

Armenia, EU launch operational phase of visa liberalization dialogue



In Yerevan, Deputy Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission, Johannes Luchner, and the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Arpine Sargsyan, launched the operational phase of the Visa Liberalization Dialogue during a Senior Officials' Meeting on December 11.

The Senior Officials, overseeing the visa dialogue process, held the first exchange on the reforms needed in key areas crucial for achieving visa-free travel to the EU. These areas include document security, border and migration management, mobility and asylum policies, combating corruption and organized crime, and upholding fundamental rights. The meeting also explored how the EU could further support these reforms.

Both sides reiterated that the process is substance-based, that there is no automatism nor deadline to conclude it. The senior officials agreed that the next steps in visa liberalization progress will consist in two scoping visits early 2025, to enable experts from the EU institutions and Member States to conduct a gap analysis. The results of the planned scoping missions will help establish the list of relevant conditions necessary to achieve the long-term objective of visa-free travel for Armenian citizens to the EU.

Armenian Foreign Ministry closely monitoring developments in Syria

Central Electoral Commission validates petition on joining EU

Armenian, Ukrainian MPs discuss prospects for development of inter-parliamentary ties

U.S. calls on Azerbaijan to cease crackdown on civil society and media

Armenian Foreign Ministry closely monitoring developments in Syria

The Armenian Foreign ministry is closely monitoring the developments in Syria.

The diplomatic staff of the Armenian Embassy in Damascus and the Armenian Consul General in Aleppo continue to work in Beirut.

The two previously provided hotlines continue to operate (Consulate General

in Aleppo: +963960003622, Embassy in Beirut: +96176447205).

In case of problems with telephone communication, letters can be sent to the Embassy in Beirut by e-mail: armconsulatelebanon@mfa.am.

According to the Ministry, the calls received through the Embassy hotline over the past four days relate to the preparation

and issuance of necessary documents, mainly Armenian entry visas. In all the mentioned cases, the Embassy provides the necessary assistance, including by providing visas free of charge to Armenians arriving from Syria.

Additional information on new decisions will be provided based on further developments.

The draft of the Employment Strategic Plan discussed under the leadership of the Prime Minister



A consultation was held under the leadership of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, during which the draft Employment Strategic Plan for 2025-2031 was discussed.

It was noted that as a result of the previous consultation, based on the Prime Minister's instructions, the draft was revised and improved several times during working discussions organized by both the parliament and the executive body. The challenges, principles, vision and expected results of the strategy were discussed.

It was noted that the current challenges relate to the high dependency ratio, the concentration of economic activity in Yerevan, etc. It was presented that the main principles of the strategy are to address the synchronization of supply and demand in the labor market, the parallel growth of employment and productivity, the promotion of exports, the growth of foreign direct investment, and the change in the public's perception of work. Referring to the vision of the strategy, it was noted that it is aimed at ensuring employment growth through the formation of a competitive and employable workforce and the expansion of high-productivity work opportunities.

As for the action plan, according to those responsible, it will be aimed at ensuring the connection between different strategic levels, as well as the effectiveness

of continuous monitoring and evaluation of results. Regarding the expected results, reference was made to the growth of the labor resource by 2031, changes in the employment structure, the growth of employment in regional cities, etc.

An exchange of ideas took place around the draft, the participants of the meeting presented their observations and suggestions on individual points of the strategy, which related to formal and non-formal employment, increasing productivity and competitiveness, the connection between education and the labor market, etc.

In this context, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan emphasized the importance of combining strategies in different directions and instructed those responsible to finalize the draft strategy based on the results of the discussion and submit it to the Government for approval.

The Prime Minister holds farewell meeting with Italian Ambassador

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Italy to Armenia Alfonso Di Riso, who is completing his diplomatic mission in our country.

The Prime Minister noted that during the Ambassador's tenure, a positive dynamic of cooperation has been formed between Armenia and Italy and expressed hope that in the near future it will not only be maintained, but also continue to develop and strengthen. Nikol Pashinyan attached importance to the expansion of

bilateral ties, including in the political, economic, and cultural spheres.

Alfonso Di Riso thanked the Prime Minister for the close cooperation and noted that economic ties have developed in recent years, particularly in the textile sector. The Ambassador also highlighted the importance of implementing joint programs in the cultural sector and added that work on organizing a new exhibition is currently underway.

During the meeting, the latest developments in the discussions on the

Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty, as well as work on the border demarcation process, were referred to.



Pashinyan warns against highly dangerous narrative of abandoning Soviet maps in delimitation



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has warned that rejecting the USSR maps for delimitation could be highly dangerous.

Pashinyan released a statement on social media dismissing arguments claiming that conducting delimitation of borders with Azerbaijan on the basis of Soviet maps is unacceptable.

“[They] speak about the unacceptability of the maps of a non-existent country, the USSR. I have to say this directly, this approach is highly dangerous for Armenia because abandoning the maps of the USSR era could mean abandoning statehood and independence because we

gained independence on the territory of Soviet Armenia and the international community recognized us as such. Remaining committed to our internationally recognized territory is an important security buffer for us.

I’ve said several times in my public speeches, that if, we ourselves don’t accurately recognize our internationally recognized territory we give the opportunity to others to not recognize it too, moreover by citing us. By not accurately recognizing our internationally recognized territory we open our gates for others,” Pashinyan said.

The Prime Minister once again denied allegations that the government has given up sovereign Armenian territory near Kirants village during the delimitation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. He said the delimitation simply fixed the border and no sovereign territory was given up. “We fixed our gate, the border of our state, and I consider this a success

story, a breakthrough. Go to Kirants and you’ll see that success with your own eyes,” Pashinyan added.

Regarding the several contentious property ownership certificates held by locals in Kirants, the prime minister said the government has investigated the legal grounds of these documents and nothing was found, thus they assume that they were issued illegally.

“Unfortunately, such practice isn’t rare in Armenia. Law enforcement agencies are now dealing with the contentious cadastre certificates of Kirants, thus I won’t make more comments. Don’t forget one more fact, at that time all these territories, both Kirants and Kheyrimli, were part of the same state, residents of both villages carried the same passport and so on. And by the way, no one has terrorized anyone in Kirants. We had a direct, honest conversation with the people, without any ruse or tricks. And a part of this [conversation] was broadcast live,” Pashinyan said.

