that Armenia highly appreciates the cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross in implementation of training projects and reaching out to the people affected by conflicts, who are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Margaryan added that the civilian population of Nagorno Karabakh and the bordering regions of Armenia have been consistently exposed to serious humanitarian risks.

"The aggression of Azerbaijan against Nagorno Karabakh in April 2016 was accompanied with grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including barbaric acts commensurate to war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as beheadings, mutilations and other atrocity crimes. Attacks and indiscriminate shelling, including of a school building, in-

flicted losses amongst the civilian population, including children and elderly," he stated, urging the international community to condemn any pursuit of a military solution to conflict situations.

"We reject any alternative to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The 1994/95 cease-fire agreements, signed by Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, and Armenia constitute the foundation of the cessation of hostilities. Armenia urges Azerbaijan to undertake genuine steps in order to create conditions conducive to the advancement of the peace process. Azerbaijan should bring to an end the persistent war mongering and cultivation of hatred and intolerance against Armenians and instead invest real efforts in promoting a culture of peace, as well as respect for human rights," Mher Margaryan stated.

He emphasized that Armenia welcomes the support of the international community, of the United Nations and of the Secretary General rendered to the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmanship in the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Italian MP promises to campaign for international recognition of Armenian Genocide



Representative of Italy's parliamentary majority Fabio Massimo Castaldo, who is also the Vice President of the European Parliament, has announced that he is proud of his contribution to the Armenian Genocide recognition by the Italian parliament.

In a meeting with the Lebanese community in Rome he noted that "Five Star Movement", which has the majority seats in the legislative, is the initiator of Arme-

nian Genocide condemnation by the Chamber of Deputies of Italy and the call addressed to the Government to recognize it, as well as raising the necessity of giving an international importance to the issue. According to him, in the past the authorities of Italy attached more importance to relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan rather than justice, but the majority political force in the legislative now is committed to the policy of condemning the Armenian Genocide and demanding Turkey to recognize it.

"We will be heard also at the European Parliament in raising the just cause of the Armenian people", ARMENPRESS reports Fabio Massimo as saying.

The Chamber of Deputies (lower house of parliament) of Italy adopted a Resolution on April 10 calling on the Government to "officially recognize the Armenian Geno-

cide" and give an international assessment to the issue. The Resolution was adopted with 382 votes in favor, 0 against and 43 abstentions.

In 2000 the Italian Chamber of Deputies adopted a resolution calling on the government to pursue the weakening of the tensions between the peoples and minorities in the region, with the aim of creating conditions for the peaceful coexistence and human rights protection. In this regard, the assessment was more general and did not contain a message on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The decision of April 10, 2019 has a targeted address. It calls on the Italian government to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide and give it an international importance.

‘Armenia is a country that pursues freedom of religion, freedom of belief and conscience’, says PM

Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan attended the opening of a conference on freedom of religion or belief in Armenia, Georgia and around the world, the PM’s Office told Noyan Tapan.

Armenian Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Netherlands to Armenia and Georgia Johannes Douma, UN Resident Coordinator for Armenia Shombi Sharp, Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) Director General Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan and others participated in the event.

Addressing the conference participants, Prime Minister Pashinyan said: “It should be noted that freedom of religion is one of the most important freedoms because I am at least convinced that a person believing in God first of all believes in himself. Consequently, freedom of religion, freedom to believe in God is first of all the freedom of an individual to believe in himself.

Of course, there are such people who believe in themselves, on the contrary, by not believing in God. But in the same way, the human being becomes a key player in the process of self-confidence. This is very important. I mean that freedom of religion is human being’s freedom.

Freedom of religion is one of the most important freedoms, and it relates directly to all those values that are universally recognized by mankind - whether democracy, transparency, human rights, freedoms, justice or the like. In this regard, I am pleased to note that the Republic of Armenia is a country that is pursuing freedom of religion, freedom of belief and conscience. And especially, the New Armenia is fully committed to these values. The fact that the national minorities feel comfortable in Armenia is a vivid evidence of what I just said. I mean that providing guarantees for the preservation of national, religious minorities’ identity in Armenia is a matter of principled approach for the Government. They should feel free to preserve, develop and be proud of their ethnic identity.

Generally speaking, religion and inter-religious relations are perhaps the most important topic because it has long been ac-



cepted that the differences between religion and religious perceptions are usually separated from each other. But we consider this situation quite strange also because most of the popular or major religions originate from the same God. And this makes us say that the dividing lines do not emanate from people who deal with religions but from their interpretation, because our faith and conviction is that religion is actually supposed to unite peoples; religion is indeed for peace and harmony; religion is in fact a way to happiness.

