

## Armenian Parliament Approves New Government Program



*Armenia - Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan presents his government's policy program to the parliament, 7 June 2018.*

In what amounted to a vote of confidence, the National Assembly approved on June 7 the new Armenian government's comprehensive policy program which calls for fresh parliamentary elections, tough anti-corruption measures and sweeping reforms.

The 26-page program was backed by 62 votes to 39 following a debate during which Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was strongly criticized by deputies representing the former ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK).

The HHK, which is headed by former President and Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan, still has the largest parliamentary faction

despite having narrowly lost its absolute majority in the 105-seat legislature after a series of defections from its ranks.

The vast majority of the remaining 52 HHK deputies voted against the government program. Still, the party leadership made sure that other members of its faction back the document. The faction leader, Vahram Baghdasaryan, said just before the vote that the HHK does not want to "obstruct the work of the government."

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## Russia will respect a decision on Karabakh's return to negotiations

(Yerevan – RFE /RL) Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov praised the current state of Russian-Armenian relations after holding what he described as "good" talks with his new Armenian counterpart Zohrab Mnatsakanyan in Moscow on June 7.

"We held good, constructive and trustworthy negotiations in the spirit of allied relations binding our states," Lavrov told a joint news briefing following the meeting.

"I would like to express my satisfaction with the results of the negotiations which I am sure will contribute to the further advancement of allied relations between Russia and Armenia," he said.

Lavrov said he and Mnatsakanyan discussed, among other things, commercial ties between their nations. "Russia remains Armenia's leading [trading] partner," he said. "Our trade grew by 30 percent last year. This positive dynamic continued into this year. Growth [in bilateral trade] reached nearly 40 percent in the first quarter."

"We closely cooperate and coordinate our actions in the international arena," added the chief Russian diplomat.



"Our relations really have a quite strong foundation," Mnatsakanyan said, for his part. He reaffirmed the new Armenian government's stated commitment to deepening them further.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly said in recent weeks that he will not pull Armenia out of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization despite his criticism of the two Russian-led blocs voiced in the past.

Pashinyan assured Russian President Vladimir Putin that Armenia will remain allied to Russia during his tenure when they met for the first time in Sochi on May 14. For his part, Putin told Pashinyan that he regards Armenia as "our clos-

est partner and ally in the region."

Lavrov spoke of "important agreements" reached by Putin and Pashinyan in the Russian Black Sea city. But he did not elaborate.

Pashinyan's cabinet underlined the "strategic and allied" character of Russian-Armenia ties in its policy program debated by the Armenian parliament on Thursday. The program says that military cooperation with Russia will remain an "important component" of Armenia's national security strategy.

The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was also on the agenda of Lavrov's talks with Mnatsakanyan. The Russian minister said that Moscow will continue to seek a peaceful settlement

of the dispute together with the two other mediating powers, the United States and France.

The Russian, U.S. and French diplomats co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group are due to visit Yerevan next week for what will be their first face-to-face contacts with the new Armenian leadership.

Speaking during Thursday's parliament debate, Pashinyan renewed his calls for Karabakh's direct involvement in Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks. He claimed that he has no mandate to "negotiate on behalf of the Karabakh people." The Armenian premier said at the same time that he is "ready to negotiate Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev."

Official Baku was quick to denounce Pashinyan's remarks and reiterate that it will not directly negotiate with the Karabakh Armenians. An Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Karabakh is an Azerbaijani territory occupied by Armenia.

Lavrov said in this regard: "If Baku and Yerevan decide that Karabakh must return as a negotiating party Russia as well as the two other co-chairs of the Minsk Group will support that decision"

## Azerbaijan fails to lead OSCE mission to its front-line positions



On June 8, in accordance with the arrangement reached with the authorities of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh Republic), the OSCE Mission conducted a planned monitoring of the ceasefire regime on the Line of Contact between the armed forces of Artsakh and Azerbaijan, to the northeast from Martakert town.

From the positions of the Defense Army of the Republic of Artsakh, the monitoring was conducted by Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk and his Field Assistant Mihail Olaru (Moldova).

From the opposite side of the Line of Contact, the monitoring was conducted by Field Assistant to the Personal Representative of the OSCE CiO Ognjen Jovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Personal Assistant to the CiO Personal Representative Simon Tiller (Great Britain).

The monitoring passed in accordance with the agreed schedule. However, the Azerbaijani side did not lead the OSCE mission to its front-line positions.

From the Artsakh side, the monitoring mission was accompanied by representatives of the Republic of Artsakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense.

## Armenia's Sevan Startup Summit to Take Place in July 2018

Sevan Startup Summit 2018 will take place on 22 – 29 July 2018 at Lake Sevan in Armenia, TechRasa reports.

It is the first outdoor campsite-based forum that fosters intensive deal-making and immersive conversations about the most burning topics in entrepreneurship today. The summit attracts leading Angels, Venture Capitalists, Entrepreneurs and Policy Makers willing to join their peers in an intimate setting to think, act and transform their environment via entrepreneurship.

Sevan Startup Summit 2018, the Gala event of all the Summits held this year, will be organized at the shore of Lake Sevan. After two successful international Summits in the UAE and India held earlier this year, the organizers are getting ready for the Gala event. It will gather about 1000 entrepreneurs from all over the globe and build a new bridge for cooperation. From July 22nd to 29th the participants will live in tents and share common lifestyle, which



as practice shows, leads to more constructive cooperation.

Startups, based on their stage of development will be distributed between starter and booster programmes, after which based on the field of operation will be distributed into tracks. The winner of each track will win \$1,500 and get a chance to take part in Starter Big Battle and Booster Final Battle. The prize fund of the Summit will reach \$50,000.

The Summit 2018 includes a week-long

micro-acceleration programme with the investment fund of \$100,000, supplemented by a series of deep-topic workshops for qualified startups, introductory sessions for aspiring entrepreneurs, and dialogues with inspiring leaders.

Among the announced speakers so far are Alexander Galitsky (managing partner at Almaz Capital ) who was numerous times honored as the most influential person in the Russian IT and Internet industry by Forbes, Rouben Vardanyan (co-founder of FAST – Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology and IDEA Foundation) an Armenian-Russian impact investor and social entrepreneur known both for his financial projects as well as his deep reaching philanthropic programs, Eli Talmor (professor at London Business School and the founder of Institute of Private Equity) one of the members of the nomination committee for the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences and many other influential individuals.

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The government program's rejection by the parliament would have led to pre-term general elections early next month.

