

# PM calls for new Constitution, says transition to semi-presidential system is an option



**ARMENIA -- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan delivers a speech during a rally of his supporters on Republic Square in downtown Yerevan, March 1, 2021**

Addressing a rally at Republic Square on March 1, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stressed the need for new Constitution or constitutional amendments.

“Today we see that this Constitution, unfortunately, creates many crisis opportunities and risks. We must work to pass a new Constitution or constitutional amendments in a referendum in October this year, and finally, the transition to a semi-presidential system of government should be one of the possible options, the Prime Minister said.

“We must carry out this process in close cooperation with the National Assembly, the Government, the President of the Republic, the political forces and the civil society,” he added.

“Our biggest task should be the creation and formation of such constitutional structures that will guarantee stability and security in the Republic of Armenia; will exclude the formation of such crises,” PM Pashinyan stated.

Speaking at rally, Pashinyan expressed readiness to hold fresh parliamentary elections to resolve the political crisis in Armenia deepened by the Armenian military’s demands for his resignation.

PM again rejected those demands as a coup attempt and said Colonel-General Onik Gasparyan, the chief of the Armenian army’s General Staff, must himself step down.

He charged that the February 25 statement by the army’s top brass was initiated by Gasparyan at the behest of former President Serzh Sargsyan. He accused Sargsyan and other opposition leaders of using the military in a bid to end “the people’s power.”

*Pashinyan moved to dismiss Gasparyan immediately after the statement that accused the current government of having put Armenia “on the brink of collapse” after the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh.*

*President Armen Sarkissian refused, however, to sign at the weekend a decree relieving the country’s top general of his duties. Despite the rebuff, Pashinyan resent the draft decree to Sarkissian for approval.*

*Addressing thousands of supporters, Pashinyan urged Sarkissian to stop blocking Gasparyan’s dismissal. He confirmed that he met with the president earlier in the day but gave no details of their conversation.*

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## Pashinyan, Putin discuss the situation in Armenia

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had a telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The situation in Armenia was discussed.

Vladimir Putin attached importance to maintaining peace and order in Armenia, resolving the situation within the framework of the law.



The Russian President called on all parties to show restraint.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on February 25 warned of an “attempted military coup,” after the country’s armed forces said he and his cabinet must resign.

The army “must obey the people and elected authorities,” he told thousands of supporters in the capital Yerevan. The opposition staged a rival rally.

## Azerbaijan bears full responsibility for the losses of the peoples in the region for three decades



Azerbaijan has unleashed two large-scale wars against the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination resulting in tens of thousands of casualties, Spokes-

person for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Anna Naghdalyan stated.

“Azerbaijan bears full responsibility for the losses and deprivations peoples of the region have suffered for three decades,” she said in comments to Aysor.am.

The comments come after the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan issued a statement on the events near the town of Aghdam of 1992, once again voicing the traditional accusations against Armenia.

“During the two wars unleashed against the people of Artsakh as well as the period preceding it, Azerbaijani side resorted to mass atrocities, including ethnic cleansing and war crimes,” the Spokesperson said.

She reminded that the murders of the Armenian civilians by Azerbaijani soldiers in the territories of the Hadrut region of Artsakh it took control of during the recent war have been described as war crimes by respective international bodies, specifically the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

## French FM calls for dialogue between supporters of PM Pashinyan and the opposition

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called for dialogue between the supporters of Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and the opposition for the sake of protecting democracy, Ria Novosti informed.

“France advocates dialogue based on the legitimacy of the Prime Minister and the President... for ensuring calm situation in the country which is living difficult period”, Jean-Yves Le Drian said in a briefing with his Ukrainian counterpart.

“Armenia’s democracy must resist”,

the French FM said.

*On February 25 the General Staff of the Armenian Forces of Armenia issued a statement, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his Cabinet.*

*In his turn Pashinyan commented on the statement, calling it as a “military coup attempt”. He invited all his supporters to the Republic Square to discuss the ongoing developments. The meeting was followed by a march across Yerevan.*



*In turn the opposition also held a rally in the Freedom Square. Thereafter, they moved to the Parliament’s building and blocked the traffic in the Baghramyan street.*



## Thousands Rally For, Against Armenian PM

(RFE/RL) - Thousands of people rallied in Yerevan on February 25 in rival demonstrations sparked by the Armenian military's demands for the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his government.

Pashinyan again accused the military of attempting to stage a coup and demanded the removal of Armenia's top general as he addressed supporters who gathered in the city's central Republic Square. He also offered to hold crisis talks with opposition groups seeking to topple him over his handling of last year's war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"Mind your business: the defense of Armenia's territorial integrity and borders. This is my order and nobody can disobey it," he said, appealing to the army's top brass that demanded his resignation earlier in the day.

"The army cannot be drawn into political processes. The army must obey only the people and the political authority elected by them," he told the crowd that chanted "Nikol prime minister!"

Pashinyan also said that President Armen Sarkissian should approve his motion to fire Colonel-General Onik Gasparyan, the chief of the army's General Staff. Alternatively, he added, Gasparyan should tender his resignation.

Sarkissian seemed in no rush to sign a decree relieving Gasparyan of his duties. In a written appeal to the nation, Sarkissian



expressed serious concern over the political turmoil in the country and urged state bodies, political actors and ordinary citizens to show "restraint and common sense."

The head of state, who has largely ceremonial powers, also said he is "urgently taking steps to find ways of easing tensions and resolving the situation peacefully." He did not elaborate.

In a joint statement, Gasparyan and four dozen other generals and colonels accused Pashinyan's government of mismanaging the country and putting it "on the brink of destruction." The statement followed the unexpected sacking of Gasparyan's first deputy, Tiran Khachatryan.

The General Staff reaffirmed its demands in another statement issued shortly before the start of the Pashinyan-led rally.

Meanwhile, an alliance more than a dozen opposition parties rallied supporters

in another Yerevan square to voice support for the military.