Armenian Justice Minister recognized as 2024 Anti-Corruption Champion by United States

The United States Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs has recognized Armenian Minister of Justice Srбуhi Galyan as 2024 Anti-Corruption Champion for her work to establish asset forfeiture as a crucial tool in the fight against corruption.

Before her appointment as Minister of



Justice, Galyan served as Deputy Prosecutor-General from 2020 to 2024 and coordinated the stolen asset recovery division.

In a press release, the ministry of justice said the award was given to Galyan by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Galyan is the first person in Armenia to receive the recognition.

Armenian, Ukrainian MPs discuss prospects for development of inter-parliamentary ties

On December 11, the Head of the Armenia-Ukraine Friendship Group of the National Assembly of Armenia, Hrachya Hakobyan, and members of the group Arsen Torosyan and Davit Karapetyan met with Lyubov Shpak, member of the Ukraine-Armenia Friendship Group of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, and Vadym Ivchenko, Member of the Verkhovna Rada. The Ukrainian delegation was in Armenia

to participate in the 64th plenary session of the General Assembly of the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly.

It was noted that Dmitry Mikisha has been elected as the new Head of the Ukraine-Armenia Friendship Group. In this context, the importance of enhancing bilateral cooperation and strengthening future interactions at the level of friendship

group leaders was emphasized.

During the meeting, the parties discussed a wide range of issues related to the agenda of Armenia-Ukraine relations. They explored the prospects for developing inter-parliamentary ties and highlighted the crucial role of interparliamentary partnership in expanding bilateral relations.

Central Electoral Commission validates petition on joining EU

The Central Electoral Commission of Armenia has confirmed the validity of the signatures submitted as part of a petition by a civic initiative that seeks to initiate parliamentary debates on launching a process of joining the EU.

According to the Central Electoral Commission, the number of valid



signatures amounted to 52,351.

By law, any petition seeking to enter parliament for consideration must garner at least 50,000 signatures.

The Central Electoral Commission said that organizers of the petition observed the verification process.

International community begins to talk about genocide when it is already a fact, Armenian FM says

The international community begins to talk and pay more attention to genocides and other mass crimes when they are already established facts, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said at the 5th Global Forum Against the Crime of Genocide in Yerevan.

“We witnessed this in our region not only in the case of the Armenian Genocide about 110 years ago, but also literally last year, when it seemed it was clear to the world that there were sufficient risk factors that could lead to irreversible consequences,” Minister Mirzoyan said.

“Unfortunately, we were unable to prevent it, and today we are witnessing its irreversible consequences. This is one of the examples when the response of international structures was not equivalent to the risk factors and the situation on the

ground. And the most significant of the mentioned risk factors, the spread of hatred, eventually turned from hate speech into a crime,” the Foreign Minister stated.

“The example I gave about the Armenians applies to the circumstances and causes of all other genocides and mass crimes, since the foundations, impulses and risk factors of this crime are the same,” he added.

The Armenian Foreign Minister emphasized that the situation in the world and the dangerous trends of genocidal risks should force us to find more effective ways to save people’s lives, the heavy bureaucratic machine should become more sensitive and flexible, not only in terms of providing an effective response, but also in terms of showing equal treatment to everyone.

“Ensuring the protection of national, racial, ethnic groups should continue to be the focus of attention of the international human rights system. At the same time, it is clear that the only guarantee of success in this regard is close international cooperation, including between UN structures, regional organizations, member states, non-governmental organizations, and other actors. Ensuring this cooperation has long become a shared responsibility, in which both the UN Security Council members involved in the decision-making process and major regional actors, as well as small states that have an impact on the situation on the ground and often take a pioneering role in promoting the prevention agenda, have their own unique role,” Minister Mirzoyan said.

Respect for international law the most important way to prevent genocide: UN Human Rights chief addresses Genocide forum in Armenia

The most important way to prevent atrocity crimes, including genocide, is for all governments and all parties to conflict fully to respect international law, because these grave crimes do not arise out of nowhere, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in an address to the participants of the 5th Global Forum Against the Crime of Genocide in Yerevan.

“They are preceded by patterns of systematic discrimination, exclusion and incitement to hatred based on race, ethnicity, religion or other characteristics, as well as other gross violations of human rights. States have the primary duty and legal obligation to prevent violations when risks are present. Today, many states are failing to live up to that responsibility,” the High

Commissioner said.

“From this important platform in Armenia, I urge all countries to abide by promote and enforce the rules of war. I also urge governments to cooperate in the investigation and prosecution of human rights violations or abuses amounting to international crimes. That means consistently supporting international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, and fully respecting and implementing their decisions, and it means that assessing all policies, including the provision of support to parties to conflicts with a view to ending such support if it presents clear risks of facilitating serious violations of international law, we are far from powerless to prevent and reduce the

risk of genocide and other atrocity crimes, national and regional strategies on hate speech, education on previous genocides, measures to counter incitement to racial, religious and other forms of hatred,” Volker Türk stated.

“These are all proactive steps that governments and societies at large are taking, supported by my office and the broader United Nations as individuals, we must all commit to building a culture of peace based on human rights and human dignity. I urge participants in this forum to promote and engage in all these efforts, and at this critical time, I wish you a successful gathering,” the UN Commissioner emphasized.

Political agenda of the Armenian-Indian relations distinguished by positive dynamics - Deputy Speaker

On December 11, in San Francisco the India-Armenia Edition of the Global Diaspora Forum was held, which was dedicated to the disclosure of the new ways of the economic cooperation between Armenia and India, as well as in the Diaspora. It brought together representatives of various fields: entrepreneurs, heads of high-tech companies, representatives of tourism, cinematography and other sectors, as well as influential figures from the American-Armenian and Indian diasporas.

The Forum was organized by the ORF/Observer Research Foundation and the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI Armenia).

According to a readout issued by the National Assembly, the NA Deputy Speaker, the Head of the NA Friendship Group Armenia-India Hakob Arshakyan gave a welcoming speech during the conference, where he touched upon the Armenian-Indian historical ties and underscored the status of India as a close and friendly country to Armenia.