The program says that the current National Assembly "does not reflect the real political mood of the people of Armenia" in the wake of a democratic revolution that brought down the country's previous, HHK-led government this spring. It says "truly free, fair and democratic elections" must therefore be held "within one year at the latest."

Shortly after being elected prime minister on May 8, Pashinyan predicted that such polls will likely be held by the end of this year. His government's plan of actions suggests that he may be ready to wait until next spring.

In an hour-long introductory speech delivered in the parliament, Pashinyan said his political team would greatly benefit from the early conduct of the elections but is ready to delay them by several months so that other political forces have more time to prepare for them. He also cited the need to enact major amendments to Ar-

menia's Electoral Code.

The popular premier, who led the recent protest movement, declined to specify possible election dates.

The fresh elections are also supported by businessman Gagik Tsarukyan's alliance and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), Pashinyan's coalition partners. A senior HHK representative said last week that Serzh Sargsyan's party is ready to discuss the idea in principle even though other party figures have spoken out against it.

The program approved by lawmakers commits Pashinyan's cabinet to strengthening the rule of law, eradicating widespread corruption, and achieving "substantial" and "inclusive" economic growth. It says that the government will strive to raise living standards by breaking up economic monopolies, tackling tax evasion, creating "the same rules of the game" for all businesses.

The program also envisages the creation of a new anti-corruption body that will have law-enforcement powers.

"I said at a recent meeting with a group of entrepreneurs and want

to repeat that all businesspeople in Armenia are now exempt from all kinds of corrupt obligations [to state officials,]" declared Pashinyan. "Any prosecutor, police chief, tax inspector or minister who will try to grab a share in a business or impose a "duty" on any business owner will be my personal enemy and will have to brace for a crushing blow from the state and the law."

"The system of economic monopolies is living its last days in Armenia ... Everyone will be taxed in the same way and by the same laws," he told lawmakers.

His cabinet's action plan contains no economic growth, poverty reduction or public spending targets. HHK deputies pounced on this fact in their strong criticism of the document.

Eduard Sharmazanov, a deputy parliament speaker and the chief HHK spokesman, described it as a mere "collection of dreams and wishes" lacking mechanisms for their implementation. "Our government handed over to your government an economy that grew by 7.5 percent [in 2017,]" he said. "In your program I see no economic targets."

Baghdasaryan accused the new government of "unprofessionalism," saying that it does not know "the real state of affairs in the economy."

Pashinyan countered that that the previous governments set economic targets that "did not materialize as a rule." "Don't worry, this government will not fail," he told HHK deputies. "The people will not fail. The revolution will not fail."

Naira Zohrabyan, a senior member of the Tsarukyan Bloc, rejected the HHK criticism in even stronger terms. She accused the country's former leadership of rigging economic data and failing to attract large-scale investments promised by it.

Zohrabyan's speech provoked furious verbal exchanges between some HHK and Tsarukyan Bloc deputies. Parliament speaker Ara Babloyan and vice-speaker Arpine Hovannisyan repeatedly urged them to stop trading insults.

Dashnaktsutyun leader Armen Rustamyan also defended the government program. He insisted that Pashinyan's government is committed to "eliminating hurdles hampering our progress."



## Arrested Yerevan Protesters Set Free

Five residents of a Yerevan neighborhood who clashed with riot police during a hostage crisis in 2016 have been released from custody.

The Sari Tagh neighborhood overlooks a police base in the city's Erebuni district which was seized by radical opposition gunmen demanding the resignation of then President Serzh Sargsyan and the release of the leader of their Founding Parliament movement, Zhirayr Sefilian. Three police officers were killed before the gunmen laid down their weapons at the end of a two-week standoff with Armenian security forces.

During the standoff several dozen male residents of Sari Tagh protested against a police blockage of roads leading to their blue-collar neighborhood imposed for security reasons. They also voiced support for the armed oppositionists holed up in the Erebuni police facility.

The protesters clashed with police officers deployed in Sari Tagh in July 2016. Ten of them were subsequently arrested and charged with assaulting law-en-



forcement officers, a crime punishable by between 5 and 10 years in prison. They went on trial last year, denying any wrongdoing.

A Yerevan court on Thursday agreed to free one of the defendants pending the outcome of the continuing trial. Four other defendants were set free on Friday.

One of them, Harutiu Torosyan, attributed their release to the recent change of government in Armenia. He also said that he will continue to plead not guilty to the accusations.

Relatives and lawyers of the five other defendants hope that they too will be set free in the coming days.

## Armenia's new deal with EU compatible with EAEU membership – FM



The Eurasian Economic Union is an important mechanism for development and we use it, Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan said in an interview with Russian Kommersant daily.

According to him, it's a good format for

cooperation between partners. "It provides us with access to large markets, enables us to work freely in partner countries and co-operate on a wide range of domains.

The Foreign Minister added that Armenia uses different mechanisms of cooperation

to strengthen the security architecture and levers of the country's development.

"We have not taken any steps that would serve the development of relations with a certain country at the cost of relations with others. We have spoken openly about the level of our relations with Russia. We have dialogue with the US and relations with the European Union. At the same time we enjoy deepest partnership with Russia. And the stronger we stand on our feet, the more confident and reliable we'll be for all those we have relations with, and this first of all applies to Russia," he said.

Speaking about the Eastern Partnership Program, Minister Mnatsakanyan said "it's a platform of cooperation and dialogue."

"For us it is a mechanism and tool for the consolidation of the process of Armenia's development," he added.

The Foreign Minister noted that Armenia's new agreement with the European Union is compatible with EAEU membership.

"We are confident that strong and stable Armenia is a good partner," he stated.

## Armenian PM says can't reserve the right to negotiate on behalf of the people of Artsakh

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan says he's ready to negotiate with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, but feels obliged to seek to raise the effectiveness of the talks.

Negotiations on the Karabakh conflict settlement cannot be full-fledged and effective as long as one of the full parties to the conflict – the Republic of Artsakh – is not participating in the negotiations, the Prime Minister said as he presented the government program at the National Assembly.

He noted that the approach includes no novelty, and it is simply a "well-forgotten past."

The fact that Artsakh is a full-fledged party to the talks was confirmed at the OSCE Budapest summit in 1994, the Prime Minister said and reminded that negotiations were being conducted in that format up until 1998.

After 1998 representatives of the Republic of Armenia started negotiating on behalf of Nagorno Karabakh as well. Nikol Pashinyan says whether the decision was correct or not, the authorities have had grounds to do so.