And if it is true that the dividing lines were drawn by virtue of religious doctrines, that is, by giving different interpretations, then dividing lines can be removed in the same way by those who gave such interpretations with new approaches, and the most important precondition here is mutual respect for others’ beliefs, emotions, ideologies and perceptions. Bearing this in mind, I attach special importance to this forum which highlights the need for mutual respect. Conferences like this should help us come to a common interpretation of the general idea of religious consciousness of peace, freedom, love and harmony.

I do believe that this is possible. I know how challenging it is, but no one should beware of hardships, especially in New Armenia. I want the forum to pursue this

difficult task with vehemence and courage. Thank you.”

* * *

The aim of the annual conference is to provide comprehensive discussions between Armenian, Georgian and international partners on developments and challenges in the field of freedom of religion and belief, strengthening Armenian-Georgian ties and promoting international cooperation. It serves as a platform where key stakeholders from different angles discuss issues of freedom, situation and development of freedom of religion and belief in the world, in Armenia, in Georgia, as well as develop appropriate recommendations for its improvement.

The forum will be addressed by: UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shahid (OSCE / ODIHR) Senior Adviser on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Kishan Manocha, Senior Advisor to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the South Caucasus Vladimir Shkolnikov, Director of the Religious Council attached to the Office of Public Defender of Georgia Beka Mindiasvili, Director of the Institute for Tolerance and Diversity Mariam Gvattadze, Vice-President of RA National Assembly Standing Committee on Education Hovhannes Hovhannisyann and other experts specialized in this field.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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



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Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

Chiron, otherwise known as the wounded healer, has been in your sign since February. It is probable that you have been more than normally focused on your health during the spring and that may continue a while longer. You probably have a desire to fix whatever health issues are interfering with you so you can get on with your life. It is a timely and a right thing to do..



Leo (July 22–August 21)

Your daily routines, along with those with whom you work, may present challenges this week. You may encounter a stumbling block in your path. One part of your mind wants to give up. But the better part of you knows this is a “test” of your intentions. Facing it and overcoming the trial will make you stronger and you will be more confident on the other side. Go for it!



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

You may be tempted to spend more money than you have this week or make other impulsive moves that you might regret later. This is a good period to work on projects that will improve your life in the future.



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

Whatever you do in the territories of short distance travels, connecting with siblings and roommates, or engaging neighbors is favored at this time. Education, studying, or teaching would be satisfying. An acquaintance may offer you a hint or suggestion that is absolutely the one thing you need to hear.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

You may need to concentrate in order to avoid critics, whether they be internal or external. Instead of blame, use the discipline to tackle a project that requires concentration. Avoid contracts and business negotiations right now because misunderstandings may develop.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

There are elements of obsessive thinking and criticism involved in this week's interactions. Be intentional about keeping an open mind and don't insist on a black and white answer. It is possible someone is demanding this from you, but you can resist falling into that trap.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Please see the lead paragraph because Mercury is your ruler. You may be hither and thither, scattering yourself everywhere, talking with everyone. Use discipline with your mind and activities in order to accomplish what you really need. These aspects can send you all around the block without gaining any traction.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

This is a good week for introspection and contemplation. Meditation, counseling, and/or journaling may prove useful. You have a need to dig through the mental chatter and find what is real within yourself.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

Beware of the tendency to obsess and worry over matters that may never happen. You are tempted to see the world through a dark lens this week and you may think that is the true version. It's more likely that the pessimistic view is extreme. Don't ruminate. Do what you can and then let it go.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Chronic health issues may require attention this week. Focus your attention on that which gives you a sense of peace, comfort, and freedom from the insanity of this mundane world. You will feel better instantly.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

Chiron is moving slowly through your own 6th house of health over the next 7 years. You may find yourself physically troubled by dis-eases that are hard to diagnose. Perhaps the best healers for you during these years will be alternative, such as homeopaths and/or acupuncturists. Allergies may develop, especially to chemicals.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Give attention to experiences that seem like “coincidences,” because they offer a message. Listen carefully for that small voice that whispers in your ear. Aspects favor play, fun, love and romance. If you spend time with children it will be meaningful.

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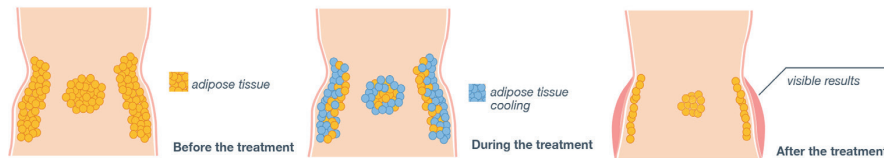
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