"We are united with India by deep

civilizational and cultural ties and traditional friendly relations. I particularly highlight the role of the Armenian community in India, which has made a significant contribution to the socio-political and cultural life of both India and Armenia," Hakob Arshakyan underlined.

In the context of preserving cultural heritage, the National Assembly Deputy Speaker referred to the functioning Armenian College and Charitable Academy in Kolkata, as well as the Armenian churches in India, which testify to the activity of the Armenian communities in India and the care of the Indian Government.

The deep respect and cultural interaction between the Armenian and Indian peoples boost the enrichment of the Armenian-Indian bilateral cultural landscape and the formation of new values.

Hakob Arshakyan underlined that the political agenda of the Armenian-Indian relations is distinguished by positive dynamics, which has been strengthened especially in recent years.

Mutual visits and high-level meetings between the two countries, including the exchange of visits by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the upcoming visit of the National Assembly Speaker, as well as close cooperation in the defense and economic sectors, testify to the continuous deepening of bilateral ties.

The National Assembly Deputy Speaker thanked the organizers of the Forum for such important initiative, which gives opportunity the representatives and entrepreneurs of the Diaspora to expand cooperation.

The Armenian delegation participated in a gala dinner organized by the Observer Research Foundation, which was attended by the leading representatives of different spheres, artists, and high-ranking officials.

Within the framework of the Forum, the President of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) Samir Saran emphasized the importance of holding the Global Diaspora Forum and expressed confidence that it will be of continuous character.

Armenia, Azerbaijan close to achieving peace, Turkish FM says

We are close to achieving peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said as he presented the Ministry's 2025 budget to the Parliament, Anadolu agency reports.

"There is a glimmer of hope for peace

in the South Caucasus. Ensuring peace will contribute to the region's development and create new opportunities. Turkey supports all efforts in this process. Our country backs the negotiations between the parties, which are ongoing on

a bilateral basis, without intermediaries," Fidan stated.

He emphasized that Turkey supports all efforts in the process and supports negotiations between the parties on a bilateral basis, without intermediaries.

U.S. calls on Azerbaijan to cease crackdown on civil society and media

The United States has called on Azerbaijan to cease its crackdown on civil society and release all those unjustly detained.

"The United States calls on the Government of Azerbaijan to free immediately Rufat Safarov, Sevinj Vagifgizi, Azer Gasimli, Farid Mehralizada, Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, Gubad Ibadoghlu, recently detained associates of independent outlet Meydan TV, and many others arrested for their work on human rights," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. "The United States is deeply concerned not only by these detentions, but by the increasing crackdown on civil society and media in Azerbaijan."

Two of these individuals were to be celebrated in Washington this week for

their human rights advocacy:

Rufat Safarov is the co-founder of Defense Line, a civil society organization that documents and reports on politically motivated arrests and prosecutions, government corruption, and allegations of torture. He is one of the few full-time human rights defenders remaining in Azerbaijan and has been targeted for his work. Azerbaijani authorities detained Mr. Safarov on December 3, only days before he was to travel to the United States to receive the Secretary of State's Human Rights Defender Award.

As Editor-in-Chief of Abzas Media, Sevinj Vagifgizi and her team reported on illegal tenders to companies controlled by government officials and investigated

allegations of large-scale embezzlement of public funds. Her work has drawn the ire of authorities, and she has been held in pre-trial detention since November 2023. On December 9, Ms. Vagifgizi received the Secretary of State's 2024 Anti-Corruption Champions award in absentia.

"We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to release those unjustly detained for their advocacy on behalf of human rights, cease its crackdown on civil society, respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all, and fulfill the commitments it made when it joined the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe," Blinken added in the statement.

Armenia, India, Iran hold trilateral consultations



The second India-Iran-Armenia Trilateral Consultations were held on 12

December 2024 in New Delhi. Shri J.P Singh, the Joint Secretary of PAI Division

led the discussions from the Indian side. The delegations from Armenia and Iran were led by Anahit Karapetyan, Head of Asia-Pacific Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and Hashem Ashja' Zadeh, Director General of South Asia Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Based on the outcomes of the previous trilateral consultations held in Yerevan in April 2023, the sides discussed connectivity initiatives, engagement in multilateral fora, and regional developments. They also explored ways to promote trade, tourism and cultural exchanges while strengthening people-to-people contacts.

During the consultations, the delegations emphasized the need for fostering close cooperation under the INSTC and highlighted the role of Chabahar Port in this regard. The Armenian side briefed the participants on its "The Crossroads of Peace" initiative.

2025 economic growth could be around 4,5-5%, says economist

The expectations regarding Armenian economic growth in 2025 are a bit more modest, economist and Modex CEO Haykaz Fanyan told Armenpress.

"I think our expectations in 2025 must

be more modest. The reduction in the next year's state budget done by the finance ministry in the final phase also attests to that. Economic growth is projected at

5,1%. My expectations are lower, a bit lower than 5%. Perhaps it can be around 4,5-5%. That's around the normal growth of the country," the economist said.

Armenian Ambassador, Founder of Delphi Economic Forum discuss perspectives of cooperation

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to Greece Tigran Mkrtchyan met with Simeon Tsomokos, Founder and President of the Delphi Economic Forum, one of the most important international forums.

Ambassador Mkrtchyan briefed Simeon Tsomokos on Armenian-Greek relations in the fields of politics, diplomacy and defense, and presented the economic priorities. In this context, the potential of the Armenian Government's Crossroads of Peace program was also touched upon.

The parties discussed the possibilities of participation in and mutual support

within the framework of major international forums.

Regional topics were also discussed during the meeting.



EU provides €1.5 million grant to address short-and medium-term needs of Karabakh Armenians

Under the 'State and Resilience Building Contract for the Republic of Armenia' budget support programme, this week the European Union paid a €1.5 million grant to the Armenian Government in addition to €13.5 million disbursed in September, the EU Delegation in Armenia informs.

This budget support programme is to



support the Government of Armenia in addressing the short-and medium-term needs of Karabakh Armenians, as well as enabling their long-term socio-economic integration ensuring inclusion in the Armenian education, social protection and healthcare systems and integration into the labor market.