"Before coming to Armenia Robert Kocharyan was the elected President of Nagorno Karabakh, while Serzh Sargsyan was an or-



ganizer of Artsakh's self-defense movement. Therefore, they could probably have a mandate to negotiate on behalf of Nagorno Karabakh, irrespective of how we see it. I cannot do the same. I cannot retain the right to hold negotiations on behalf of the people of Artsakh., because I have no legal, political or moral bases for it," Nikol Pashinyan stated.

"The people of Nagorno Karabakh do not participate in elections in Armenia, do not participate in the formation of the authorities in Armenia. Instead, they have their own authorities, their National Assembly, Government and President and the people of Artsakh can only be represented by a legit-

imate delegate," he said.

He noted that every time the issue of Artsakh's participation in the negotiations comes to the agenda, Azerbaijan insists that representatives of the so-called Azerbaijani community of Nagorno Karabakh should participate as a separate party.

"This a false argument, because the political status of Azerbaijanis who once lived in Nagorno Karabakh has not changed as a result of the conflict. Both before and after the conflict they remain citizens of Azerbaijan, and continue to participate in elections taking place in Azerbaijan, including the presidential elections. This means the President of Azerbaijan par-

ticipates in the negotiations on the basis of a mandate granted by those people, i.e. they are already involved in the negotiations in the face of the incumbent President," Pashinyan added.

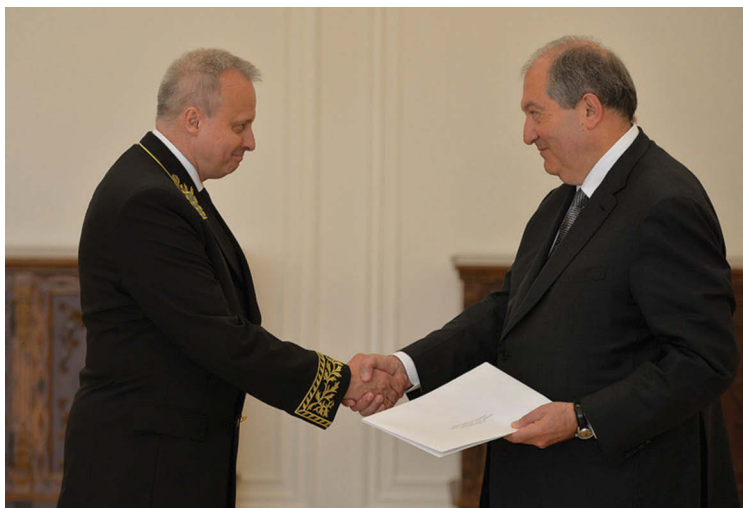
The Prime Minister reiterated the readiness to negotiate with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev within the framework of the OSCE misnk Group co-chairmanship, but feels obliged to do his best to raise the effectiveness of the talks "if we are negotiating to reach a solution rather than for the sake of negotiating."

Nikol Pashinyan stressed the importance of implementing past agreements, because, he said, it will be inconvenient to negotiate new agreements, if the previous ones have not been called to life.

Nevertheless, he said "we'll stick to a constructive approach in the negotiation process on the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, thus contributing to the reinforcement of stability and security in the region and the world."

He stressed that there is no military solution to the Karabakh conflict, but underlined that any adventurism on the part of the rival will face a "crushing" response of the Armenian Armed Forces and the entire nation.

## Russia's new Ambassador presents credentials to Armenian President



The newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipoten-

tiary of the Russian Federation Sergei Kopirkin presented his credentials to President Armen Sarkissian on June 7.

The President of Armenia congratulated the newly appointed Ambassador and wished him success in his responsible mission. President Sarkissian expressed confidence that Ambassador Kopirkin during his tenure will do his best to further strengthen and develop the Armenian-Russian cooperation based on the historically formed friendship. President Sarkissian expressed readiness to assist the Ambassador in all his undertakings which will be aimed at the deepening of the bilateral relations.

Ambassador Kopirkin conveyed to the President of Armenia warm greetings of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. He assured that he would do his best to further deepen and strengthen strategic partnership of the two countries.

At the meeting, which took place after the ceremony of presenting credentials, the parties underscored that relations of the two strategic partners develop by year and encompass new areas.



## Pashinyan calls for “new Impetus” to Armenian-Iranian ties

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reaffirmed on June 8 his government's stated intention to maintain and even deepen Armenia's cordial relations with neighboring Iran.

“We will make utmost efforts to further develop bilateral partnership,” Pashinyan told the Iranian ambassador in Yerevan, Seyed Kazem Sajjad.

“We are interested in giving new impetus to Armenian-Iranian ties on the basis of mutual interests,” he said in remarks publicized by his press office.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani likewise called for closer ties between the two nations when he phoned Pashinyan a week after the latter was elected Armenia's prime minister on May 8. An official Armenian readout of the phone call said the two leaders agreed to “further deepen mutually beneficial partnership in all areas.”

A statement by Pashinyan's office said the Armenian premier and Sajjad discussed the implementation of bilateral energy projects, including the ongoing construction of a new power transmission line and long-standing plans to build a hydroelectric plant on the Armenian-Iranian border. It said they also touched upon broader commercial ties, with the Iranian ambassador stressing the importance Iran's provisional free-trade agreement with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) signed last month.

Pashinyan was quick to hail that deal, saying that it “fully” reflects Armenia's national interests. “We hope that it will stimulate our commercial ties [with Iran,]” he told reporters on May 17.

Armenian manufacturers have long complained that the Islamic Republic's protec-



*Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (R) meets with Iranian Ambassador Seyed Kazem Sajjad in Yerevan, 8 June 2018.*

tionist policies severely limit their access to the Iranian market.

According to official Armenian statistics, Armenian-Iranian trade stood at a modest \$263 million last year. The authorities in Yerevan hope that a free economic zone created near Meghri, an Armenian town on the Iranian border, last December will also boost it significantly.

The Iran-EEU deal was signed just days after the United States decided to re-impose economic sanctions on Tehran after pulling out of a 2015 international agreement on the Iranian nuclear program. Rouhani and Pashinyan reportedly discussed implications of U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial move.

In its comprehensive policy program ap-

proved by the Armenian parliament on Thursday, Pashinyan's government pledged to seek the kind of “special relationship” with Iran which would be “immune to other geopolitical influences as much as possible.” The program says Armenia will at the same time seek to bolster its “friendly partnership” with the U.S.

Due to the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the resulting closure of Armenia's borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey, Iran has long been one of the landlocked country's two commercial conduits to the outside world. Successive Armenian governments have therefore been keen to maintain a warm rapport with Tehran.

*By Emil Danielyan*

## European investors ready to discuss implementation of concrete programs in Armenia

The Head of EU Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Piotr Switalski sees good perspectives for attracting European investments in Armenia.