Speakers at the opposition rally included Seyran Ohanyan and Yuri Khachaturov, former chiefs of the army staff highly critical of the current government. Both retired generals echoed opposition claims that Pashinyan is to blame for Armenia's defeat in the war.

Pashinyan insisted that it is the country's "corrupt" former leaders who are primarily responsible for the outcome of the six-week war stopped by a Russian-brokered truce on November 10.

Addressing thousands of his supporters at Republic Square, Pashinyan expressed readiness to start "political consultations" with the opposition on "how to resolve this situation." He complained that the opposition rejected his December offer to hold snap general elections.

"A change of the government can take place only through elections," the prime minister said before marching with the crowd to other parts of the Armenian capital.

Opposition leaders and their supporters chanting "Armenia without Nikol!" marched, meanwhile, to the Armenian parliament building and blocked an adjacent street. The two opposition parties represented in the parliament demanded an emergency session of the National Assembly on the deepening political crisis.

## Pashinyan blames other officials for 'wrong' claim about Russian missile



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan effectively retracted on March 1 his claim that the Armenian army's most advanced Russian-made missiles seriously malfunctioned during the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Pashinyan said last week that the Iskander missiles "did not explode or exploded by 10 percent." He also suggested that the sophisticated missile system might be outdated.

Pashinyan's remarks provoked a storm of criticism from Russian pro-government lawmakers and pundits. They accused him

of incompetence and deceit.

Russia's Defense Ministry said on Thursday that it was "bewildered and surprised" by the remarks. The ministry spokesman, Igor Konashenkov, said the Armenian army did not fire any Iskander missiles during the six-week hostilities stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire on November 10.

"In all likelihood, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was misled," Konashenkov said.

Pashinyan's press secretary, Mane Gevorgyan, gave the same explanation on March 1.

"An analysis of available facts and data has led the Armenian prime minister to conclude that he did not receive correct reports about this matter," she said, adding that Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed it in a February 25 phone call.

Gevorgyan went on to stress that "Russian weapons are one of the best in the world" and that Armenia intends to deepen military ties with Russia.

The Kremlin publicly accepted the explanation. "It is very important that the truth about this issue has been restored," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists.

Several Armenia media outlets quoted on February 24 the first deputy chief of the Armenian army's General Staff, Tiran Khachatryan, as also refuting Pashinyan's claim. Khachatryan was sacked hours later.

In a statement issued the following morning, the army's top brass strongly condemned the sacking, accused Pashinyan's government of incompetence and misrule and demanded its resignation. The prime minister responded by accusing the military of attempting to stage a coup d'etat and moving to fire the chief of the General Staff, Onik Gasparyan.

## President Sarkissian rejects proposal to dismiss Army Chief, returns the motion with objections



President Armen Sarkissian on February 27 refused to fire Armenia's top army general who has demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his government.

He said the sacking of Colonel-General Onik Gasparyan sought by Pashinyan would be unconstitutional and would not address the "unprecedented" political crisis in the country.

Pashinyan petitioned Sarkissian on Thursday to sign a decree relieving Gasparyan of his duties shortly after the chief of the Armenian army's General Staff and 40 other high-ranking officers issued a joint statement that accused the government of misrule and demanded its resignation.

Pashinyan rejected the demand as a "military coup attempt." By contrast, Armenian opposition groups trying to oust him over his handling of the autumn war in

Nagorno-Karabakh voiced support for the military's top brass.

Sarkissian held a series of talks with senior representatives of the ruling My Step bloc, opposition leaders and Gasparyan before announcing his decision not to sign a relevant presidential decree drafted by Pashinyan's office.

Citing "leading lawyers and independent experts," the president suggested that the proposed decree runs counter to the Armenian constitution. He also noted that Pashinyan demanded Gasparyan's sacking after the military's unprecedented statement and amid a "political crisis" and "serious security challenges" facing Armenia.

"There is no doubt that the armed forces must maintain neutrality on political issues," Sarkissian said in a statement. "It is also evident that because of the war the military personnel now need our support and attention more than ever before. Solving problems of the army and its personnel is a top priority that cannot be ignored in any way."

"The existing situation is unprecedented, requires systemic and comprehensive solutions, and cannot be resolved with frequent personnel changes that do not take

into account the state of affairs in the country," added the statement.

It insisted that the head of state, who has largely ceremonial powers, "does not support any political force."

The Armenian constitution allows the prime minister to again demand that Sarkissian sack Gasparyan. In that case, the president can sign the relevant decree or ask the Constitutional Court to rule on its legality.

Pashinyan was quick to criticize Sarkissian's decision not to sack the army chief. "This decision does not help at all to settle the current situation," he wrote on Facebook, adding that he is resending the draft decree to the president.

Sarkissian's move was swiftly welcomed by an alliance of Armenian parties that continued to stage demonstrations in Yerevan aimed at forcing Pashinyan to step down.

One of the alliance leaders, Vazgen Manukyan, described it as a "great victory" when he addressed supporters of the Homeland Salvation Movement before they again marched through the city center. Manukyan again called on Armenia's police and the National Security Service to join the military in demanding Pashinyan's resignation.

## US continues to support democratic processes in Armenia – Department of State

The US is following the situation in Armenia very closely, Spokesman for the Department of State Ned Price told a daily press briefing.

"We urge all parties to exercise restraint and to avoid any escalatory or violent actions. We remind all parties of the bedrock democratic principle that states' armed forces should not intervene in domestic politics," he said.

"The United States has been a steadfast supporter of the development of democratic processes and institutions in Armenia. We continue to support Armenia's democracy and its sovereignty, and we urge its leaders to resolve their differences peacefully while respecting the rule of law, Arme-



nia's democracy, and its institutions," the Spokesperson stated.

Asked whether the demand of the General Staff of the Armed Forces for the Prime Minister's resignation was an incitement or attempt or a coup attempt, Price said:

"The Department of State has a process to determine whether a coup has transpired.