Amulsar gold mine: Negotiations on financing continue, minister hopes for successful operations

Discussions are underway with commercial banks in Armenia after the Eurasian Development Bank turned down a loan bid for exploitation of Amulsar gold mine, Minister of Economy Gevorg Papoyan has said.

Papoyan said he is unaware why the bank has rejected the crediting, but noted that the operators of the mine are in negotiations with commercial banks in Armenia.

"If these negotiations proceed successfully, the banks will finance the operators," Papoyan told reporters when asked on the matter. "During the past years our banks amassed big capital, which gives them



the opportunity to finance 150 million dollars. A few years ago, this would have been unimaginable, but now this is real and possible," Papoyan said.

He said the government takes part in

the process, given the big volume of financing.

"We ordered studies from a leading audit company, selected through a bid. Based on the results provided by them, as part of state-private sector co-operation, a relevant decision will be made," the minister said, adding that the implementation of the project is realistic.

"I hope we will have an operational mine. Moreover, in case of a successful process of the project, it will be possible to start extraction in the beginning of the fourth quarter," he said.

Armenia, Italy ink 2025 defense cooperation plan

Armenia and Italy held regular defense consultations in Yerevan under the chairmanship of Levon Ayvazyan, Head of the Defense Policy and International Cooperation Department of the Armenian Ministry of Defense, and Colonel Mattia Zuzzi, Head of the International Cooperation Department of the General Staff of the Italian Armed Forces.

During the consultations, the results of cooperation in 2024 were discussed, the tasks for the next year were outlined.

The parties commended the progress of cooperation, which has been expanding in recent years, embracing new areas.

Levon Ayvazyan briefed his colleagues on the progress of the work carried out towards the transformation of the army.

Opinions were also exchanged on a number of regional and international issues.

As a result of the consultations, the parties

signed the Armenia-Italy defense cooperation plan for 2025, which includes a number of events for the exchange of experience, training in various directions, military education, and other areas.



The interview of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia with Finnish media



During his visit to Finland, Armenia's Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan gave an interview to the local news agency "Lännen Media," which resulted in the publication of an article titled "We want to get closer to Finland and other democratic countries," featuring the Minister's interview, in four Finnish newspapers. The interview addresses various foreign policy issues, including democratic changes in Armenia, expanding partnerships based on democratic values, deepening cooperation with the EU, Armenia's suspension of participation in CSTO bodies, and the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

At the beginning of the article, the journalist noted that Europe is attractive to many today. The community of democratic countries is showing interest in Armenia in an unprecedented way. Quotes from the minister in the interview are presented below.

Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan emphasizes at the beginning of the interview that Armenia shares the same values with countries like Finland. He emphasized that his country is pursuing an "ambitious cooperation agenda" with Finland and the EU. "You know our policy of bringing Armenia closer and closer to the European Union. The Prime Minister of Armenia stated in his speech at the European Parliament that Armenia is ready to get as close to the European Union as the EU deems possible," Mirzoyan said.

According to him, Armenia is currently implementing a policy aimed at significantly deepening its relations with the EU. Negotiations are underway on a document titled New Partnership Agenda, described by Minister Mirzoyan as a comprehensive cooperation plan covering various fields.

"In April, a high-level trilateral meeting was held between Armenia, the EU and the United States. The main goal was to strengthen the resilience of Armenia, especially economically, keeping in mind that Armenia faces multiple threats from various directions, including hybrid threats, I might say.

As you know, Armenia is a democracy. We had a democratic non-violent revolution. We initiated extensive democratic reforms to eradicate corruption and strengthen democratic institutions. We have already had two parliamentary elections recognized as fully democratic, free, and transparent.

When building a democratic society, of course, we look for opportunities to strengthen ties with other democratic societies. It is quite natural that we turn our eyes to the EU, which has many established democracies."

Minister Mirzoyan confidently noted that the democratic changes taking place in Armenia are irreversible. "It doesn't matter which government comes to power through democratic free elections, democratic values are the foundation of our society."

The journalist then asks the following question: how well a military alliance with Russia fits together with European goals. Could Armenia, for example, be pressured to participate in Russia's war against Ukraine?


"To be honest, we have never been suggested, pressured, or expected to participate in any form in the war in Ukraine.

There has been no attempt," Minister Mirzoyan answered.

In response to a question about involvement of Armenia within the framework of the CSTO Minister Mirzoyan replied: "Formally, we are still part of this organization, but we announced that we have frozen our participation in its activities. We have thought for decades that, in a military sense, we should be in this military alliance, because we have had some common threats, certain concerns, on possible aggression against the territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Armenia. We thought that this organization would help us protect our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Unfortunately, in recent years we have seen several attacks and our internationally recognized borders have been violated. When that happened, we never got any real support. At the same time, with such commitments, allies are supposed to help each other. That is exactly the point of a military alliance.

This indifferent attitude led to enormous frustration. It truly shifted public opinion in Armenia. It has created a unique situation. We are in the middle of a major process. Where this process will lead us, I cannot predict, but I can say that we are deepening our relations with our European partners across various fields. I am talking about the economy, economic resilience, as well as political dialogue and mutual understanding. We have EU involvement in the security environment of Armenia. We have the format of Political and Security dialogue with the EU. We have the European monitoring mission deployed on the ground in Armenia, monitoring the situation at the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. These developments were unimaginable just a few years ago."

Touching upon the  page 9

page 8 ➔ process of normalization of relations with Azerbaijan, Minister Mirzoyan noted progress in the border delimitation process as positive development: "Overall, we have a border, and we know where it is. It is based on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration, signed by the former Soviet Republics, which transformed administrative borders into state borders. Of course, the commissions of the two countries must work together on further delimitation and precise demarcation"

Minister Mirzoyan, describing delimitation as a guarantee of future stability, noted: "As far as any guarantees are possible these days, having a clearly delimited border is a very strong mechanism."

In the context of opening of communications, Minister Mirzoyan noted that Armenia and Azerbaijan could reach solutions which would be acceptable for both sides: "We can organize the passage of Armenian goods through Azerbaijan and the passage of Azerbaijani products through Armenia. In the first phase, we can restart rail transit and expand it gradually."