The Ambassador said at a meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan that “European investors are ready to discuss concrete programs.”

PM Pashinyan, in turn, attached importance to the continuous development of cooperation with the European Union. He noted that the recent events in Armenia [peaceful transition of power] have considerably contributed to



the development and reinforcement of democracy.

According to the Prime Minis-

ter, the favorable atmosphere in the country will further boost the implementation of reforms and

radical changes in a number of spheres.

Nikol Pashinyan pointed to the fight against corruption as the government's number one priority. He said the executive body will also seek to develop democratic institutions, improve the business environment, including the protection of investments, elimination of monopolies, minimizing corruption in the field of state procurement, etc.

“We are resolute to call our goals and programs to life to achieve concrete results,” Nikol Pashinyan said.

## Armenian utility said to cut energy Price for poor families



Armenia's national electric utility has promised a 25 percent reduction in the price of electricity supplied by it to low-income families, Energy Minister Artur Grigoryan announced on June 8.

Grigoryan said the Electricity Networks of Armenia (ENA) operator agreed to the price cut as a result of "negotiations" held with the Armenian Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources. The tariff will go down "at the expense of ENA's profits" and cost the company 2 billion drams (\$4.1 million) in annual revenue, he said.

Speaking after a weekly cabinet meeting in Yerevan, the minister told reporters that the discount will apply to at least 110,000 families and most probably take effect on July 1. He insisted that ENA was not

pressurized by the government into cutting the tariff.

The daytime electricity price for poor households is currently set at 40 drams (over 8 U.S. cents) per kilowatt/hour. It will fall to 30 drams per kilowatt/hour, according to Grigoryan.

ENA declined to immediately confirm this information. The utility is owned by the Tashir Group of Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan.

Tashir seems to have significantly reduced ENA's massive losses since purchasing the debt-ridden company from a state-run Russian energy giant, Inter RAO, in 2015. It has also pledged to make substantial capital investments in the aging power distribution network.

During the cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told Grigoryan to continue exploring possibilities of also cutting the electricity price for the rest of the country's population. It currently pays almost 45 drams per kilowatt/hour.

Grigoryan cited "a number of risks" complicating an across-the-board price cut. In particular, he argued that the nuclear power plant at Metsamor will be brought to a halt soon for prolonged capital repairs designed to extend the life of its sole reactor. Armenia will have to rely on more expensive energy generated by natural gas during the stoppage.

The energy minister also pointed out that a Russian-Armenian agreement on the price of Russian natural gas supplied to Armenia expires at the end of this year. He thus did not exclude that the gas price will be raised next year.

## IMF: Armenia's financial system stability exemplary

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received Yulia Ustyugova, Permanent Representative of the International Monetary Fund in the Republic of Armenia.

The Premier appreciated the ongoing close cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and the assistance provided by the IMF for Armenia's economic reforms. Nikol Pashinyan emphasized that spending efficiency and financial discipline are among his government's key priorities.

The IMF Permanent Representative briefed the Prime Minister on the programs

implemented by the Fund in Armenia and the upcoming projects. Yulia Ustyugova expressed confidence that in cooperation with the new government, the IMF would be able to effectively promote the ongoing reforms. She highlighted the stability of Armenia's financial system, stressing that the country is exemplary in this regard.

The interlocutors exchanged views on the new government's program, including the efforts to improve tax and customs administration, the proposed pension system reform, as well as a number of other issues of mutual concern.

## World Bank projects a 4.1% economic growth for Armenia in 2018



The World Bank projects a 4.1% economic growth for Armenia in 2018. Growth is forecast to pick up to 4% in 2018 and 2019.

The World Bank says in a new report on Global Economic Prospects that global economic growth will remain robust at 3.1 percent in 2018 before slowing gradually over the next two years, as advanced-economy growth decelerates and the recovery in major commodity-exporting emerging market and developing economies levels off.

Growth in Europe and Central Asia region is projected to moderate to an upwardly revised 3.2 percent in 2018 and edge down to 3.1 percent in 2019, as a modest recovery among commodity exporting economies is only partially offset by a slowdown among commodity importers.





## Ex-Aide Regrets Obama's Failure To Recognize Armenian Genocide

Samantha Power, a former special adviser to President Barack Obama, on Friday expressed regret at his failure to ensure an official U.S. recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey during his tenure.

Speaking to RFE/RL's Armenian service in Yerevan, Power said Obama did not honor a key election campaign pledge because he did not want to jeopardize a rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey and feared that Ankara could obstruct U.S. efforts to defeat the Islamic State extremist group.

Power, who advised Obama on foreign policy and human rights before serving as U.S. ambassador to the United States from 2013-2017, also blamed the "very volatile personality" of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Obama referred to the Armenian genocide as a "widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence" when he ran for president in 2008. He said that if elected he will officially recognize the World War One-era slaughter of some 1.5 million Armenians as genocide.

During that presidential race, Power famously recorded a five-minute video that urged Americans of Armenian descent to vote for Obama because of his stance on the genocide issue.

"I have great regret that we did not manage to go all the way to full recognition in the way that we had promised," Power told during her first-ever visit to Armenia. "I really believed going into the White House that we would."

"But in 2009, which was really the year that we would have done it right at the beginning, President Obama made clear that his view of the facts had not changed and everybody knew his view," she said. "But he felt that the Armenian-Turkish normalization was at a very important and very fragile stage."

"Then, I think, at the hundred anniversary [of the genocide in 2015,] when it would have been another opportune time to recognize, we had just been granted access to Turkish bases to fight ISIS (Islamic State)."

"Turkey is a very powerful and large country that's a NATO ally and has a lot of weight," added the former U.S. official. "President Erdogan of course is a very volatile personality. So that also meant that some of the threats that he

made were deemed more credible frankly."

Power made clear that she thinks none of these factors justified Obama's decisions. "There is really no excuse because, as I wrote before I became a U.S. government official, there really is never a good time to do it," she said. "There is always going to be some set of issues and equities on the other side of the argument."



Obama reportedly came very close to recognizing the genocide in an April 2015. While avoiding the politically sensitive word, he implicitly praised Pope Francis for calling the 1915 mass killings "the first genocide of the 20th century." He also paid tribute to Henry Morgenthau, America's World War One-era ambassador in Constantinople who tried to stop what he saw as a "campaign of race extermination."

Obama's 2015 statement followed a reportedly heated debate within his administration. The Associated Press reported

at the time that an explicit recognition of the Armenian genocide was advocated by administration officials who deal more directly with human rights issues. Power was said to be among them.

