

## Armenian-Italian high-level negotiations take place in Rome



*Italy -- Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (L) and his Armenian counterpart Nikol Pashinyan inspect an Italian honor guard before talks in Rome, November 22, 2019.*

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hailed Armenia’s growing trade with Italy and called for greater Italian investments in his country during an official visit to Italy that ended on November 22.

The Prime Ministers of Armenia and Italy held private talks, during which Nikol Pashinyan and Giuseppe Conte discussed the course of the Armenian-Italian relations and the development prospects. During the extended-format meeting that followed their private talks, the Armenian and Italian Prime Ministers referred to a wide range of issues of bilateral cooperation.

Giuseppe Conte expressed support for Armenia’s democratic agenda and went on to assure of Italy’s readiness to cooperate closely with our country in promoting the rule of law, the judiciary reform and strengthening democratic institutions.

Thankful for the Italian side’s readiness and valuable contribution to the formation of an anticorruption commission, Nikol Pashinyan highlighted Italian companies’ active participation in our country’s economic life. Confident that the aforementioned initiatives will be continued, the Armenian Premier advised that his government intends to promote investments in every possible way. Pleased with Italy’s initiative to launch negotiations on visa liberalization with the EU, he hailed the improved migration pattern in Armenia.

Nikol Pashinyan and Giuseppe Conte expressed satisfaction with the ongoing Armenian-Italian cultural and edu-

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## Armenian Prime Minister, Mayor of Milan discuss cooperation

Nikol Pashinyan and Mayor of Milan Giuseppe Sala held a meeting at the Institute for International Political Studies as part of the official visit of the Armenian Prime Minister to Italy.

Mayor Sala welcomed the Armenian Premier's visit to Italy, namely to the city of Milan – finding it to be a good opportunity to discuss cooperation items, the Prime Minister's Office said in a news release. The mayor said that Milan is a dynamically progressing, multinational city, and presented its development programs as Italy's major financial-economic and industrial center. Giuseppe Sala namely spoke about urban development, innovations, transportation infrastructure and tourism, and presented details from the ongoing reforms in public transportation of Milan.

PM Pashinyan attached importance to his



visit to Milan- one of the significant financial, economic and cultural centers of Italy- as part of the official trip to the country. He commended the city's development projects and noted that Armenia and its capital city of Yerevan are interested in joint ini-

tiatives of implementing reforms in various sectors. In this context the Premier highlighted exchange of experience and joint discussions in the public transportation reforms. The Armenian PM also addressed the importance of the upcoming Yerevan-Milan-Rome flights due to be launched by RyanAir from January 2020. He noted that the flights will boost economic, business, cultural, tourism and interpersonal ties between Armenia and Italy and will strengthen political relations.

The sides attached importance to the role of Milan's Armenian community in the strengthening of Armenia-Italy relations. They also exchanged ideas over prospects of development of the Armenian-Italian cultural ties.

## Pashinyan visits flood-affected Mekhitarist Monastery to express support during Italy trip



Nikol Pashinyan's first stop during the official visit to Italy was Saint Lazarus Island in Venice, where the Mekhitarian Congregation is located, a religious and cultural organization with a history of about 3 centuries.

The Head of Government toured the site, where Pontifical Delegate of the Mekhitarist Congregation, Prelate of the Armenian Catholic Church in Turkey Archbishop Levon Zekian briefed him on the consequences of the latest flood in Venice.

According to him, the ground floors were filled with water, the south gate was ruined and some manuscripts and ornaments were damaged in the disaster.

A sailboat called Armenia collided with a berth, but the Congregation did not suffer serious cultural damage. The scale of the damage is being estimated at this point of time. Prime Minister Pashinyan expressed solidarity with the members of the Congregation, stating that he was glad that no irreversible losses had been caused to the

Mekhitarists' cultural assets.

Following the Lord's Prayer, Nikol Pashinyan lit a candle and later called at the Congregation's library to sign in the Golden Book. "We have come to express our support to the flood-hit Mekhitarist Congregation, I am happy that no irreversible damage has been inflicted. I would also like to express the Armenian people's appreciation to the Mekhitarist Congregation considering that it is a source of our modern education, science and arts. At the times when the Armenian identity was jeopardized in the Motherland, the Mekhitarist Congregation became a temple for preservation of our language, history and identity. I bow to all devotees of that sacred mission," the Premier wrote.

Later on, the Prime Minister met with Pontifical Delegate of the Mekhitarist Congregation, Prelate of the Armenian Catholic Church in Turkey Archbishop Levon Zekian.



## Parliament passes bill against ‘criminal subculture’



(RFE/RL – Yerevan)- The Armenian parliament has approved a government bill aimed at tackling what officials describe as a deeply-rooted “criminal subculture” in the country.

The bill passed in the first reading late on Tuesday involves relevant amendments to Armenia’s Criminal Code and Code of Procedural Justice. It criminalizes the creation of and membership in groups “carrying a criminal subculture” and outlaws underworld ranks granted to crime figures.

Holders of the highest of these ranks are known as “thieves-in-law” in the former Soviet Union. They name “overseers” of criminal activity in prisons or various regions.