We talked about that process in the context of a very different setting, and that was Burma and the coup determination that we arrived at in the aftermath of the military's overthrow of Burma's democratic civilian leadership on February 1st. I think I said at the time that there are three criteria that this department looks for in making that determination. Of course, there has been no such determination in this case. We continue to support Armenia's democracy and its sovereignty, and we'll continue to watch developments very closely as they unfold," he concluded.

The U.S. Embassy in Yerevan issued a similar statement earlier on Thursday amid mounting political tensions in the country.



## Secretary General of the European Ombudsman Institute calls for release of Armenian POWs

Secretary General of the European Ombudsman Institute Josef Siegele has called on Azerbaijani to immediately release all Armenian prisoners of war and civilians held in Azerbaijan.

“Everyone deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the armed conflict should be returned immediately after the cessation of hostilities and without any preconditions,” Siegele said.

“It should be considered exclusively in



the context of human rights and the humanitarian process as an international requirement which is to be automatically applied,” he added.

“Delaying the return of the Armenian prisoners of war and civilians undermined human dignity and seriously violates the fundamental requirements guaranteed by the Geneva Convention. This grossly undermines the post-war humanitarian processes and the international human rights mandates,” he noted.

Josef Siegele stressed that the release of the captives and their safe return require immediate resolution.

## CoE Secretary General on events in Armenia: All political disagreements should be resolved in a peaceful manner



Statement by Council of Europe Sec-

retary General Marija Pejčinović Burić says all political disagreements in Armenia should be resolved in a peaceful manner.

“I have been closely following recent developments in our member state Armenia and I call for calm, restraint and responsibility,” she said.

“All political disagreements should be discussed and resolved in a peaceful man-

ner, around an inclusive negotiating table involving civilian representatives of society and in line with the principles of democracy and the rule of law,” the Secretary General noted.

She said the Council of Europe remains at the disposal of the Armenian authorities and civil society to provide assistance in this respect.

## Dutch Parliament urges Government to recognize the Armenian Genocide

The House of Representatives of the Netherlands has adopted a motion put forward by MP Joël Voordewind (ChristenUnie), calling on the Dutch government explicitly to recognize the Armenian Genocide, reports the Federation of Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands (FAON) Federation of Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands (FAON).

The motion was adopted almost unanimously. This very broad support for the motion shows that for too long there has been great dissatisfaction in the Parliament how the successive governments have dealt with the Armenian Genocide.

FAON, the 24 April Committee and all Armenians are thankful to Joël Voordewind and also to the many other MPs, who were committed to the recognition of the Armenian genocide for many years. Many of them showed their commitment by being present at 24 April commemorations, at

Genocide monuments, concerts, such as the Armenian Genocide Centennial commemoration concert in the Grote Kerk in the Hague. FAON is grateful to them all. FAON is also thanking the members of Recommending Committee of 24 April Committee for their support for years.

The motion’s message is that a clear language is needed to resolve precarious issues in the future. The FAON considers this idea especially important, given the current situation, in which Genocide Watch warned of a new genocide during the war in Nagorno Karabakh, and after the war both Turkey and Azerbaijan are aggressive towards Armenia.

The failure to identify and recognize historical events as genocide can be considered as the wrong signal.

The FAON assumes that the government will not disregard this very clear statement of the Parliament and will imple-



ment it.

With the new motion, the Parliament announces that it can no longer agree with the government’s current approach.

In earlier motions (2015, 2018), the Parliament explicitly recognized the Armenian Genocide, after the Dutch Parliament had already recognized it in 2004 in the motion by MP Rouvoet adopted unanimously, which appeals to the government “to expressly and continuously raise the recognition of the Armenian Genocide during the bilateral and EU dialogue with Turkey”.

## Armenia-EU Agreement enters into force

The European Union-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) enters into force today. It has now been ratified by the Republic of Armenia, all EU Member States and the European Parliament. This represents an important milestone for EU-Armenia relations.

This Agreement provides a framework for the EU and Armenia to work together in a wide range of areas: strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights; creating more jobs and business opportunities, improving legislation, public safety, a cleaner environment, as well as better education and opportunities for research. This bilateral agenda also contributes to overall aim of the EU to deepen and strengthen its relations with the countries of its Eastern neighborhood through the Eastern Partnership framework.

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, said: “The entry into force of our Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement comes at a moment when Armenia faces significant challenges. It sends a strong signal that the EU and Armenia are committed to democratic principles and the rule of law, as well as to a wider reform agenda. Across polit-



*ical, economic, trade, and other sectoral areas, our Agreement aims to bring positive change to people's lives, to overcome challenges to Armenia's reforms agenda.”*

Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, underlined that: “While these are trying times for Armenia, the European Union continues to stand by the Armenian people. The entry into force of the bilateral EU-Armenia agreement on 1 March will allow us to strengthen our work on the economy, connectivity, digitalization and the green transformation as priority areas. These will have concrete benefits for the people and are key for socio-economic recovery and the longer-term resilience of the country. In the current turbulent days, maintaining calm and respect for democracy and constitutional order are key.”

The Agreement was signed in Novem-

ber 2017 and substantial parts of have been provisionally applied since 1 June 2018. Since then, the breadth and depth of the bilateral cooperation between Armenia and the European Union have advanced steadily. At the 3rd EU-Armenia Partnership Council held on 17 December 2020, the European Union and Armenia reiterated their full commitment to implementing the CEPA.

The Agreement plays an important role for the modernization of Armenia, in particular through legislative approximation to EU norms in many sectors. This includes reforms in the rule of law and respect of human rights, particularly an independent, efficient and accountable justice system, as well as reforms aimed at enhancing the responsiveness and effectiveness of public institutions and at favoring the conditions for sustainable and inclusive development.