Power said on Friday that the current and future U.S. administrations should follow the example of two dozen other nations and "defy the bullying that genocide deniers have done." Asked whether she thinks President Donald Trump may do so, she said: "Trump is so volatile. Maybe we wake up one morning and there'll be the tweet that we've all been waiting for: recognizing the genocide."

In any case, the former Obama administration official went on, Armenians should keep fighting for greater international recognition of the genocide. They have already made major progress in that endeavor, she said, arguing that "there is almost nobody in any doubt around the world about the events of 1915."

Power was visiting Armenia as a new member of an international committee that will select this weekend the latest winner of an annual humanitarian award created in memory of the Armenian genocide victims.

The Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity award was established in 2015 by three prominent Diaspora Armenians: philanthropists Ruben Vardanyan and Noubar Afeyan, and Vartan Gregorian, the president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It is designed to honor individuals around the world who risk their lives to help others.



*Armenia - Samantha Power (C), the former U.S. ambassador to the UN, visits the Armenian genocide memorial in Yerevan, 8 June 2018.*



## EU Report: EU-Armenia relations reach new highs



Since January 2015, EU-Armenia relations have developed significantly. The negotiation and provisional application of a new bilateral partnership agreement, as well as the finalization of Partnership Priorities in February this year have contributed to this success, a new EU report said.

Issued ahead of the first European Union – Armenia Partnership Council, which will be held on 21 June, today's report looks at developments in Armenia and in EU-Armenia relations over the past two-and-a-half years.

"We have witnessed a very important period for EU-Armenia relations and for Armenia itself", said the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini.

"A lot of hard work and determination has gone into our new bilateral agreement, which stands to bring visible benefits to our citizens, from strengthening transparency and accountability, to creating more opportunities for trade and investment, to environ-

mental protection. Now is the time to implement the agreement, along with our Partnership Priorities, so as to turn the hard work on paper into concrete results."

"In addition to the new agreement, which was ratified unanimously by the Armenian Parliament and is now being provisionally applied, we also have seen encouraging steps forward when it comes to bringing our citizens closer together, through initialling a common aviation agreement and extending the Trans-European Transport Network", said the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn. "Armenia has also participated actively in our Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels last November, when leaders endorsed the 20 deliverables for 2020, complementing the priorities of our bilateral agenda."

In Armenia, peaceful protests in April and May 2018 brought about a change of government within the framework of the Armenian Constitution. The EU will continue to support re-

forms in Armenia that promote democracy, the rule of law and respect of human rights, as well as a resilient and prosperous social and economic system.

Notable developments highlighted by the report include the adoption by a large majority in the Armenian Parliament of a new Law on the prevention of violence, protection of victims and restoration of cohesion within the family in December 2017. The EU considers the new law an important step towards the greater protection of human rights and gender equality.

In the area of education, reforms have taken place in line with the Bologna process with the support of the Erasmus+ programme. Armenian universities have been able to modernise study programmes, moving towards a better match with labour market needs. 1,800 students and university professors have been involved in EU-Armenia academic exchange and mobility until the end of 2017.

In 2016 Armenia became associated to the EU Frame-

work Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020, which opens up new opportunities for the country's research institutions and enterprises to enhance the transformation of scientific knowledge into commercial opportunities. The EU4Innovation initiative, launched in November 2016, aims at boosting innovation throughout the Eastern Partnership. An EU4Innovation Centre is about to be established in Yerevan to promote scientific education and close links between universities and businesses.

Since 2014, the EU has provided close to €120 million of financial support to Armenia with a focus on private sector developments, governance and education. Furthermore Armenia has also benefited from funding for multi-country projects. Transport infrastructure development and energy efficiency has been supported under the Neighbourhood Investment Facility, while further EU support is aiming at delivering concrete results to citizens in areas such as judicial reform, access to finance and economic development, connectivity, education and mobility. Support to civil society, human rights, deepening democracy and strengthening citizen participation will continue to be a focus, as well as support to economic development.

The EU has also continued to fully support the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group Co-Chairs and confidence/peace building and conflict prevention activities in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The European Union firmly believes that the conflict needs an early political settlement in accordance with the principles and norms of international law.



## Crystal Palace Armenia Premier: A New Wonderful Project by Orbelian and Friends



By  
**Gourgen  
James  
Khazhakian**  
Chief  
Correspondent

...Maestro **Constantine Orbelian** never stops surprising us. He has a steady habit of performing something special and extraordinary. In our difficult financial times he manages to get not just eminent foreign soloist but also the whole

have never been held without his participation: the First International Opera Festival dedicated to the memory of **Gegham Grigoryan** initiated by Maestro in which a lot of outstanding people took part: prominent baritone **George Gagnidze**, the daughter of Gegham Grigoryan **Hasmik Grigoryan** who has been conquering the most prestigious world scenes, brilliant performers from the USA and Russia, a wonderful soprano from Italy **Barbara Frittoli**, and a number of others...

tival left a lasting impression!

And the concert dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the legendary singer **Ella Fitzgerald** with the participation of bright jazz stars from the USA, too...

And recently the stage of the Theatre has been given to the guests from the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia: the Armenian premier of the *Crystal Palace* ballet performance has been organized by the Association for the Support of Cultural Initiatives of Russia with the participation of the



bands. And, no doubt, it should be stressed here that a lot of things in the Theatre are done at the expense of Orbelian's personal resources.

There are just several events which would

The unique concert of the great **Renee Fleming** on the stage of the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre after A.I. Spendiaryan within the framework of the Yerevan Perspectives Fes-

European Foundation for the Support of Culture (Malta) and the Culture and Arts Foundation (Armenia).

The pre-premier performance was held in



Malta in June last year on the occasion of celebrating jubilee of diplomatic relations establishment between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Malta. Following the premier in Malta, Maestro Orbelian appealed to the European Cultural Foundation asking for the performance to be held in Yerevan. Notably, the performance was greatly acclaimed and held twice. On the second day (June 2) of the first night the President of the Republic of Armenia **Armen Sargsyan** and his spouse **Nuneh Sargsyan** attended the event.

The performance turned to be the most wonderful and festive event of the second half of the season. Flawless, serious, professional, with super class dancing and wonderful decorations, perfect technical provision, it evoked considerable interest of the audience in Yerevan. The music by the Maltese composer **Alexey Shor** (reminding to this author Mozart pieces in some extent – **G.Kh.**) was very temperamental, melodic and emotionally rich. By the way, composer Alex Shor is well-known among Armenian music lovers. In 2017 he was the resident composer at the Armenia International Music Festival and Contest. His works have several times been performed by the National Filharmonic Orchestra conducted by **Eduard Topchyan**, by the State Symphony Orchestra conducted by **Sergey Smbatyan**, by the State Chamber Orchestra, by the world renowned cellist **Narek Haknazaryan**, by lady pianist **Nareh Arghamanyan** and others.