Anyone receiving or granting such ranks will now face between seven and ten years’ imprisonment. Having ties to such individuals will also be deemed a criminal offense.

The bill was drafted by the Justice Ministry and approved by the Armenian government in late August. Some media outlets linked its circulation with riots that broke out in the country’s main prisons in early September. Inmates reportedly resisted government efforts to root out underworld

rules that have long regulated prison life in Armenia, Russia and other ex-Soviet states.

Justice Minister Rustam Badasyan insisted on the need for such anti-criminal legislation when he presented it during a parliament debate this week. Deputies from the ruling My Step alliance strongly backed the bill.

But some opposition lawmakers voiced objections, saying that the bill is not specific enough. “We have always said that criminals must be punished, but they must be punished for concrete deeds,” said Gevorg Petrosyan of the Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK).

Another BHK parliamentarian, Vartan Ghukasyan, found himself in hot water last week after declaring that he respects many “thieves-in-law” because he believes “nobody is smarter than them in the world.”

More importantly, he allegedly warned and threatened the main parliamentary co-sponsor of the legislation, My Step’s Nazeli Baghdasaryan. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan angrily warned Ghukasyan against acting on the alleged threats.

Ghukasyan strongly denied pressuring Baghdasaryan to stop backing the bill. The pro-government lawmaker insisted on Tuesday that she did receive implicit threats and warnings from individuals familiar with Ghukasyan. She did not name them.

Ghukasyan, 58, served as mayor of Armenia’s second largest city of Gyumri from 1999-2012. He and his close relatives were

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accused of violent conduct throughout his tenure. In April 2013, Ghukasyan, his notorious son Spartak and two dozen other men were rounded up by the Gyumri police following the killing of a man connected to the ex-mayor’s most bitter local rival. Ghukasyan was set free after spending several hours in police custody. One of his nephews was arrested and charged with murder.

educational cooperation, appreciating the effective exchange programs between the universities of the two countries. Down to cultural linkages, Prime Minister Pashinyan attached importance to the exchange of experience with Italy in the field of archeology.

The two heads of government had substantive discussion on international security issues and the situation in Syria. Prime Minister Pashinyan introduced the humanitarian mission carried out by Armenia. The parties noted the compatibility of their respective positions on ways of restoring stability in Syria.

The Prime Ministers of Armenia and Italy next referred to issues of regional security, exchanged views on EU-Iran, Armenia-Iran relations and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process. The two prime ministers stressed the importance of interaction within the UN Human Rights Council.

In conclusion, Nikol Pashinyan invited Giuseppe Conte to pay an official visit to Armenia.

## Journalists from Armenia and Artsakh visited Azerbaijan – MFA spokesperson

From November 17 to 21 media representatives from Armenia and Artsakh visited Azerbaijan, while media representatives from Azerbaijan visited Armenia and Artsakh, Spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry of Armenia Anna Naghdalyan said in response to the question about the journalist exchange program, reports Armenpress.

“From November 17 to 21, exchange of journalists took place: media representatives from Armenia and Artsakh visited Azerbaijan, while media representatives from Azerbaijan visited Armenia and Artsakh.

The program was prepared and implemented under the coordination of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and with the involvement of the relevant agencies of



Armenia, Artsakh and Azerbaijan”, the MFA spokeswoman said.



## Armenia is a place of opportunity, U.S. Ambassador says



In recognition of Global Entrepreneurship Week, U.S. Ambassador Lynne M. Tracy delivered closing remarks at the Embassy-funded “Career Entrepreneurship Fair” at the Congress Hotel in Yerevan on November 22. The fair was the culmination of a three-day “Career Camp,” organized by Haykuhi Gevorgyan, a U.S. Embassy exchange program alumna. The Camp featured workshops and discussion panels on topics including “Future Skills and Future

Jobs,” CV writing, interview skills, and entrepreneurship.

“What I have learned throughout my travels in Armenia over the last nine months is that Armenia truly is a place of opportunity,” Ambassador Tracy said. “From the artisans I met at the Berd Honey and Berry Festival to the farmers in Syunik who are expanding their market access and financial opportunity through the Farm Service Center, the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Armenia.”

Around 45 companies that have current vacancies attended the fair, hoping to recruit top Armenian talent for open jobs, internships, and volunteer positions.

The Career Camp is the flagship U.S. Embassy-supported event in Armenia during the annual Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW), taking place November 18-24, 2019, in cities around the world. GEW is designed to celebrate self-starting innovators and connect entrepreneurs to potential collaborators, mentors, and investors. Since its inception in 2008, GEW has fostered the spirit of entrepreneurship globally with millions of participants at thousands of events in nearly 170 countries.

## New members of anti-corruption body appointed

The National Assembly voted on November 19 to appoint the five members of a newly overhauled anti-corruption body tasked with scrutinizing income and asset declarations submitted by Armenia’s top state officials.

The Commission on Preventing Corruption is a successor to a largely ineffectual body that had been set up by the former Armenian authorities. It is empowered to not only process asset declarations but also ask law-enforcement bodies to prosecute officials suspected of engaging in corrupt practices or making false disclosures. The commission will also be able to conduct its own inquiries into possible conflicts of interest among them.