Regarding the third component of normalizations of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan – the signing of the peace treaty – Minister Mirzoyan noted: "We now have 15 out of 17 articles agreed upon. I believe we could have finalized and signed

the treaty even before the COP29 climate summit in Baku. Unfortunately, this did not happen, but we are now ready to do so in a relatively short time. One could say this is a moment of hope. I would say we are very close. Despite the tragic past of our two states and societies, there is an opportunity to turn the page of hostility. The past has been difficult. It is not easy to comprehend, to forget, to forgive, but our region has seen enough bloodshed, and now we have the opportunity to look more towards the future."

Regarding the internal political crisis in Armenia following the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh, Minister Mirzoyan noted: "The Prime Minister of the country, government and political team decided to hold early parliamentary elections. We went to the people and asked two things: do they support deeper democratic reforms and the peace agenda, i.e. the policy of the government. We again got the majority of votes. We will ask the same in the 2026 elections, as of now the polls show support for the policy of the government."

At the moment, we are focused on strengthening the security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of our country. On the other hand, we are focused on the prosperity, continued modernization, and democratization of our country. And this naturally brings us closer to Europe and

similar value choices as yours.

At the same time, with all due respect to procedures and rules, perhaps it is time to act differently from the "business as usual" mode. This might be true both for geopolitical decisions and for internally significant decisions. The world is changing. Perhaps it is time for bold political decisions."

At the end of the interview, Minister Mirzoyan responds with a smile to the question about the nature of the work of Foreign Minister of Armenia: "Thank you for the interesting question. It was very tempting to first become Deputy Prime Minister and then Speaker of the Parliament after our democratic revolution, because we were all figures who went through that process. But when I received the proposal from the Prime Minister to take responsibility for foreign relations, it made me think. Not everyone would agree to take on this role, given the specific circumstances."

At the end of the article, the journalist added that one can imagine the number of challenges existing for Armenia just looking at the location of the country of just under three million inhabitants on the map between Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Iran in the neighborhood of Russia in the South Caucasus.

Syrian rebels elect transitional government leader



Syrian rebels have tasked Mohammed Al-Bashir, a former head of rebel-held northwestern Syria, with forming a

transitional government, The Brussels Times reported citing local television.

Al-Bashir will lead this government to manage the transition and "prevent the country from descending into chaos," the report stated, without providing further details.

Rebels led by the Islamist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) made rapid advances last week, prompting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to flee the country.

HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani arrived in the capital, Damascus, on Sunday, and later met with Assad's prime

minister and vice president to discuss forming a new government.

Al-Bashir, an engineer from Idlib, had previously served as a minister in the rebel-controlled northwestern region of Syria. Earlier this year, he was appointed the head of the government in that area, which was supported and financed by HTS but lacked international recognition.

The decision to appoint Al-Bashir followed a meeting between him, HTS leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa (al-Jolani's real name), and current Prime Minister Ghazi al-Jalali, according to Arabiya TV.

From confrontation to cooperation, Armenian Parliament Speaker briefs PABSEC on ‘Crossroads of Peace’ initiative



Armenia is a landlocked country and has systemic vulnerabilities in accessing global markets, Speaker of the Armenian National Assembly Alen Simonyan said in opening remarks at the 64th plenary session of the General Assembly of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

Therefore, he said, “we recognize the importance of equal and inclusive connectivity, open borders, and fully functioning transport infrastructure for the economic well-being of the region.”

“The elimination of political barriers to the free movement of people, goods, and services, the realization of human economic and social rights, including the right to development, is a vital prerequisite for the full realization of the economic potential of the Black Sea region and its integration into global markets,” Simonyan said.

“The Black Sea region is of great importance in the context of the development of trade and transport communications in

the East-West and North-South directions. In order to identify and realize the transport potential of the region, we should focus our efforts on the effective implementation of the BSEC mechanisms. The implementation of the “Black Sea Ring Highway”, “Sea Routes” initiatives can significantly increase the resilience and improve the quality of transport infrastructure in our region. It is also important to develop joint mechanisms for trade facilitation and simplification of customs procedures,” the Speaker noted.

He emphasized that due to its geographical location, the South Caucasus can contribute to economic cooperation and trade between Europe and Asia. “The unblocking of all trade and transport communications in the South Caucasus, based on full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality and reciprocity of states, will open up new opportunities not only for the economic development of the region, but also for

people-to-people contacts and cultural ties. This will significantly contribute to security and stability in the region and beyond,” he said.

“Guided by this vision, the Government of Armenia has introduced the Crossroads of Peace initiative. As part of our peace agenda, this program aims to develop regional communications based on international law, state sovereignty and jurisdiction. The Crossroads of Peace program can effectively connect the Persian Gulf, the Black and Caspian Seas, contributing to the expansion of economic cooperation and trade,” he said.

“Armenia has been constructively engaged in negotiations with Azerbaijan on the lifting of the blockade of transport infrastructure. No less important is the resumption of communication routes with Turkey. The successful outcome of this process can restore the region’s importance in international cargo transportation, contributing to the well-being of our countries and peoples and peace in the region,” Simonyan stated.

He noted that the “Crossroads of Peace” is aimed at transforming the paradigm of relations in the region from confrontation to cooperation.

“We hope that the parliament of the BSEC member states will support this initiative, which is fully in line with the principles and norms of international law. I am confident that with joint efforts we can significantly contribute to a better and more prosperous future for all countries in our region,” the National Assembly Speaker said.

French ambassador, not Pashinyan, is defending Armenia's interests



Harut Sassounian

Something is terribly wrong when Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is making continuous concessions to Azerbaijan, while the French ambassador to Armenia, Olivier Decottignies, is defending Armenia's interests. Ironically, a foreign ambassador is more pro-Armenian than the prime minister of Armenia.

When Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev repeated his lie about the non-existent "Western Azerbaijan" as a replacement for the Republic of Armenia, Pashinyan shamefully equated the fake "Western Azerbaijan" with Armenians' historical demands for "Western Armenia." It was the French ambassador who posted on Nov. 24, 2024, on X: "The one and only: Western Azerbaijan is one of the 31 provinces of Iran whose capital and largest city is Urmia," quoting from Wikipedia. He attached a map of Iran that indicated the location of the Western Azerbaijan province in Iran. The post was viewed over 93,000 times with 114 comments and 1,100 likes. An Armenian with the pseudonym "Nemesis Melkonian" praised the French ambassador on X: "Can you become our next prime minister? The current one is ethnically Turkish." An Iranian replied: "As an Iranian" adding the OK hand sign. This was a slap in the face of Aliyev, but also a rebuke to Pashinyan, according to some Armenian commentators.