From the entry into force of the Agreement on 1 March, cooperation will be strengthened in those areas which to date were not subject to the provisional application of the Agreement. The European Union stands ready and looks forward to working even more closely with Armenia on the full and effective implementation of the Agreement, in our mutual interest and to the benefit of our societies and citizens.

## UN ready to send humanitarian mission to Nagorno Karabakh



The UN has reiterated it is ready to deploy an initial independent inter-agency humanitarian assessment mission to Nagorno-Karabakh and other conflict-affected areas at the earliest opportunity.

“We have informed all relevant actors in that regard. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN Refugee Agency and relevant UN entities continue to engage with all concerned on the specific parameters and timing of the deployment of the planned mission,” Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, told a daily briefing. He said the latest official communication was sent on 19 February.

“The mission hopes to get a clearer picture of the humanitarian situation on the

ground and broadly assess the conditions for safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable returns of all displaced populations,” Dujarric said.

“We look forward to a formal reply to our latest communication. We call on all relevant groups to cooperate fully with the UN entities to ensure their unfettered and speedy access to conduct such a mission, which will be solely based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence,” he added.



## Armenia's economic activity index declines 7.5% in January 2021



Armenia's economic activity index has

declined by 7.5% in January 2021 compared to January 2020, according to the data released by the Statistical Committee.

Industrial production volume declined 10.8%. Construction volume increased by 0.8% in January 2021 compared to January 2020. The decline in trade turnover comprised 15.1%, and in the services volume (trade excluded) – 10.3%.

In January 2021 consumer price index

increased by 4.5%, the index of the industrial production prices – 5.5%. Electricity production volume increased by 2.2%.

Average monthly nominal salary in January 2021 compared to January 2020 declined 3.8%, comprising 183,760 drams.

Decline was also registered in the external trade turnover volumes by 16.8%. Moreover, the export declined by 11.3% and the import by 20%.

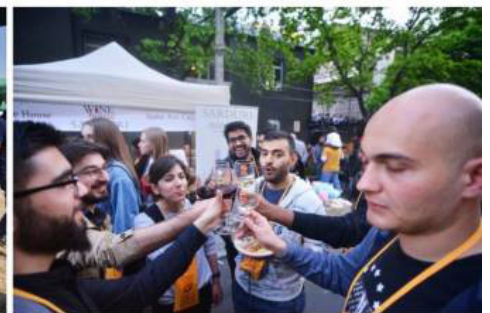
## Event tourism restoring in Armenia: Border communities to be under focus

Armenia's tourism sector is trying to gradually recover following the difficulties of 2020. Although COVID-19 has not been completely eliminated yet, this year the tourism season in Armenia will be full of festivals, also taking into account the new realities.

Director of the Festival Association of Armenian Festivals Nune Manukyan told Armenpress that there are no restrictions connected with mass gatherings anymore, which she considers as a good opportunity for restoring the events tourism in the country.

“The Association has developed rules for holding events amid the pandemic. For instance, the pavilions will be installed away from one another, the staff will wear face masks, the pavilions will have disinfectants in a visible, accessible place. The arrangements in the area will be in a way to avoid gatherings”, she said.

Nune Manukyan informed that despite that the annual festival season in Armenia starts with the Yerevan Wine Days event, which is taking place in the first Friday-Saturday of May, but this year will take place on June 4-5, this year the opening of the festival season will be held on April 30 with the Spirit of Armenia in Yerevan's English Park. It's a festival of alcoholic drinks, which will take place for the first time. All types of drinks produced in Armenia will be presented. The visitors will have an opportunity to see over 1500 types of drinks. Then, the traditional Dolma Festival is coming.



As usual, this tasty event will be accompanied by a number of cultural events. The next is the Yerevan Wine Days which is for wine-lovers. During the event the visitors have a chance to taste the Armenian wine, as well as be introduced on the production of winemaking companies.

This year, in line with all these events, Armenia's bordering communities will be under focus.

“We will definitely hold the Mulberry Festival in Karahunj. I think that this is very important for the domestic tourism. The community must not lose its attractiveness and should continue to be interesting for the guests. The Wine Festival will take place in Areni, the Gata Festival in the village of Khachik”, she said, adding that the

company, which is organizing the Yerevan Wine Days, is planning to hold two events in the provinces, the border communities. “The talk is about the Tavush Wine Days and the Yerevan Music Night. I think we need to boost our communities with the development of event tourism”, she added.

The festivals will take place, however, due to the pandemic, there won't be a major flow of foreign tourists. Manukyan, however, noted that there is a little progress in connection with the re-launch of flights. There are already foreign nationals interested in travel to Armenia. Manukyan said that there are some tour-operators who are interested in the list of event tourism. The Association will present details about the Armenian festivals and events on its Facebook page.

## Any attempts by Azerbaijan to change the status of Artsakh's occupied territories invalid – MFA

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh has sent a Memorandum to international organizations on the occasion of the visit of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to the occupied territories of the Republic of Artsakh.

The document, in particular, notes that after the end of the 44-day war imposed on Artsakh by Azerbaijan with the support of Turkey and mercenaries from various terrorist groups, the Azerbaijani authorities have set a course to impose a fait accompli created through the use of military force in blatant violation of norms of international law.

According to the document, among the instruments for implementing this policy are the visits of the President of Azerbaijan to the seized territories, the most striking of which is Aliyev's visit to the city of Shushi, where he made a number of statements replete with outrageous threats and militant rhetoric containing outright hatred towards the Armenian people.

The Memorandum also states that the provocative and inflammatory nature of the visits and the accompanying statements evidence Azerbaijan's intent to disrupt the resumption of the negotiation process on



a comprehensive settlement of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict and to keep the conflict unsettled. Such destructive and defiant behavior of Azerbaijan should be strictly condemned by the international community, the Memorandum reads.

The document underlines that the people of Artsakh exercised their right to self-determination and established statehood in those territories. As noted in the document, the failure to respect this fundamental right is not only a violation of human rights, but also one of the core sources of serious threats to security in the region.