Under a relevant Armenian law, the commission will consist of five members. They were nominated by the government, the



Supreme Judicial Council and the three political forces represented in the parliament.

The National Assembly appointed all five nominees in secret ballot one day after they addressed lawmakers and answered questions from them on the parliament floor.

The current Armenian government has pledged to strengthen the commission as part of an anti-corruption strategy and a three-year action plan adopted by it in Oc-

tober. Justice Minister Rustam Badasyan said Armenian judges will be a key focus of the commission’s activities. It will be allowed to launch disciplinary proceedings against judges suspected of having dubiously acquired assets, he said.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan confirmed, for his part, that this “integrity verification” will be a substitute for a mandatory “vetting” of all judges which he demanded

in May.

The anti-graft strategy also calls for the creation in 2021 of a special law-enforcement agency that will prosecute officials suspected of bribery, fraud and other corrupt practices. The Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) will inherit most of its powers from the existing Special Investigative Service.



## Armenia bears special duty to promote prevention of genocide

Armenia bears special duty to promote prevention of the crime of genocide, Armenia's Permanent Representative to the UN Mher Margaryan said at a UN Security Council Open Debate on "The role of reconciliation in maintaining international peace and security."

"As a nation, which has witnessed the horrors of genocide in its own historic homeland and continues to face the challenges of denial and justification of the past crimes, Armenia bears special duty to promote prevention of the crime of genocide," he stated.

"Derogatory statements, aimed at justifying the genocide by means of denigrating and insulting the dignity of the victims and qualifying it as "the most reasonable act",



deepen misunderstanding and distrust and make the genuine reconciliation and dialogue even harder," Margaryan said.

He attached importance to the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide for serving truth, historical justice and reconciliation.

"It is essential for the entire international community and particularly the

potential victims of the identity-based crimes, those people, who are vilified simply because of their ethnic and religious origin," the Ambassador noted.

Mher Margaryan reiterated Armenia's commitment to advancing prevention agenda, also through education and awareness-raising of gross violations of human rights

and identity-based discrimination against all groups and peoples that if not addressed can lead to mass atrocities and genocide.

"It is through acknowledging the truth, commemoration and tribute to the dignity of the victims of past crimes that we can pave way for genuine reconciliation and sustainable peace," he concluded.

## Azerbaijani blogger enters Armenian church in Milan, addresses a question to PM Pashinyan

An Azerbaijani blogger got into an Armenian Church in Milan as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was holding a meeting with local Armenians.

Addressing the Prime Minister, the blogger said "the whole world has recognized the genocide perpetrated by Armenians against Azerbaijanis." He then asked Armenia's democratic Prime Minister to "free our lands so that I can see my Shushi, my Khojalu."

The blogger also asked whether he would be allowed to leave the venue. "I guarantee that," PM Pashinyan said.

"The fact is that being an Azerbaijani, you have entered an Armenian church and asked a question to Armenia's Prime Minister. It is impossible to imagine any situation, where an Armenian could enter



an event, where the Azerbaijani President would be present."

"Secondly, you said that the entire world has recognized the genocide against Azerbaijanis, but it's an obvious lie, since even former president of Azerbaijan Ayaz Mutalibov once said in an interview that the Khojalu incidents were organized by the opposition of Azerbaijan to achieve

changes and revolution in Azerbaijan," Pashinyan continued.

The Prime Minister reiterated his concept for peace. "I have told Ilham Aliyev that I am the 1st Armenian leader to announce that any solution to Nagorno Karabakh conflict should be acceptable for the peoples of Armenia, Artsakh and Azerbaijan. I suggest that Azerbaijani President should also make a similar announcement, since it's the main concept

and platform for regional stability and peace," Pashinyans stated.

He reminded that the Supreme Council of Nagorno Karabakh used its legal right to self-determination, after which Azerbaijan launched an aggression against the people of Nagorno Karabakh.



## Armenian parliament raises minimum wage

Armenia's parliament backed on November 19 a government proposal to raise the minimum wage in the country by more than 23 percent.

The government announced plans for such an increase in June. A bill drafted by it at the time would raise the minimum monthly wage from 55,000 drams to 68,000 drams (\$143).

The National Assembly passed the bill unanimously.

Arkady Khachatryan, a parliament deputy from the opposition Bright Armenia Party, echoed government assurances that it will somewhat reduce poverty. "A working person must not live below the minimum consumer basket level," he said.

According to government officials, the measure, effective from January 1, will benefit at least 80,000 workers across the country who earned 55,000 drams per



month as of this summer. Most of them work for private firms.

The average monthly wage in Armenia currently stands at 178,000 drams (\$375), according to official statistics.

The bill approved by the parliament marks the most drastic increase in the na-

tional minimum wage to date. It was set at 55,000 drams by the country's former government in 2015.

The current government is also planning a 10 percent rise in pensions which average roughly 41,000 drams per month at present.

## Water price in Armenia to remain unchanged



The price of drinking of water in Armenia will not rise next year despite the government's decision to stop subsidizing it, public utility regulators said on November 20.

The price currently stands at 191 drams (40 U.S. cents) per cubic meter. But households and other consumers pay only 180 drams per cubic meter thanks to the government subsidy provided to a French company managing Armenia's water distribution.