On the same day, the French ambassador also posted a photo of the well-known Blue Mosque in Yerevan and wrote: "In the gardens of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan, emblematic of the Persian heritage

of Armenia." This post was viewed 43,000 times with 46 comments and 660 likes. While Azeri commentators falsely claimed that the Blue Mosque was of Azerbaijani origin, many others thanked the French ambassador for featuring this historic Persian place of worship. The Iranian Embassy in Armenia expressed its appreciation to the French ambassador by posting on X: "The Blue Mosque, a symbol of Iranian art, has been active again in the last three decades as the praying and congregation place of Muslims residing in Armenia and a touristic attraction. A great pleasure that its centuries-old Persian epigraphy has been preserved! Who can read them?" The embassy then added several images of Persian calligraphy found on the walls of the mosque.

Mordechai Kedar, an Israeli sycophant of Azerbaijan, jumping into the discussion, wrote an article in the Jerusalem Post on December 5, 2024, titled: "France's ambassador sparks outrage with support for Persian hegemony in Armenia." This is nothing but pure pro-Azeri propaganda.

Kedar wrote that "the Azerbaijanis are outraged by these social media posts, as the Blue Mosque in Yerevan was built by Azerbaijanis, and trying to portray the mosque as 'Persian' demonstrates France's support for Persian colonialism in the region. Furthermore, the Azerbaijanis are angered at the French diplomat's attempt to portray West Azerbaijan as part of Iran." If the Azeris were outraged by what the French ambassador wrote, why is it any of Kedar's business, unless he expects to gain something by volunteering to act as a propagandist for Azerbaijan?

Kedar claimed that Armenians have described the Blue Mosque as Persian in order "to erase all traces of Azeri heritage from their country [Armenia]." Kedar is ignoring the fact that Azeris have destroyed thousands of Armenian historic monuments and churches in Artsakh and Azerbaijan. Making an even more outrageous claim, Kedar wrote that Persians "used these Armenian acts of delegitimization in order to expand their colonial influence into the South Caucasus."

To pile up the attacks on Armenia and

France, Elnur Enveroglu wrote on the AzerNews website that the French ambassador's tweets "revealed Decottignies' ignorance of history." Elnur could not even spell the ambassador's last name correctly.

Naturally, the French ambassador could not leave unchallenged such nonsense from Kedar whose childish arguments disgraced the Jerusalem Post. The ambassador replied, "Seriously, Mr. Kedar? The Blue Mosque in Yerevan was built under Persian rule in typically Persian style. Does calling a Roman aqueduct Roman 'demonstrates support' for colonialism?"

There was no reason for Nasimi Aghayev, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Germany, to stick his nose in this issue, but being a life-long falsifier of the truth, starting from his days as the Consul General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, he wrote, "Beautiful Azerbaijani Blue Mosque in Yerevan. Built in 1766 by Huseyn Ali Khan, Ruler of Azerbaijan Iravan [Yerevan] Khanate. The only surviving mosque in Armenia. All others (at least 269) were destroyed. Regrettably, Armenia continues to deny Blue Mosque's Azerbaijani identity." Mary Hogins rightly responded in a tweet to Nasimi: "You mean Persian Mosque, lying khiyar [cucumber]?"

Nasimi must have forgotten that until 1918 there was no such country as Azerbaijan. Even then, the Secretary General of the League of Nations rejected Azerbaijan's application to be recognized as a state by writing in an official memorandum in 1920: "This territory, occupying a superficial area of 40,000 square miles, appears to have never formally constituted a State, but has always been included in larger groups such as the Mongol or Persian and since 1813 the Russian Empire. The name Azerbaijan which has been chosen for the new Republic is also that of the neighboring Persian province." Case closed.

In his fanatical zeal, Aliyev doesn't seem to understand that his constant attacks on France, based on lies, are not going to end well for Azerbaijan. France is a superpower, while Azerbaijan is a banana republic, which does not even have bananas, ruled by a two-bit dictator!

Congressman Brad Sherman appointed as Vice Chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus



Congressman Brad Sherman (CA-32), senior Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has been selected as the new Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional Armenia Caucus – an organization of over 100 Members of the United States Congress who are dedicated to strengthening the U.S.-Armenia relationship and advancing Armenian issues.

“I am honored to serve as the Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus,” said Congressman Sherman. “For nearly three decades, I have dedicated myself to strengthening the ties between the United States and Armenia, combatting anti-Armenian hate, and advocating for the Armenian American community. As Vice Chair, I look forward to building on this legacy, working with my colleagues towards a future of democracy, security, and prosperity for Armenia and its people.”

“Rep. Brad Sherman has been a decades-long champion for Artsakh’s freedom and Armenia’s security, demonstrating unwavering leadership in advocating for Armenian community priorities,” stated Aram Hamparian, Armenian National

Committee of America (ANCA) Executive Director. “We are proud to welcome him as the new Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus, and we look forward to working with the Caucus leadership to support Armenia’s sovereignty, advance the Artsakh people’s right to return, and hold Turkey and Azerbaijan accountable for their genocidal actions against our nation.”

“We congratulate Representatives Pallone, Bilirakis, Valadao, and Sherman for their leadership roles as Co-Chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues in the 119th Congress,” stated Marjiam Khaloyan, Congressional Relations Director of the Armenian Assembly of America. “Their longstanding commitment to advancing U.S.-Armenia relations and addressing issues of critical importance to the Armenian-American community is deeply appreciated. We look forward to working with them to advance policy priorities that reflect our shared values and which strengthen bilateral ties.”