The Memorandum notes that any legislative and administrative actions of Azerbaijan to change the status of the territories of the Republic of Artsakh, including the

expropriation of land and properties, the transfer of populations to the occupied territories and the incorporation of the occupied territories, are invalid under international law and cannot change their status. No territorial gains resulting from the threat or use of force should be recognized as legal.

The document notes that the current military occupation by Azerbaijan of the territories of the Republic of Artsakh, including the city of Shushi, also cannot change their status. The city of Shushi is an integral part of the Artsakh Republic in a number of aspects, including territorially, culturally, economically and historically. Any attempt to seize it is a gross violation of the territorial integrity of Artsakh.

The Memorandum underlines that only a just settlement of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict—one that will eliminate its root cause associated with Azerbaijan's unwillingness to recognize the rights of the people of Artsakh—will reverse the consequences of the illegal use of military force by Azerbaijan and re-institute the primacy of the principle of peaceful resolution of disputes.

## Human Rights Watch documents unlawful attacks by Azerbaijan on medical facilities in Artsakh

Three unlawful attacks on medical facilities by Azerbaijani forces during the six-week armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh have come to light in recent Human Rights Watch research in the region.

Human Rights Watch documented multiple unlawful strikes on a public hospital in Martakert in September through November 2020, and an unlawful strike on a military hospital in the town's outskirts in October. The hospitals were very close to the front lines at the time.

The weapon used by Azerbaijani forces against the military hospital – a satellite-guided variant of an Israeli-supplied rocket artillery system called LAR-160 – suggests that the strike was intentional. The strikes on the public hospital, including with Grad rockets and cluster munitions, appeared indiscriminate.

The attacks damaged both hospitals and impeded medical work, but no one was wounded or killed in the attacks.

Human Rights Watch also documented a deliberate attack on September 28, ap-



parently by Azerbaijani forces, on an Armenian military ambulance, in which assailants shot and killed a military doctor.

Human Rights Watch previously documented damage to two hospitals in Stepanakert, the capital city of Nagorno-Karabakh, due to Azerbaijan's indiscriminate strikes in October.

The Human Rights Watch further says Azerbaijani rocket artillery hit a military hospital in Aghabekalanj, a village just southwest of Martakert city, along the main road, in an apparently deliberate strike on October 14, 2020.

Before being hit, the hospital had

been providing first aid to the wounded – as many as 130 a day, hospital staff told Human Rights Watch – some of whom were then transported to Stepanakert for further treatment.

As Azerbaijani forces frequently shelled Martakert and surrounding areas during the conflict, patients were treated in the two-story hospital's reinforced basement, where medical staff also slept.

Human Rights Watch visited the hospital in November and found that the attack had caused significant damage. A small structure by the gate was largely destroyed, and the medical workers' housing in the back was severely damaged. The outer walls of the main building showed blast and fragmentation damage, and the windows were shattered.

Martakert's public hospital, the R. Bazyan District Medical Association on the northern end of Sakharov Street also suffered extensive shelling damage during the six-week war.



## President of Azerbaijan continues the policy of Armenophobia – MFA Spox

The hours-long press conference of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev on February 26 was another manifestation of hate speech towards the Armenian people, aimed at diverting the attention of the Azerbaijani society from domestic issues by manipulating the image of the Armenian people as a "useful enemy," Spokesperson for Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Anna Naghdalyan said in comments to Armenpress.

She emphasized that the President of Azerbaijan continues the policy of Armenophobia, which is the primary source of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

"The words 'Armenians are not Azerbaijan's enemies' uttered by President Aliyev, who has previously declared the Armenian people as number one enemy of Azerbaijan, are dissolved by hostile rhetoric towards the Armenian people, its state institutions, the army, so they cannot be credible," Naghdalyan said.

Second, she added, despite the increasing calls of the international community for the immediate release of Armenian servicemen captured in violation of the first provision of the November 9 statement, the President of Azerbaijan justifies violations of his country's international obligations, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, in fact by threatening with new captives.

"Moreover, the claim by the President of Azerbaijan that all Armenian captives have been returned was made when the relevant Azerbaijani authorities passed information to the reputable international bodies on the existence of Armenian prisoners of war," she added.



"Third, we have repeatedly stated that the use of force by Azerbaijan with the support of Turkey cannot be considered a resolution to the conflict. In order to establish peace and security in the region, the consequences of military aggression must be eliminated, the rights of the Armenians of Artsakh must be exercised, including on the basis of the right to self-determination proposed by the Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship," the Spokesperson noted.

Fourth, she said, the Armenian army is the guarantor of the right of the Armenian people to live and create free and dignified life in their homeland, which, at the cost of the self-sacrifice of many Armenians, thwarted the genocidal aspirations of the Turkish-Azerbaijani-terrorist alliance towards the Armenian people. "Aliyev's press conference once again proved the imperative of replenishment and modernization of the Armenian armed forces."

"The statements of the Azerbaijani leadership demonstrate that Azerbaijan is not ready to undertake steps for peace and stability in the South Caucasus, moreover, its statements nullify any possibility of building trust," Naghdalyan said.

As for Azerbaijani President's remarks on a "corridor" through the territory of Armenia, the Spokesperson emphasized that

the November 9 trilateral statement does not contain any provisions on the establishment of a corridor. "Any road or communication route passing through the territory of Armenia is and remains exclusively under the jurisdiction of the sovereignty of Armenia."

At the press conference for foreign media the President of Azerbaijan stressed the need for the return of Azerbaijani refugees to Artsakh.

In this regard Anna Naghdalyan said, "The November 9 trilateral statement calls for the return of displaced people to their places of residence under the supervision of the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Refugees. However, at least four months after the statement, the Azerbaijani side is posing impediments towards the entry of international organizations, including the UN specialized agencies, into Artsakh, disrupting the implementation of humanitarian missions."