The Veolia Djur operator informed the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) in August that it can keep this tar-

iff unchanged in 2020 even without the subsidy. The PSRC formally approved the application after weighing up all factors determining the cost of water supplies in the country.

In August 2018, Veolia Djur asked the commission to raise the price to 205 drams per cubic meter, saying it needs additional revenue to upgrade the aging network. It also argued that annual price hikes are envisaged by its 15-year management contract with the former Armenian government signed in November 2016.

The government's State Committee on

Water Resources strongly objected to Veolia Djur's plans. Shortly afterwards, the Armenian police launched a criminal investigation into what they called corrupt practices by state utility regulators and the water operator. The police also claimed to have found financial irregularities in Veolia's contracts with Armenian suppliers.

The company, which is part of France's Veolia utility giant, angrily denied the accusations. None of its employees in Armenia has been prosecuted since then.

Later in 2018, Veolia agreed to withdraw its demand for the price rise in return for financial concessions made by the current government. The latter allowed the company to make less capital investments in the water network than were envisaged by the 2016 management contract.

Veolia managed the water and sewerage network of Yerevan from 2007-2016, phasing out Soviet-era water rationing in the vast majority of city neighborhoods. "By 2030 the entire population of Armenia will be supplied with drinking water [around the clock] thanks to Veolia," the company pledged in November 2016.



## The 2019 Laureate of the Global IT Award is the Founder of “Origami World” Theory, Author of the ‘Virtual Reality’ Concept Prof. Takeo Kanade of Japan

*For the second time a Japanese scientist becomes the Laureate...*

By **Gourgen James Khazhakian**  
Chief Correspondent



On 20 November at the Ministry of High-Tech Industry of Armenia a traditional news conference to announce the year Laureate of the Global IT Award (State Award of the Republic of Armenia for Outstanding Contribution to Humanity through IT) was held. And, as usual, the speakers at the conference were Minister of High Tech Industry of Armenia, Chairman of the Award Organizational Committee **Hakob Arshakyan**, General Partner VivaCell-MTS' Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** and Award Organizational Committee Coordinator Dr **Hovik Musayelyan**.

At the press conference the founder of “Origami World” theory, author of the concept ‘virtual reality’, Professor of the Carnegie Mellon University Takeo Kanade was announced the Laureate of the Global IT Award for 2019. (Wikipedia says: Takeo Kanade is a Japanese computer scientist and one of the world’s foremost researchers in computer vision. He is U.A. and Helen Whitaker Professor at Carnegie Mellon University. He has approximately 300 peer-reviewed academic publications and holds around 20 patents. Awards: Kyoto Prize (2016), Bowers Award (2008), NAE Member (1997).

“This year marks the 10th anniversary of the GIT Award. This is a unique leadership in this field - to have the GIT Award and hand it over to the tech giants of the world who have changed the world with their creativity, who, we can say, started from scratch, had an idea, developed it and made it possible for mankind to benefit from technologies that make our lives much easier,” - said the Minister of High-Tech Industry Hakob Arshakyan.

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## Armenia’s Leading Telecom Operator Founding GM Ralph C. Yirikian: How to Dream and Achieve Your Dreams in a Digital Era?

Upon yet another invitation from “Leadership School” VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** had an open door lecture “To Dream and to Achieve” at the Ramada Hotel and Suits by Wyndham Yerevan.



Mr. Yirikian reflected on a number of pivotal qualities and skills required to carve own path to future. Mr. Yirikian particularly mentioned: “In order to be a leader, you need to be able to serve as an example and there are moral values at the core of this approach. Leadership cannot be an end in itself; it must rest on a vision and a will to bring it to life, it is associated with personal responsibility to the team and society. Creating and sustaining a team spirit requires motivation by an honest and realistic agenda. This is the mission of a leader. In today’s digitized realities and rapid changes and challenges truly creative and daring solutions are required from the leader. More than thousands of opportunities are created to constantly move and create”.

The meeting continued in an open conversation and an exchange of ideas. Mr Ralph Yirikian answered the questions of the participants, related in particular, to his perceptions of business.

“Generally, we need to take into account that digitization is not just about technology, as you can often hear; it first of all refers to the change of thinking. This is requires contemplation and in depth revision of strategy, the logic of doing business”, - Armenia’s Leading Telecom Operator Founding GM Ralph C. Yirikian explained.

“...When VivaCell-MTS was starting fifteen years ago, no one could have imagined that the day would come when we would move from a telecommunications operator to a digital services operator. But our teamwork, creative thought, strength and energy



have multiplied, enriched by the ideas of generations “X”, “Y”, and “Z”, created a rich mix of crazy, yet realizable ideas, which requires courage and does not leave a room for hesitation

or surrender from the idea of going forward, opening new horizons,” VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager, a role model citizen, manager and businessman Ralph C. Yirikian concluded.

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## Armenia sincere in its aspiration for peace in the region – Prime Minister

All of you here know, that Armenia is located in a volatile region with many security risks and challenges. Unresolved conflicts, which are producing ongoing tension, an arms race, and hate politics, are still alive in the South Caucasus, Armenia's Prime minister Nikol Pashinyan said in an address to the Italian Institute for International Political Studies in Milan.