“We at In Defense of Christians (IDC) are thrilled to learn that Congressman Sherman will serve as Democratic

Vice Chair of the Armenia Caucus; a well-deserved honor. His resume certainly matches the role! Congressman Sherman is a longtime stalwart for Armenian issues. Congressman Sherman passionately (and effectively!) championed the U.S. Congress’ long-overdue recognition of the Armenian Genocide, which took the lives of over 1.5 million Armenians and hundreds of thousands of other Christians, including Greeks and Syriacs. Still today, Congressman Sherman is a chief standard bearer in calling out Azerbaijan for the ethnic cleansing of 120,000 Armenian Christians in their millennia-old homeland, Nagorno-Karabakh. When it comes to championing Armenian issues in the U.S. Congress, Congressman Sherman is as real as it gets,” said Richard Ghazal, Executive Director of In Defense of Christians.

Throughout his tenure in Congress, **Congressman Sherman has been a steadfast advocate for Armenian issues**, including:

Recognition of the Armenian Genocide: consistently introduced and championed resolutions calling for the formal recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Support for Artsakh: has actively called for U.S. assistance to Artsakh and has condemned aggression against its people.

Humanitarian Aid: has worked to secure significant U.S. humanitarian assistance for Armenia and Artsakh.

As Vice Chair, Congressman Sherman aims to further elevate the Caucus’s efforts in promoting human rights, democracy, and economic development in Armenia, Artsakh, and the Caucasus region, and looks forward to collaborating with his Congressional colleagues, Armenian American organizations, and the Armenian government to advance these shared goals.

GRECO notes Armenia's progress in preventing corruption among parliamentarians, judges and prosecutors, closes the compliance procedure

In the new compliance report published on December 11, the Council of Europe anti-corruption group GRECO concludes that Armenia has made additional steps to comply with the pending recommendations provided back in 2015 related to prevention of corruption among members of parliament and judiciary.

GRECO states that out of the 18 recommendations provided, 12 recommendations have now been implemented satisfactorily, and six remain partly implemented. The report terminates the compliance procedure for Armenia in this monitoring round.

GRECO stresses that rules applicable to the acceptance of gifts have been clarified and upgraded in respect of all categories of persons (parliamentarians, judges and prosecutors).

It notes that with respect to members of parliament, some progress is underway. The authorities have reported positive examples regarding the practice of public engagement in parliamentary work. Likewise, measures have been taken to

prevent conflicts of interests of MPs (i.e. rules on the transfer of shares held by parliamentarians in commercial organizations to trust management) and to provide for greater scrutiny in this risk area. A Code of Conduct is yet to be adopted and coupled with effective supervision, advisory and awareness raising measures.

With regard to the judiciary, GRECO regrets that the Minister of Justice still has a role in the disciplinary procedures against judges. However, the Action Plan for 2022-2026 on the Strategy of Judicial and Legal Reforms foresees the review of the weight allocated to the votes of non-judge members of the Ethics and Disciplinary Commission of the General Assembly of Judges. Appeal mechanisms have been provided for decisions on the recruitment and promotion of judges. For dismissal decisions, amendments to the Law on the Judicial Code have introduced an appeal mechanism against decisions of the Supreme Judicial Council, which has not been made operational yet.

Even though this report, the fifth one assessing compliance with the 2015 recommendations, terminates this monitoring round, the Armenian authorities may, however, wish to inform GRECO of further developments in the implementation of the outstanding recommendations. These are related to the adoption of the code of conduct for parliamentarians; strengthening the mechanism for monitoring their compliance with standards of ethics and the code; reforming the procedures for the recruitment, promotion and dismissal of judges, reviewing the system of disciplinary proceedings against judges; identifying and effectively sanctioning undue interference with the judges' activities, as well as to pursuing a deliberate policy for preventing improper influences on judges.

Armenia continues to be monitored by GRECO in the ongoing Fifth round focusing on preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies.

4,479,792 AMD to Armenia Tree Project. the next beneficiary is Children of the regions NGO

4,479,792 AMD: this is the amount accumulated through "The Power of One Dram" initiative during the month of November, which has been transferred to the Armenia Tree Project (ATP) charitable foundation for its "Backyard Nurseries" program. This program supports 113 village residents, helping them establish nurseries on their own land. The funds raised through "The Power of One Dram" will be used to purchase the planting material grown in these nurseries, which will then be planted for afforestation efforts.

Idram and IDBank announce that the total amount accumulated during December will be transferred to the "Children of the Regions" socio-educational non-governmental organization for the annual regional forum Face to Face: Dialogue of Generations. The forum aims to provide a platform for children with unique experiences and stories to share, who have already achieved success in their respective fields of activity.

Tatevik Vardevanyan, head of the Communication and SR Programs Department of Idram and IDBank, is confident that this collaboration will provide additional motivation and inspiration for young people living in the regions to continue building their future in their hometowns. "This is a very important issue—to help our youth envision their best future in the very place where they were born and live. Modern opportunities have long proven that achieving success, obtaining education, building a career, and creating connections no longer necessarily require moving to the capital. Thanks to foundations like MEM, our children and young people in the regions gain the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to achieve all of this," noted Tatevik Vardevanyan.

According to Aramays Margaryan, President of MEM NGO, such collaborations are extremely important as they target the same audience—children—and address the same field—education

and the culture of collaboration between younger and older generations. "I am confident that through joint efforts, we will nurture hundreds of motivated, collaborative individuals from both younger and older generations who are digitally and financially literate," emphasized Aramays Margaryan.

The army of goodwill ambassadors for "The Power of One Dram" is growing day by day, which means that in the coming year, we will help make even more dreams come true. We remind you that you don't need to do much to join the good works of "The Power of One Dram". Just make all your payments with the Idram&IDBank application, IDBanking.am, banking.idram.am online platforms, Idram and Bank terminals, and for each of your payments, companies will donate one dram to the implementation of programs and initiatives of the greatest importance.

COMPANIES ARE SUPERVISED BY RA CBA

Supporting Happiness Through Help: Armenian Culture Shines at the European Parliament's Christmas Market

Armenian culture and craftsmanship take center stage at the European Parliament's Christmas Market with a dedicated stand managed by the Arslanian Foundation. All proceeds from this stand are directed to supporting Armenian families in need, with a current focus on improving living conditions for displaced Armenians from Artsakh by providing essential goods.

In an interview with *Armenian Press*, Anelga Arslanian, head of the foundation and initiator of this project, shared how the aftermath of the 2020 Artsakh War and the hardships faced by displaced families compelled them to act. Initially relying on family resources as part of a tradition of giving, they expanded their efforts to support a growing number of families.