(Your correspondent wants to reveal a secret of Shor's special attitude to Armenia and Armenians: in the Soviet times his grandfather served in a military unit dislocated in Leninakan, current Gyumri, so son and father Shors were intended to visit the second city of Armenia to search for the house of the grandfather – **G.Kh.**)

The Orchestra of our Opera and Ballet Theatre was conducted that night by the famous opera and symphony conductor **Pavel Klinichev**, the Children's Choir after **Armen Tigranyan** (Armenian composer, author of the legendary opera *Anoush*) and the girls of the Yerevan State Choreographic Col-

lege participated as well.

The performance was conceived and carried out in the traditions of the Russian Royal Court Theatre of 18th century and first ballet spectacles. Directing by **Yekaterina Mironova** was very interesting; she is the ballet master and stage director of The Bolshoi Theatre and director-choreographer of a number of Russian and international projects.



The choreographer **Alexander Somov** is the Merited Artist of the Russian Federation, known as the Bolshoi Theatre ballet star in the recent past. The public was enthralled by the wonderful stage sets by **Sergey Timonin**. He displayed to the audience the metaphorical Summer Garden, with exaggerated colours, with trees, statues, a huge pool, and with the Summer Palace. In sync with the action on the stage the light scheme is transformed, and the colours are transformed, new hues transpire, symbolic characters appear against the garden background such as cherubs with bows and arrows.

The impressive appearance of singer **Anna Aglatova** who in baroque theatre traditions glides above the Theatre stage in a ring singing *Ode to the Empress* left no one untouched. To note, her beautiful voice has already conquered not only Bolshoi audience (after all, it is her home stage – **G.Kh.**) but listeners everywhere in the world. It is noteworthy that Aglatova is her stage name as she was born **Asriyan**, so she is an ethnic Armenian.

The wonderful stage sets are rivalled by the colourful costumes

designed by **Elena Netsvetova-Dolgaleva**. It is quite obvious that all the costumes are hand-sewn and lavishly embroidered with gems - indistinguishable from genuine 18th century articles!

The show tells a story that occurred in 1710 at the Court of the Russian Empress **Anna Ioannovna** (who opened the 1st ballet school in Russia). Not only the Empress herself appears on the

movement - everything is proof of the fact that he was born to dance.

Vassiliev is a unique dancer who attracts unwavering attention by the fact that he is one of the kind, - not compared with the others. That is exactly why he, with his very rare actor's gift, with his ability to impart his character with intense inner life, shows the process of development of a human soul from the inside - takes his special place in the ballet today. His dance emanates powerful energy of joy affecting every spectator. Freedom of his manner, randomness of scenic surprises cannot hide the strong fundamental discipline, that very school that arms the Talent with freedom of volition, recognition of his power over the audience and his own professional armoury.

The part of the lady jester was superbly danced by the real-life wife of Ivan Vassiliev, the Bolshoi star **Maria Vinogradova**. The performance of Maria Allash and the chorus line involving many soloists and dancers of the other Moscow theatres merits a special attention. The public was greatly impressed by the experienced conductor Pavel Klinichev. The Chief Set Designer, lavishly employing multimedia effects, freely recreated historic atmosphere.

...By the end of this fantastic as well as other performances you cannot but feel deep gratitude to the Artistic Leader and the General Director of our Opera Theatre Constantine Orbelian whose aim is to turn our Theatre into a world-class stage.

Ladies and Gentlemen, attention, your dream comes true: **world stars are already here!**

In The Highlights coming issues our readers could find stories on the other fruits of the Maestro Orbelian's great energy such as the Ballet Fest dedicated to the 115th birthday of the Great **Aram Khachaturian** and the coming staging of the *Gayaneh Ballet* by the Genius at the Bolshoi stage.

*Photos courtesy Opera and Ballet Theatre Marketing and PR Division (by Tigran Araqueyan)*

*Some pieces of the story are taken with gratitude from Golos Armenii semi-weekly (golosarmenii.am)*

## Four Congressmen join Armenian Caucus

Working vigorously through the month of April, the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) held 50 meetings with congressional offices discussing key issues of concern, including reaffirmation of the Armenian Genocide, U.S. assistance to Armenia and Artsakh, as well as Christian and other minority communities at risk in the Middle East.

As a result of these efforts, the Assembly says is pleased to welcome Representatives Charlie Crist (D-FL), Steve King (R-IA), Eric Swalwell (D-CA), and Steve Knight (R-CA) as the newest Members to join the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, bringing the total to 122 Members.

"I'm proud to join the Armenian Caucus, working in a bipartisan manner to strengthen the U.S.-Armenian relationship – a vital strategic partnership," stated Rep. Crist.

Congressman Crist represents the 13th congressional district of Florida, on the Gulf Coast from Clearwater down to St. Petersburg. After meeting with the Assembly, he co-signed this year's letter to President Donald Trump to formally recognize the Armenian Genocide. Last year, the Congressman co-signed a letter to then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urging him to arrest, prosecute, and jail members of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's security detail who



attacked peaceful protesters outside the Turkish Ambassador's residence in Washington, D.C.

Rep. Swalwell told the Assembly: "I'm happy to join the bipartisan Congressional Armenian Caucus because I believe in strengthening the diplomatic, cultural, economic and military ties between our nations. You don't need to be of any particular political party, or of Armenian descent, to know that many of our interests intersect and we should work together to ensure peace and prosperity throughout the Middle East, West Asia, and around the world."

Congressman Swalwell represents the 15th congressional district of California, which includes parts of the East Bay in Northern California, and is a co-sponsor of H.Res. 220, af-

firming the Armenian Genocide.

Rep. King agreed to join the Armenian Caucus after meeting with the Assembly and Ecumenical Director and Diocesan Legate of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) Archbishop Vicken Aykazian. During the meeting they discussed the plight of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East. Rep. King also co-sponsored H.Res. 220 and signed the letter urging President Trump to reaffirm the Armenian Genocide.

"I'm proud to join my colleagues on the Congressional Armenian Caucus," said Rep. Knight. "America and Armenia share much in common, especially our mutual commitment to freedom of religion and individual liberties. It's also important to never forget atrocities like the Armenian Genocide so that we may always remain vigilant in ensuring they never happen again. Southern California has a large contingent of Armenian Americans, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the caucus to address these important issues."