He said Armenia is sincere in its aspiration for peace in the region, and is open for a dialogue to reach a solution to the conflict, which will be acceptable for the peoples of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

"This is our approach, and we are ready to negotiate on the basis of this new paradigm," the Prime Minister said.

### Below are excerpts from the speech:

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, two out of Armenia's four borders – those with Turkey and Azerbaijan – have remained sealed for about three decades. By refusing to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and overtly assisting Azerbaijan against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey remains a serious security threat to Armenia and the Armenian people who experienced the first genocide of the 20th century in Ottoman Empire and continue to face the fierce denial of truth and justice.

Although the two other borders with our friends, Georgia and Iran, are open, however, in terms of economic efficiency, they can be considered only half-open. Foreign policy challenges of our two neighbors limit the potential for external relations of our economy and undermine the possibilities for a full-scale regional cooperation.

But the biggest security challenge for us is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It still remains unresolved becoming a source of permanent tension, and threatening to escalate into another outbreak of hostilities.

Anyone interested in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should know the background of the conflict. This conflict is not a territorial dispute, as some have tried to present it in a simplified way. It is about the right to self-determination, human rights, and the physical security of the people that live



there.

The roots of the conflict date back to early days of the Soviet Union when an Armenian region with 95 percent of Armenian population was assigned to Azerbaijan by an arbitrary decision of the Communist party. This happened as a result of an agreement reached between Bolshevik Russia and Kemalist Turkey in early 1920s.

During the Soviet era the conflict was manifested by systematic and violent discrimination against the Armenian population who formulated their bid for self-determination in 1988 – just on the eve of the demise of the Soviet Union. In response to the aspirations of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, the authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan undertook severe measures to crack down on this movement with the use of police force. Ethnic cleansing with mass atrocities against Armenians were exercised in many areas of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

Then, as the Soviet empire was in the process of disintegration, Azerbaijan, like other republics, started its withdrawal from the USSR. In accordance with the Soviet Constitution, if a member-republic declared its intention to separate from the USSR, the autonomous regions under its jurisdiction were entitled to determine their status, which included the secession from that republic.

Making use of the Soviet Constitution, Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region exercised its right to self-determination. Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence from Azerbaijan exactly in the same way as did Azerbaijan separating from the Soviet Union.

This time, Azerbaijani authorities used military forces against Armenians. They waged a full-scale war threatening the

very existence of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. In response to the existential threat, the Armenians, who constituted about 80% of the total population of Nagorno-Karabakh, resorted to self-defense. They succeeded in protecting their land and made Azerbaijan come to terms with the new situation. As a result, a ceasefire agreement among Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Republic of Armenia was signed on May 12, 1994.

The negotiation process on the settlement of the conflict was initiated back in 1992, even before the ceasefire agreement was signed. The OSCE Minsk Group, mandated by the international community to mediate the conflict resolution, defined that there were three parties to the conflict – Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Armenia. This fact was reaffirmed by many international documents of early 1990s. Indeed, for a long time, Nagorno-Karabakh participated as a party on the negotiation process. In early 1990s even a number of meetings were held between the leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, as well as the ministers of defense of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia.

By the way, a prominent Italian politician and diplomat Mario Raffaelli, who rendered a lot of efforts towards normalizing the situation in the region, was the Chairman of the Minsk Conference – the first international officer charged to deal with the conflict in early 1990s. Minsk Group meetings, which among the other two parties to the conflict were also attended by the elected representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh, took place in Rome, in capital of Italy. Unfortunately, despite the decades-long efforts of international mediators, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict still remains unresolved.

What are the reasons behind this situation?

First and foremost, Azerbaijani authorities refuse to negotiate with the representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh. They claim that Nagorno-Karabakh should be considered an indivisible part of Azerbaijan. But this is really a very odd position. On the one hand, Azerbaijani authorities want Nagorno-Kara-

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bakh to be a part of their territorial integrity. On the other hand, they do not want to conduct a dialogue with the representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh. Is this not somewhat weird?

What does this position mean? It means that Azerbaijani authorities in fact do not want to negotiate with the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, just because they only want the territories but not the people. To be more precise – territories, without the people. It means that they hope to resolve the conflict by military means: occupy the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, conduct ethnic cleansings, and get rid of both Armenians and the problem itself.

“Military solution is not ruled out” – that was a typical statement made by President Aliyev on many occasions. “Any time we can solve the issue by military means” – that was the statement made by president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev in January 2017, at the government meeting discussing the economic development of the country. “We will increase our military power, and I believe that it is one of the most important factors for the negotiations.” – that was the statement made by president Aliyev on November 5, 2018. On another occasion on December 17, 2018, he said that, I quote, “...our military forces and our power are the key factors among the all factors for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”, end of quote.

Indeed, there are many reasons to believe that the Azerbaijani authorities are preparing their society to a war. This is why they are inflaming anti-Armenian sentiments among their people. This is why they are spending enormous resources on armament. This is why the anti-Armenian hate speech has become actually official policy in Azerbaijan. This is why Armenophobia became a state policy in Azerbaijan.

I will bring some concrete examples of that policy in action.