"It is clear that the people displaced during the recent large-scale war must return in the first place; the November 9 statement is aimed primarily at eliminating the humanitarian consequences of that war. This refers to the residents of Hadrut, Shushi and other settlements fallen under the Azerbaijani control. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani armed forces not merely prohibit the return of the displaced, but also try to make it impossible by burning and destroying their settlements," she stated.

"Such behavior clearly indicates that the Azerbaijani leadership is trying to cover up the infamous policy of ethnic cleansing and annihilation of Armenians from Artsakh making announcements on the coexistence between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis," the Spokesperson concluded.

## Artsakh In My Heart AMAA's Vision For Artsakh

By Rev. Dr. René Léonian, AMAA Representative in Eurasia



*Since its founding in 1918, the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) has always aimed to be vital to the Armenian people. It is in a Christian spirit, and in the name of love of neighbor, that the AMAA has organized its programs.*

The essence of AMAA's work is summed up in its support to churches, its Christian education, humanitarian, educational, cultural and development programs.

After the devastating earthquake in Armenia on December 7, 1988, the AMAA's Board of Directors, under the leadership of its Executive Director Rev. Movses Janbazian decided to invest heavily in Armenia and come to the aid of families in the disaster areas. From the early years of AMAA's involvement in Armenia, the Association partnered with Espoir pour l'Arménie – Hope for Armenia of the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches of France. At the time, the official authorities of Soviet Armenia praised AMAA's mission and service in the Homeland.

On September 10, 1991, the AMAA was officially registered in Armenia to work in two directions (cf. official registration text):

- "To help the Armenian people in spiritual, religious, educational programs and publications.

- through humanitarian programs."

On September 21, 1991, Armenia became independent and immediately

afterwards the AMAA established its permanent headquarters in Yerevan (with "Hope for Armenia").

In the fall of 1994, I had the privilege to be the Representative of the Armenian Evangelical World Council and the AMAA. The AMAA's services were originally focused on the earthquake zone, then gradually it spread to the whole Armenian territory. From time to time, sporadic actions were carried out in Artsakh.

After a few years, the AMAA decided not to neglect Artsakh. Thus, in 1995, the leadership of the AMAA in the United States and the leadership of AMAA in Armenia, decided to set up a permanent center in Artsakh. That same year the

*The official ribbon cutting ceremony of the AMAA Center in Stepanakert, Artsakh in 1998, with Artsakh Republic Minister of Foreign Affairs Naira Melkumyan, AMAA Executive Director Rev. Dr. Movses Janbazian and local and overseas guests and Armenian Church representatives.*

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AMAA officially registered in Artsakh as the first Diasporan Armenian philanthropic organization.

This materialized through contacts with the highest authorities of the Republic of Artsakh. It was facilitated by personal ties, but also because the AMAA's reputation in Armenia was appreciated by the President and the Government of Artsakh.

Rev. Janbazian and I had a similar conception of the goal to be reached and shared these objectives with Hagop Manjelian, who was AMAA's

Field Director at the time.

Arsen Manasyan, who was appointed Coordinator of the AMAA's programs in Artsakh in 1996, strategically directed our offices in Stepanakert and supervised the AMAA's work throughout Artsakh. His courage and faith in God enabled the realization of our programs in the early years.

While being in full agreement with the objectives enshrined in the official statutes of the AMAA, spiritual and philanthropic action, we believed that Artsakh represented much more than a piece of territory. Artsakh was like a part of us.

During the Artsakh war for independence from 1990 to 1994, it was at the cost of the sacrifice of our soldiers and the Armenian population that we regained our honor and our pride in being Armenian. We understood that the security and independence of Artsakh were the guarantors of the security and independence of Armenia.

That is why it was necessary for the AMAA to invest in many areas of the lives of our brothers and sisters in Artsakh. Very quickly, the AMAA focused on the Christian education aspect of the younger generation, as well as their social, economic, educational and cultural needs. Through these programs, we knew that we would encourage the local people to stay in Artsakh.

The official inauguration of the new headquarters in Stepanakert was held







on July 15, 1998. The Government of Artsakh, by its presence at the inauguration ceremony, expressed its support for our patriotic, humanitarian and spiritual action.

That day in Stepanakert with Rev. Janbazian, our international delegation and our local leaders, we first stopped at the Cemetery of the heroes who fell during the liberation war to meditate. Rev. Janbazian deeply moved us by his words filled with gratitude to these young people who fell at the front for the defense of the Armenian borders and for the defense of Armenians all over the world.

Later in the day, we went to Shushi to visit this “impregnable” fortress. We prayed in the magnificent Ghazanchetsots Cathedral. When I left the Church, I asked Rev. Janbazian to follow me and our local Coordinator Arsen Manasyan. The three of us went to visit a house 500 meters away with adjoining land. I said to Rev. Janbazian: “We have a permanent seat in Stepanakert, now we must also set the presence of the AMAA in Shushi, because Shushi is the place where, in 1823, the Swiss missionaries of the Evangelical Mission of Basel settled and, it is there that the Evangelical movement began in the Caucasus (Eastern Armenia) among the Armenians. Rev. Janbazian looked

at this beautiful house and said: “It’s okay, you find the money in France and we buy it.” In the following months, an Armenian from France financed this purchase and that’s how AMAA settled in Shushi. This house was also the place where AMAA’s Summer Camp Program in Shushi developed. Soon AMAA also took charge of the only kindergarten in Shushi.

We were so happy, along with our Artsakh colleagues, to have been able to help the city of Shushi flourish.

Today, we are still reeling from the defeat of the war and the surrender of November 10, 2020. However, we believe that better days will come. The AMAA is still present in Artsakh. Our

on-site representatives do an extraordinary job and under the leadership of Executive Director/CEO Zaven Khanjian, the AMAA is raising awareness around the world on the situation and needs of Artsakh.