Congressman Knight represents the 25th congressional district of California, which covers a sizable part of northern Los Angeles County, and includes the Santa Clarita Valley, Simi Valley, the Antelope Valley, and the northern section of the San

Fernando Valley. He co-signed the bipartisan Royce-Engel letter, which proposes common sense measures to curtail ongoing Azerbaijani military-initiated attacks against citizens of Artsakh and Armenia, and calls upon the OSCE Minsk Group to "publicly condemn specific acts of aggression along the line of contact."

"The Assembly is pleased that Rep. Knight has joined the Congressional Armenian Caucus, and looks forward to continue working closely with the Congressman and his staff. I would like to take this opportunity to express the Assembly's gratitude to Ms. Vanessa Wilk for her extraordinary efforts in encouraging Rep. Knight to join the caucus," stated Assembly Western Region Director Mihran Toumajan.

The Assembly's Western Region office has been in contact with Rep. Knight's Santa Clarita district staff since August 2017, when they held a productive meeting with the Congressman, along with the Assembly Southern California Regional Council (SCRC) and the leadership of St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church of Santa Clarita. The Assembly-led delegation expressed its gratitude to Rep. Knight for his support of Armenian issues in Congress, and also acknowledged his efforts assisting Armenian American constituents during his tenure in the California State Assembly (2008-2012) and California State Senate (2012-2014).

"The Armenian Assembly looks forward to working with these new Members and with the leadership of the Armenian Caucus as we continue to strengthen U.S.-Armenia relations, and continue to promote genocide awareness and education, including the remarkable efforts of John Elder and James O. Arroll of the YMCA in helping the survivors of the Armenian Genocide," said Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny.





## Mascot Books publishes children's book on Armenian Genocide relief efforts

Mascot Books announces the release of a children's book, titled *Under the Light of the Moon*, by Laura Michael, the Armenian Mirror-Spectator reports.

The book focuses on the efforts of the Near East Relief (NER) to help survivors of the Armenian Genocide, but tells in a way to make the story appropriate for young readers.

Based on the real experiences of the orphans of the Armenian Genocide, including the author's great-grandparents, *Under the Light of the Moon* is a story of hope and survival during a dark time in world history.

The book is set in 1924, the end of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey, and ten-year-old Lucine has found safety at an orphanage in Greece. She doesn't know if her parents have survived and wonders if she'll ever see them again, and she isn't alone: there are hundreds of thousands of orphans just like Lucine struggling to survive, their stories making headlines worldwide. In response, the United States NER, which provides food, clothing, shelter and safety for these children.

Jackie Coogan, one of America's most famous child actors at the time, uses his celebrity power to support NER, but soon realizes that there are some things in life that are out of our control. Lucine appreciates the help of these kind strangers, but there's still something missing: more than anything, she wishes to be reunited with her family. As time passes, her future becomes more and more uncertain.

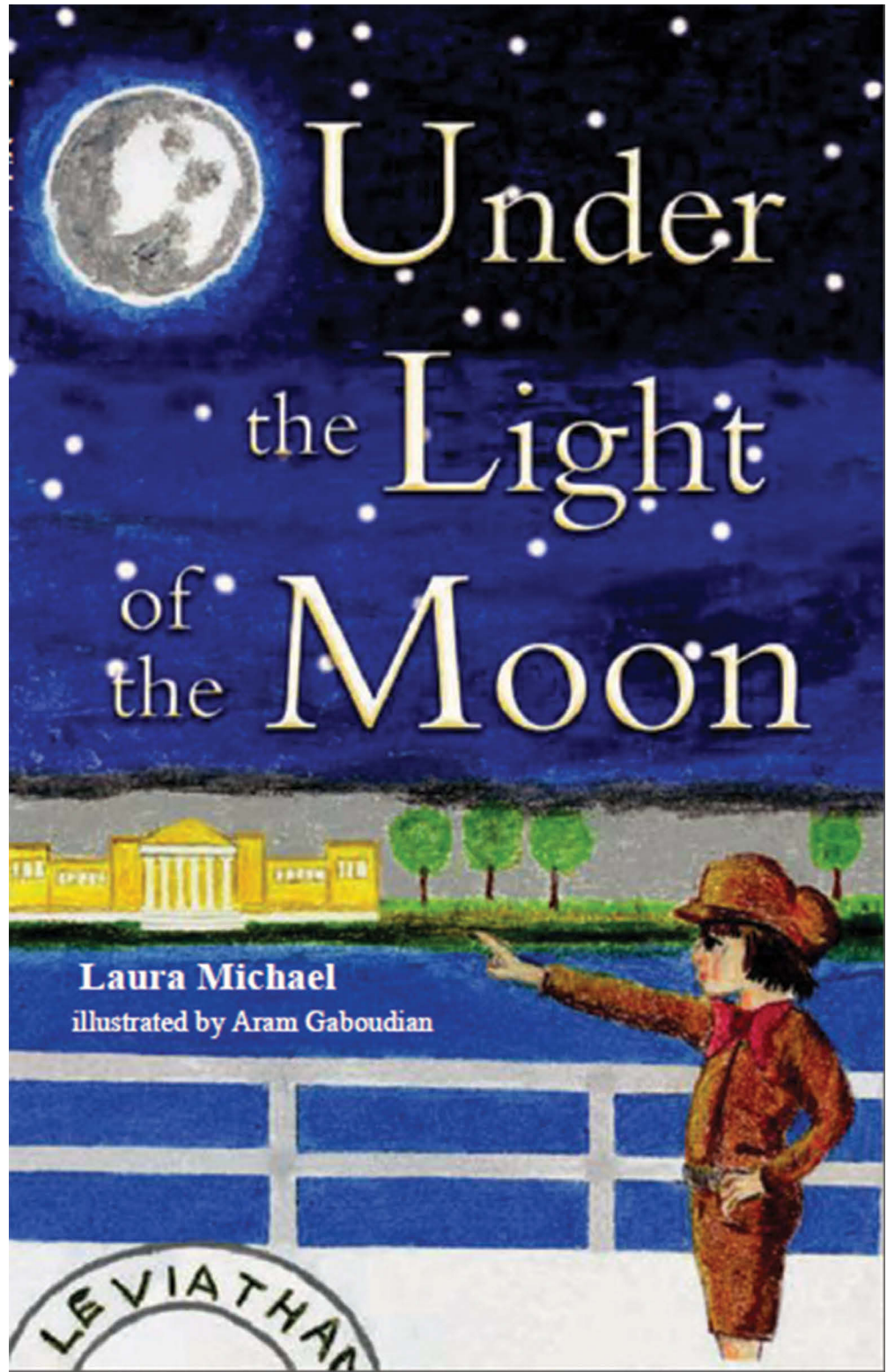
The true events of young Jackie's volunteer work remind that anyone — no matter how young or old — can make a difference in the world.