Any foreigner who visits Nagorno-Karabakh is blacklisted by Azerbaijan. This list already includes more than 850 people. Citizens of any country who bear an Armenian surname or suspected to have Armenian ethnic origin cannot enter Azerbaijan. This was the case with a Bloomberg journalist of the US citizenship Diana Markosyan who was banned to enter Azerbaijan in 2011.

In 2014 this was the case with a Turkish orchestra musician, Rafer Noyan, who had an Armenian-like surname. In 2016 it happened with an eight-year old child Luka



Vardanian, and in 2018 with an eighty-year old pensioner from Russia Olga Barseghian.

In 2017, a woman of Armenian descent with her 4-years-old child was kept in the airport of Baku for three hours and then deported. This list can be continued.

But probably the most notorious case happened with Arsenal player Henrikh Mkhitaryan, who missed the final match of the Europe League in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan just a few months ago. Azerbaijani authorities even banned T-shirts with Mkhitaryan's name. And people wearing them were stopped by the police on Baku streets.

This policy sometimes has even ridiculous manifestations. Just a few days ago, a driver was detained in Baku merely for listening to an Armenian pop song.

But the most tragic and cynical case was the one with Ramil Safarov who murdered with an axe his Armenian classmate of a NATO seminar in Budapest. Safarov killed his Armenian classmate while he was asleep. Safarov was sentenced to life-imprisonment, then extradited to Azerbaijan by the Hungarian authorities, greeted as a national hero of Azerbaijan, pardoned by president Ilham Aliyev and released, promoted in military rank, and gifted an apartment.

Notwithstanding all these circumstances, notwithstanding anti-Armenian policy of the Azerbaijani authorities, Armenia is taking concrete steps towards finding a mutually-acceptable solution to the conflict. With this end in view, about one year ago I publicly stated that any solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must be acceptable for the people of Armenia, people of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the people of Azerbaijan.

I was the first Armenian leader who voice such a position. I was heavily criticized in my country for such a formula which places the three parties of the conflict on an equal footing. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that this is the only way to the peaceful and lasting settlement of the conflict, because it

offers a possibility for compromise, mutual respect, and balance.

In order to move forward, I expected a similar statement from Azerbaijan. Should we hear such a statement from President Aliyev, this would be a real breakthrough in the negotiation process.

However, the highest authorities of Azerbaijan remain on their position, which aims at a solution of the conflict acceptable only for the people of Azerbaijan. It gives me an additional reason to believe that Azerbaijan is nursing hopes to resolve the conflict by military means and doesn't want to find a solution at the negotiation table.

However, the Azerbaijani authorities should understand that there is no alternative to the peace talks and the peaceful solution to the problem.

First of all, it is absolutely useless to speak with Artsakh, with Nagorno Karabach and Armenia in a language of threat. It's a path to nowhere. Azerbaijan once tried to speak the language of violent force with the people of Nagorno Karabach and faced serious consequences despite its huge superiority over Nagorno-Karabakh in terms of both population and the armament. Attempts to avenge this military failure will not lead to anything good.

A military escalation in our region will have disastrous consequences with even a global impact. Apparently, Azerbaijan, being engaged in hostilities, could provide a fertile ground for those terrorists who lost ground in Syria and Iraq and now are looking for new territories to set up their operations. Geographically, Azerbaijan could become a perfect basis for them to penetrate in all four directions to the South, to the North, to the East, and to the West. Dear friends,

The Nagorno-Karabakh is a very complicated and painful issue for the peoples of the region. It is impossible to settle it without hard and consistent work, without a compromise, mutual respect, and balance. But if we took responsibility for the future of our peoples, we must make efforts to achieve real changes. I mean government of Azerbaijan, Government of Nagorno Karabach and Government of Armenia.

We are sincere in our aspiration for peace in the region, and are open for a dialogue to reach a solution to the conflict, which will be acceptable for the peoples of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. This is our approach, and we are ready to negotiate on the basis of this new paradigm.



## Armenia recorded the highest number of statistically significant advances in Europe for 2018 – Report

Armenia was the only country in Europe to transition from being a hybrid regime in 2017 to a democracy in 2018, according to a new report published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).

The study notes that “Armenia recorded the highest number of statistically significant advances in Europe for 2018: on Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, and on eight related democratic subattributes.”

The report titled *Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise* provides a health check of democracy and an overview of the current global and regional democracy landscape. It analyses the encouraging democratic trends as well as the key current challenges to democracy.

The analysis in *The Global State of Democracy 2019* reflects the data in the GSoD Indices for the period 1975–2018, which shows that democracy continues to expand its reach around the world, with the number of democracies continuing to grow.

The world is more democratic than it has ever been. According to the report, more than half of the countries in the world (62



per cent, or 97 countries) are no democratic (compared to only 26 per cent in 1975), and more than half (57 per cent) of the world’s population and more than four billion people, now live in some form of democracy, compared to 36 per cent in 1975. The share of non-democracies has more than halved since 1975 (68 per cent of countries in 1975 versus only 20 per cent in 2018).

The majority (72 per cent) of today’s democracies were established after 1975 as part of the so-called third wave of democratization. Of these, more than three-quarters transitioned before 2000 (early third wave), while less than one-quarter transitioned after 2000. The remaining 28 per cent of the world’s current democracies, all of which were established prior to 1975, have experienced uninterrupted democracy between 1975 and today, except Sri Lanka.