Thanks to the help and prayers of all AMAA members and friends, we will continue to participate in the recovery and development of Artsakh and its people.

We have been shaken, but we believe God has not forsaken us. The children of Artsakh will still sing patriotic and spiritual songs, they will still dance our folk dances, they will continue their studies, and they will grow up healthy, under the benevolent gaze of the Good Shepherd.

So, we will say as usual with faith and comfort: “Next year in Shushi!” □

\* Rev. Dr. René Léonian was AMAA Representative in Artsakh 1995-2011

In 1998 local leaders and international guests at Stepanakert Cemetery paid tribute to the heroes who fell during the liberation war and meditate.

The first property bought in Shushi, where the AMAA’s Summer Camp Program was developed.

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## Vatican holds first observance of Gregory of Narek Day

**The first observance of Gregory of Narek Day was held in Vatican on February 27, Vatican News reports.**

The first commemoration of St. Gregory Narekatsi (Gregory of Narek) was held in Vatican under the auspices of the Assembly of Eastern Churches and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Christian Unity, and in cooperation with Armenia's Embassy to the Holy See, Cardinal Leonardo Santri, Chairman of the Congregation, and Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Christian Unity, and Primate of the Armenian Catholic Church in Istanbul and Archbishop Levon Zekian, Pontifical Delegate of the Mekhitarist Congregation.

The Holy Sacrifice was attended by a very small number of participants, in view of the situation created by the epidemic. Among those present were the Apostolic



Delegate for Western Europe of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Archbishop Khazhak Barsamian, and other clergy members of the Apostolic Church, the great Rev. Fr. Narek Naamoyan, along with his fellow priests, the heirs of the Levonian Theological Seminary, Armenia's Ambassador to the Holy See Garen Nazarian and the staff members of the two embassies, as well as several Armenian and foreign guest and journalists.

In his homily during the Holy Sacrifice, Cardinal Santri placed special emphasis on the significance of the day.

At the end of the liturgy Saint Peter's Basilica, a small group of Armenians living in Rome also joined the Holy Sacrifice, and then all of them went together to the statue of St. Gregory of Narek erected in the Vatican Gardens in 2018, for a prayer.

By the decree of Pope Francis, February 27 is celebrated in the Roman calendar as the day of remembrance of St. Gregory of Narek (Grigor Narekatsi), Archimandrite of the Ecumenical Church, the Armenian Embassy to the Holy See reports.

It is included in the calendars of Catholic churches all over the world, the books of the liturgy and the texts of the liturgy will be updated.

On February 23, 2015 the Pope awarded the title of "Archimandrite of the Ecumenical Church" to the medieval Armenian clergyman, theologian, poet St. Gregory of Narek.

## Tomasz Lech Buczek: Polish politician offers himself as an exchange for Armenian POWs

Polish politician and lawyer Tomasz Lech Buczek has penned a letter to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, offering that he be exchanged for Armenian captives.

"In the name of eternal truth, faith and love for others. In the name of humanism, I propose the President that my person, Tomasz Lech Buczek, be exchanged for Armenian prisoners of war detained, humiliated and tortured in Azerbaijan. With



the condition of their immediate release," Buczek wrote.

"There are over 300 desperate families waiting for them, they wait with pain in the name of the truth," he said.

Tomasz Lech Buczek has been in Armenia for over a week. He wrote the letter in Etchmiadzin, where he held a meeting with His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

## 170+ US Representatives slam Erdogan

Bipartisan letter signed by more than 170 US Representatives calls on Biden Administration to stop appeasing Ankara, reports the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA)

**The letter addressed to Secretary of State Antony Blinken reads:**

As the Biden administration formulates its foreign policy in regard to Turkey, we ask that you aim to address the troubling human rights abuses taking place under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey has long been a key United States ally. Unfortunately, President Erdogan has strained the relationship between our nations. Strategic issues have rightfully received significant attention in our bilateral relationship, but the gross violation of human rights and democratic backsliding taking place in Turkey are also of significant concern.

President Erdogan and his Justice and

Development Party have used their nearly two decades in power to weaken Turkey's judiciary, install political allies in key military and intelligence positions, crack down on free speech and free press, and wrongfully imprison political opponents, journalists and minorities. Since 2016, more than 80,000 Turkish citizens have been imprisoned or arrested and more than 1,500 nongovernmental organizations have been closed to suppress political opposition. Among those arrested on dubious criminal charges include three Turkish staff employed by the U.S. State Department. We urge you to prioritize their cases, including their immediate release and dismissal of all charges, in your engagements with Turkey.

President Erdogan's government even brought its style to the streets of our nation's capital, when during Erdogan's 2017 visit to the United States, Turkish security

personnel assaulted peaceful protestors and federal employees. Four of Erdogan's guards still face charges in the United States for the incident. They remain at large in Turkey.

While it is in our mutual interest for the United States and Turkey to remain strategic allies and repair the rifts between us, we believe changes to President Erdogan and his party's behavior are vital to seeing that relationship restored. We hope that State Department under your leadership and the Biden administration more broadly will elevate human rights and democratic backsliding concerns in our bilateral relations. To that end, we pledge to work with you so that we can not only advance our nation's national security interests, but also uphold our commitments to supporting human rights, the rule of law, and democratic values.



## Internationally renowned physician Bernard Kouchner visits Armenia and Artsakh Republic

Internationally renowned humanitarian and physician Bernard Kouchner has arrived to Armenia at the invitation of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative that continues to bring the world humanitarian leaders to Armenia and Artsakh, exploring new opportunities to help the local population and to support Artsakh's international standing.

Mr. Kouchner, co-founder of Médecins Sans Frontières, former French Foreign Minister and member of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee, is accompanied by humanitarians Alain Boinet, Founder of Solidarités International, and Patrice Franceschi, former Chairman of the Société des Explorateurs Français. Together, they will have a chance to take a closer look at the regional humanitarian projects supported by Aurora and focused on promoting micro and small enterprises, restoring infrastructure, and boosting economy.