Michael is an Armenian-American activist, educator and writer who was born and raised in Rhode Island. She received a bachelor's degree in Spanish from the University of Rhode Island and a master's degree in education from New York University. She has taught at the elementary, middle school and college levels in Massachusetts and New York and currently

lives in Los Angeles where she is an administrator for a local school district. Michael is also on the ANCA-WR Education Committee and works to help schools implement genocide and human rights curriculums. Her most memorable trip was when she found

her great-grandparents' former homes in historic Armenia, which is now part of eastern Turkey.

For more information, visit [lauramichael.net](http://lauramichael.net). The book is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble, among other vendors.





## AGBU Europe marks centennial of the First Republic of Armenia in Brussels

From June 1 to 3, the city of Brussels was captivated by a multi-genre Musical Weekend organized by the Performing Arts Department of AGBU France/Europe in partnership with the Boghossian Foundation, the City of Brussels and the Armenian community of Belgium.

The three-day concert was inspired by the 100th anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia, an historical milestone in the Armenian Nation's long road to independent statehood. "Since Armenia's rebirth in 1991, it has showcased to the world the depth and breadth of the musical achievements of its people. This concert series has crystalized those achievements all in one weekend," remarked Nicolas Tavitian, the director of AGBU Europe, when noting the consid-

erable turnout at all three of the weekend's events.

Together with AGBU Performing Arts Department of France, AGBU Europe assembled a roster of some of the best musicians of a generation, many whose talents were originally cultivated in Armenia. A new AGBU string ensemble, a classical piano trio and a jazz band played on successive nights, displaying their mastery of their respective genres.

The entire weekend also served as a fundraiser to benefit the afterschool programs of the AGBU Children's Centers in Yerevan Armenia. "After 25 years of providing Armenia's youth with character-building and self-discovery programs through arts and sports, these centers are long overdue for a major renewal—not only to ex-

pand and upgrade interior space but also to enhance teaching proficiencies and enrich curricula," explained Karen Papazian, back at the AGBU Central Office in New York. As the director of Global Outreach and Development, she pointed out that "Armenia's youth deserve to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. And no doubt, some of these children will grow up to follow in the footsteps of rising stars like those who performed this weekend."

The concert series began Friday evening at the Brussels Town Hall, one of Belgium's most magnificent Gothic buildings. Opening remarks made by officials and dignitaries spoke to the significance of the occasion. H.E. Tatul Margaryan, Armenia's Ambassador to Belgium, stated, "On May 28, one hundred years ago, our nation restored its millenia-old state by declaring the birth of the First Republic of Armenia. Although the First Republic faced numerous challenges and was short lived, it laid the foundation for the establishment and development of state institutions and democratic governance."

He was followed by Philippe Close, the mayor of Brussels, who referred to the turbulent context in which the Republic of 1918 was founded, citing the fall of the Ottoman empire, the chaos of the Russian revolution and the admission of hundreds of thousands of genocide survivors. The mayor also highlighted the will of the City of Brussels to collaborate with Armenian organizations to host this important cultural event, noting that "culture is the best expression of a people's vitality and of its presence in the world."

Stepan Mirdikian, a former chairman of the Armenian community of Belgium also added words of inspiration. Quoting Ernest Renan, he mentioned, "What constitutes a nation is not so much speaking the same language or belonging to the same ethnic group, it is to have accomplished together great things in the past and to want to accom-

plish more in the future."

On opening night, the AGBU String Ensemble[CE1], took to the stage to perform under the direction of young composer Alexander Iradyan, who conducted the very first concert of the ensemble which interpreted the powerful and emblematic Symphony for Strings and Timpani, by Mirzoyan along with selected works by Komitas.

The following evening, the diverse audience of Armenians and non-Armenians gathered at the Ceremonial Hall of the Boghossian Foundation Villa Empain for the performance of pianist Varduhi Yeritsyan, known for her vast and diverse repertoire. She performed along with the Brussels based brothers Hrachya Avanesyan (violin) and Sevak Avanesyan (cello). The trio performed the works of Shostakovich and Babajanian as well as a number of encore pieces by Komitas following the wide public acclaim.

Sunday's performance at the same venue featured the contemporary works of Yessai Karapetyan Trio, a jazz ensemble led by pianist Yessai Karapetyan, a gifted musician who performs on the most prestigious jazz stages in Europe. Yessai was accompanied by Sylvain Fournet-Fayas on double bass and David Paycha on drums.

Nadia Gortzounian, the president of AGBU France, hailed the event as a "brilliant" weekend. "I was thrilled to see such a high level of attendance at each of our three events and I am profoundly grateful to all the immensely talented musicians for their extraordinary performances. It was also a pleasure to collaborate with the City of Brussels, the Armenian community of Belgium and the Boghossian Foundation that allowed us to host our concerts in the particularly magical setting of the Villa Empain in Brussels."

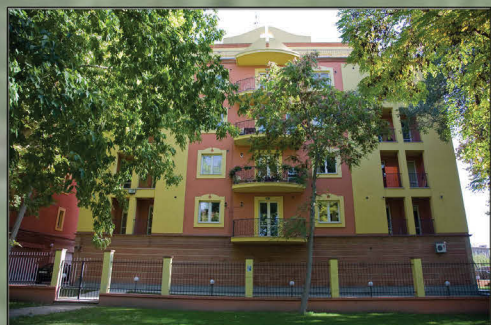
She went on to say, "It was a heartwarming and inspiring experience to see just how far the Armenian Nation has come since the First Republic, as we contribute to world culture through the arts."





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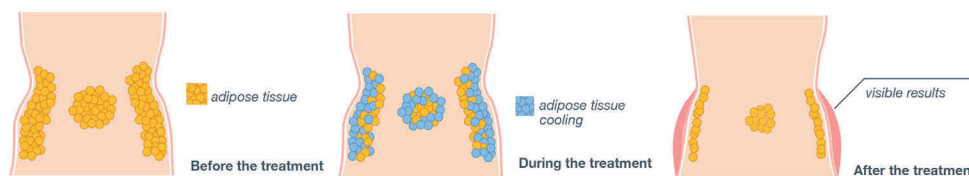
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