Democracies can now be found across all regions of the world. In North America and

Europe, 100 and 93 per cent of countries are democracies, closely followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (86 per cent of countries).

In the past 10 years (i.e. since 2008), 11 countries transitioned to democracy for the first time in their history. Four of these transitions have occurred in the past four years: Burkina Faso and Myanmar in 2015, Armenia and Malaysia in 2018. This is more than the previous decade and equals the number of new transitions in the first decade of the third wave (1975–1985).

The report notes that in 2018, two of the world’s most enduring hybrid regimes transitioned to democracy: Armenia and Malaysia. Malaysia became a democracy after more than four decades of hybridity following the 2018 general elections in which the monopoly of the National Front Coalition (Barisan Nasional) came to an end on the back of a united opposition and a strong civil society.

“Armenia, a hybrid regime since its independence in 1991, was beset by a wave of popular protests in 2018 that led to the resignation of its prime minister and long-standing president, and a subsequent electoral victory for the opposition,” the study says.

## ADB approves \$10 million loan to help improve education and health in Armenia

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$10 million policy-based loan (in euro equivalent) to assist the Government of Armenia’s efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of education and health services.

Armenia is experiencing a demographic shift with the share of children under the age of 18 declining from 37% of the national population in 1990 to 25% now, signaling an impending decline of the country’s labor force. Access to and funding for quality education and health services are poor, resulting in many people not having the skills to meet employers’ needs and avoidable ill health having a detrimental effect on the population.

In 2017, for instance, public expenditure on education was about 2.2% of gross domestic product (GDP), which is lower than the 5% recommended by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Government health spending was at 1.3% of GDP, below the 5% threshold observed by the World Health Organization as expenditure of countries with low shares of



out-of-pocket payments.

To address this, the Government of Armenia has implemented reforms since 2010 to improve education and health services, with a focus on helping women and girls. A preschool law was endorsed to the National Assembly with the aim of boosting the number of children in elementary schools to 70% in 2023, from around 30% in 2017. Teachers have also been receiving training and skills development. A new set of guidelines and protocols, meanwhile, have been implemented in most of the country’s hospitals and health centers, covering topics ranging from preventing hospital-acquired infections to methods in continuing medi-

cal education.

“A well-educated and healthy population is essential for the growth and development of a country like Armenia, where human capital is significantly unrealized,” said ADB Senior Health Specialist for Central and West Asia Ms. Rouselle Lavado. “ADB’s assistance will support the government’s ongoing efforts to ensure that citizens are educated, healthy, and productive.”

The main focus of the Human Development Enhancement Program is children and youth, starting from the preschool age. As well as improving the accessibility and enhancing the quality of education and health services in the country, the program will also increase financing for these efforts.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. In 2018, it made commitments of new loans and grants amounting to \$21.6 billion. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

## **ANCA supports Congressional campaign to restore U.S. military aid parity to Armenia and Azerbaijan**

For the second time in less than two months, Congressional Armenian Caucus leaders have called on the U.S. Departments of State and Defense to restore military aid parity to Armenia and Azerbaijan, or risk emboldening an already aggressive Azerbaijani government to escalate its attacks against Armenia and Artsakh, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s documented culture of corruption and oppressive tactics against dissenters,” stated Representatives Pallone, Speier, and Schiff in their September 27th letter.

In response to State and Defense Department assertions that \$102 million in security aid to Azerbaijan “will neither undermine efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, nor be used for offensive purposes against Armenia,” Representatives Pallone, Speier and

Schiff were adamant.

“Without question, the increase of security assistance to Azerbaijan creates an imbalance in the region and ignores a twenty-year precedent in U.S. foreign policy. We are concerned that rewarding Armenia’s autocratic neighbor with this windfall at such a time of historic change in Armenia sends negative signals about the importance we place on democratic values. Returning to parity in military assistance is the only way the U.S. will be able to retain its credibility as a regional power capable of bringing Azerbaijan and Armenia together.”

“We join with Reps. Pallone, Schiff, and Speier in challenging the Administration’s reckless military aid tilt toward Azerbaijan’s corrupt Aliyev regime,” said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hambarian. “In light of Azerbaijan’s relentless aggression, we call on Congress to zero-out any and all security assistance to Baku, or – at the very least – match every dollar in military aid to Azerbaijan with another to Armenia.”

In September, 2019, Congressional Armenian Caucus founding Co-Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Co-Chair Jackie Speier (D-CA), and Vice-Chair Adam Schiff (D-CA) expressed concerns to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper about the proposed significant increase in security assistance to Azerbaijan for Fiscal Year 2018 and 2019, totaling \$102 million, compared to \$7 million in military assistance to Armenia over the same period. They noted that Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, adopted in 1992, prohibits aid to Azerbaijan due to its ongoing blockade and aggression against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

“While the State Department has the authority to extend a waiver of Section 907, we do not believe the waiver the State Department noticed on April 18, 2019, is an appropriate use of this authority considering Azerbaijan’s continued efforts to destabilize the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh and given the ruling regime of

In their November 18th letter, the Congressional Armenian Caucus leaders go on to request that Armenia be provided with “training and equipment to build partner capacity that will help secure its borders and create military parity in funding with Azerbaijan. This funding would increase Armenia’s capacity for counterterrorism, counter-illicit drug trafficking, and weapons of mass destruction interdiction operations – especially on its southern border with Iran. We also ask for robust funding of confidence building measures on each side of the border between Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh, and Armenia – including those that would implement the 2015 Royce-Engel Peace Proposal – to establish a clearer pathway to peace for all parties in this conflict.”