"We began by assisting seven homeless families, but that number quickly grew. Today, we're striving to help dozens. I was determined to secure sponsorships for my compatriots. Some donors wished to contribute without direct contact with the families, which led us to formalize our efforts by creating the foundation, establishing a dedicated bank account, and ensuring that all donations are securely managed," explained Anelga. She stressed the value of personally meeting with the families at least two to three times annually to better understand their needs and develop practical solutions.

Irene Sanchez Prieto, a Spanish staff member at the European Parliament, supported the stand last year by purchasing handmade Armenian crafts to gift to her friends in Spain. "Every piece here is brimming with color and love—it's stunning. By treating ourselves, we're also helping families and women in need. What could be more beautiful?" she remarked.

For Hungarian translators at the European Parliament, the stand is a unique chance to explore and purchase authentic Armenian handmade items—a rare opportunity. Enthusiastic about languages and cultures, they cherish the ability to bring a touch of Armenian heritage into their homes.

The Arslanian Foundation aims to go beyond one-time donations, focusing on sustainable solutions that empower families to escape extreme poverty. By



gifting a goat, rabbits, or beehives, they enable families to generate income and gain stability, paving the way for assistance to other families in dire need.

"Some families have daughters eager to learn trades like manicuring or hairdressing. We've created opportunities for them to train and start working. Once these families achieve self-sufficiency, we move on to support others living in deplorable conditions—homes without roofs or sanitation, for instance. The challenges are enormous, especially with the influx of 120,000 displaced Armenians from Artsakh," said Anelga. She expressed heartfelt gratitude to those contributing through donations or purchases.

Founded to assist struggling families in Armenia, Artsakh, and the diaspora, the foundation has initiated numerous projects. In 2020, Lara Arslanian launched

the Protect ARTsakh online charity art auction, while Anelga and Lori Arslanian oversee the foundation's operations and initiatives.

A notable program, "One Village, One Tractor," has provided seven remote and impoverished villages with tractors, enabling residents to sustain themselves through agriculture.

Born and raised in Belgium, Anelga Arslanian is a physician who first traveled to Armenia during the Spitak earthquake in

1988. Since then, Armenia has remained a significant part of her family's life. As a member of Doctors Without Borders, Anelga remains deeply connected to her Armenian heritage and committed to helping those in need.

The foundation also conducts fundraising campaigns to equip Armenian hospitals with critical medical devices, such as neonatal resuscitation equipment. Furthermore, they provide displaced Artsakh families with essential items, including beds, blankets, pillows, and sheets, to improve their living conditions.

Prior to participating in the European Parliament's Christmas Market, the foundation held a week-long charity sale at the office of an Armenian architect in Brussels. Located on one of the city's busiest streets, the architect generously offered his space to support this noble cause.



Sean Baker's ANORA starring Armenian actors nominated for five Golden Globes



Sean Baker's ANORA starring Armenian actors Vache Tovmasyan and Karren Karagulian has been nominated for five Golden Globes.

The film has been shortlisted for Best Motion Picture, Best Screenplay, Best Director (Sean Baker), Best Performance by a Female Actor (Mikey Madison) and Best Supporting Performance by a Male Actor (Yura Borisov).

"Anora" centers on Ani, a Brooklyn stripper turned call girl who strikes gold with a wealthy client, the son of a Russian oligarch, only for the fairy tale to turn sour.

Wicked's Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande are among the stars who have scored nominations for the Golden Globes.

Angelina Jolie, Hugh Grant, Timothee Chalamet, Sebastian Stan, Demi Moore, Pamela Anderson, Kate Winslet and Selena Gomez are among the other big names in contention.

Netflix musical Emilia Pérez, about a Mexican drug lord who changes gender, leads the nominations overall with 10, including one for Gomez.

Other prominent films include heavy-weight dramas The Brutalist, about a

Hungarian architect who tries to build a new life in the US after World War Two, and Conclave, about a group of scheming cardinals who gather to select the new Pope.

The top film nominees:

- Emilia Perez – 10
- The Brutalist – 7
- Conclave – 6
- Anora – 5
- The Substance – 5

The Golden Globe winners, chosen by 300 international critics, will be announced at a ceremony in Los Angeles on 5 January, followed by the Oscars on 2 March.

Syrian Armenians Expect Aid from Yerevan

(RFE/RL) - The Armenian community in Syria and the war-torn city of Aleppo in particular hopes to receive urgent economic assistance from Armenia, one of its representatives indicated on December 11

The once thriving community has been in limbo since Syrian rebels launched late last month a military offensive that led to the ouster of the country's longtime President Bashar al-Assad.

An estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Syrian Armenians still live in Aleppo. Even before capturing Damascus at the weekend, the rebels led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) Islamist militant group assured them that it will protect and not discriminate against the Christian minority.

A spokeswoman for the Aleppo diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which has long been representing the local community, said that while the security concerns of its members have been seemingly addressed for now, they are increasingly grappling with the economic fallout from



consulate in Aleppo and embassy in Damascus as the rebel offensive progressed rapidly. It has announced no plans to reopen the diplomatic missions following the formation of a new, interim government of Syria.

"It's not that the government could do something but doesn't," said Zareh Sinanian, Armenia's high commissioner for Diaspora affairs.

the recent fighting. Maria Gabrielian said that because of the continuing chaos in the country many of them have trouble reopening their small businesses or earning a living otherwise.

Gabrielian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that the diocese has provided \$35 worth of one-off financial aid to every Armenian family in Aleppo. The money will support them for just a few days, she said.

"We would like you to ask the Armenian government in what ways they can assist Syrian Armenians so that we find out," added Gabrielian.

The government evacuated Armenia's

high commissioner for Diaspora affairs. "The situation was developing very quickly, it was fluid, and the government, like everyone else, didn't even have a realistic chance to respond."

Sinianian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that shortly before the fall of Damascus the government bought air tickets for 14 Syrian Armenian families that fled Aleppo and were scheduled to fly to Yerevan on December 14. He said the flight has not been cancelled by a Syrian airline operating it and may still go ahead as planned.

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