Bernard Kouchner co-founded the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) in 1971 and co-founded Médecins du Monde in 1980. He organized humanitarian operations to Somalia, El Salvador, Lebanon and Vietnam. In 2018, Mr. Kouchner joined the Aurora Prize Selection Committee comprised of Nobel Laureates, former presidents, prominent political figures, highly respected humanitarians and well-known human rights activists dedicated to recognizing modern-day heroes and the excep-



tional impact their actions have made on preserving human life and advancing humanitarian causes in the face of adversity.

After arriving to Armenia, Mr. Kouchner went to the Genocide Memorial Complex to honor the victims of the Armenian Genocide and had an opportunity to pay respect to the doctors who volunteered in Artsakh during the war. The next day, the delegation went to Artsakh to show their solidarity and support local humanitarian efforts, including those assisted by the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

In Stepanakert, Mr. Kouchner and others visited the Lady Cox Rehabilitation Center to meet with wounded soldiers in treatment. Aurora supports the infrastructure improvement of the Center within the framework of the Initiative's aid program for Artsakh, focused on assisting projects that facilitate the region's long-term social development. The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative has already allocated a total of \$581,740 (300,660,500 AMD) to aid fifty-seven local and international projects implemented by its numerous partners.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to come to Armenia and Artsakh and show my solidarity to those affected by the war.

I was impressed by the philosophy of the Lady Cox Center to integrate the whole family and environment in the therapeutic process. The whole place had a quiet and positive atmosphere, and I am happy that Aurora supports this institution that is so much needed in Artsakh," Dr. Kouchner said after the visit.

On February 24, Mr. Kouchner's delegation toured the areas of Stepanakert that had been most affected by the war and talked to the representatives of the projects assisted by Aurora, including The HALO Trust's operation to clear cluster munitions and other explosives in civilian areas to allow the safe return of displaced people to Artsakh.

"People [here] know very well that their existence depends, first of all, on a secured environment, and we understand now how important it is to create the proper structure for their health to respond to the needs of this strong and courageous population," Mr. Boinet remarked upon leaving the Stepanakert Republican Hospital.

On their way to Yerevan, Mr. Kouchner and his group will travel to Dilijan to tour the UWC Dilijan school and town. On Friday, before concluding his visit, Bernard Kouchner plans to take part in a moderated discussion at the Yerevan State Medical University and to go to the Matenadaran, Armenia's national repository of ancient manuscripts supported by Aurora Grants.

## Azerbaijani press keeps targeting Armenia's Human Rights Defender



Azerbaijani media outlets continue to publish insulting and hateful articles about

Armenia's Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan, calling him an "official infected with the fascist bacterium," "hypocritical," etc.

The Ombudsman has shared an article from Azerbaijani press related to his statements on the need to protect the rights of the residents of the border villages in Syunik province of Armenia.

The article shows the statements of the Human Rights Defender on these issues

caused great dissatisfaction in the Azerbaijan.

Yet again, the article yet again clearly displays the foundations of anti-Armenian sentiments in the country.

The Human Rights Defender says he will continue his mission for the protection of the rights of Armenia's border residents, regardless of any pressure against the activity deriving from his mandate.

## Levon Aronian says leaving Armenia

Armenia's leading Grand Master Levon Aronian has announced he is leaving the country.

"Last year was very difficult for all of us – an epidemic, a war, in my case – personal misfortune and the state's absolute indifference to Armenian chess. I was faced with the choice of quitting the work of my life or moving to a place where I would be valued," Aronian said in a lengthy post on Facebook.

"After waiting for the fulfillment of the promises of the current government for more than a year, I realized that I had to make a breakthrough decision to leave my native country," Aronian said, adding that every year of expecting change is a wasted year in terms of sports career.

"I am sincerely proud to have had the honor of making a significant contribution to the greatest achievements of Armenian chess. Three Olympic gold medals, gold at the World Championships, two World Cups, a number of individual and team victories. I think it is clear that in chess it is not possible to achieve heights without a huge



amount of hard work and state-sponsored support," Aronian added.

Levon says he has received a number of attractive offers from various countries over years, including from the great American philanthropist, chess lover Rex Sinquefeld, who repeated his offer to move to the United States every year.

"I always justified my refusal by saying that what my state was doing was invaluable for the development of chess, that no material value could be compared to the respect that a chess player enjoyed

in Armenia. I want to thank the respected Rex Sinquefeld for continuing to believe in me today. My thanks to Fabiano Caruana, who, being America's strongest player, supports me in sharing my decision to be his teammate. I am very grateful to him – to my family, relatives, friends, all the people who know my principles and understand me," he said.

Levon Aronian said he is connected to the homeland with all ties and will continue to do the possible and the impossible for the country even from afar.

## Artsakh manuscripts to be exhibited in Yerevan



The Artsakh manuscripts transferred from Matenadaran-Gandzasar scientific and cultural center to will go on display in the Mashtots Matenadaran from March 3, 2010.

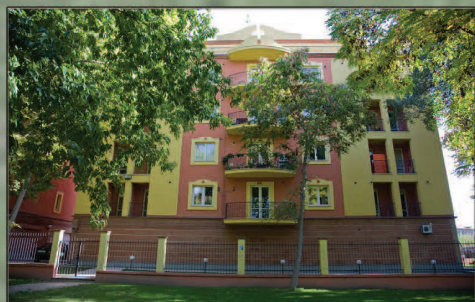
The exhibition will present the centers of Artsakh writing: Amaras, Gandzasar, Yeghishe Arakyal Monastery, Gtchavank, St. Hakobavank, Khadavank, Dadivank, Yeritsmankants monastery, Shushi.

Manuscripts written, illustrated and kept in Artsakh, archival documents, antique books printed in Shushi will be exhibited. A total of eight dozen items will be on display.



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