## **Qatar announces visa waiver for Armenian citizens**



The State of Qatar will cancel visa requirements for the citizens of Armenia. At a meeting with of the Emir of the State of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Than, President Armen Sarkissian expressed gratitude to the Emir for the cancellation of the visa regime, as well as for the active support provided to the opening of the Embassy of

the Republic of Armenia in the State of Qatar.

The President expressed confidence that the cancellation of the visa requirement would have a positive impact on the further promotion of economic, cultural, scientific, educational and especially tourism links.

The Armenian President and the Emir of Qatar underlined the great potential of cooperation between the two friendly countries, the importance of expanding and strengthening relations. As possible areas of cooperation, they cited health, education, research, and the opportunity to study in Doha.

President Sarkissian said he was very impressed with the work of the Qatar Foundation. “It is also an international center and has much in common with our vision of development,” President Sargsyan said.

“We have decided to form a joint working group to outline the directions for cooperation.” The President underlined the great potential of cooperation in the fields of science, education and technology, noting in this context the possibility of cooperation in the framework of the Presidential Initiative on ATOM (Advanced Tomorrow) aimed at the development of new technologies and science in Armenia.



## The 2019 Laureate of the Global IT Award is the Founder of “Origami World” Theory, Author of the ‘Virtual Reality’ Concept Prof. Takeo Kanade of Japan...



“The GIT Award is 10 years now, and VivaCell-MTS has been by the side of this initiative throughout these years. The impact the award has had on the development of information and communications in Armenia is hard to overestimate. This impact has touched upon value systems and mindsets: our IT community and students welcome exceptional personalities, living legends, whose creative minds have revolutionized the global technological perspectives getting the ITC industry to qualitatively new levels. We shall underline that in today’s world there are very few technological achievements, which can be called true innovations; the global visionaries visiting Armenia are the ones creating groundbreaking technologies. By meeting them and by talking to them our younger generation get living role models and learns the right way of life to choose – to believe in oneself, to work hard, to choose own path, and reach heights no man has ever reached so far,” - VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph Yirikian said.

“The Award was established in 2009 and this year we will have the 10<sup>th</sup> winner in Armenia. It is already the second year that the award is given as the RA State Award. The winner of the Global IT Award 2019

is Dr. Takeo Kanade, who is a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, the founder of “Origami World” theory, as well as the author of the concept ‘virtual reality’. The



initiative to award Kanade belongs to Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to Japan H.E. **Hrant Poghosyan**,” – said the Award Organizational Committee Coordinator Dr Hovik Musayelyan. He shown to the gathered a specimen of the special post envelop with portrait of Dr Kanade that will be cancelled just few minutes before the Award handing official ceremony.

“I’d like to attract your attention on the words of Mr Yirikian that the Laureates, the Legends were not very distinctive of the current youngsters, you, when they’ve been starting their career”, Minister Arshakyan added, by this encouraging our today’s

youth.

Dr Musayelyan told the Agenda of Mr Kanade. Talking to a lady reporter he (once more) mentioned that it was obligatory for a Laureate to visit Armenia personally.

“Every time, within many years in row already, when doing something (important) for our people, you modestly expressing hope that other businesses will join you, but



by the moment, at least here, in sense of this Award, I see nobody else...please comment on this”, - that was The Highlights’ correspondent (yours truly) question to Ralph Yirikian.

“Well, you yourself already answered your own question”, responded Mr Yirikian. However he added that “We’ll happy and welcome other partners with investment programs...And if such a partner appears, he/she should believe in this idea, in program of social investments, finally, should believe he/she could be helpful our country...We love our country, we believe in its better future, that is why we make our modest investment in that future”.

And Dr Musayelyan, when asked about real contribution of all the Laureates in the



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development of ICT/hi-tech sector of Armenia replied by the following: *“Indeed, we have been staying in touch with the Award Laureates within all these years... Yes, they did their contribution in our ICT sector; so let me to bring few bright examples: Dr **Craig Barrett** and Dr **Federico Faggin** were active participants in the Armtech Congress, and Dr **Tsugio Makimoto** of Japan wrote a book entitled “Armenia as IT Country Shining Silicon Valley in the Middle East/Caucasus” in Japanese, and a bit later it was translated in English, **Mario Mazzola** donated American University of Armenia one million dollars, and its interests contribute to stipends for the best students. **Yevgeny Kaspersky** opened his name Lab in Yerevan Polytechnic University, and a cyber security chair was opened*



*at the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University. **Louis Pouzin** was key speaker at the Frankophonie Summit held in Yerevan quite recently, **Tony Fadell** has been*



*actively cooperating with the Starmus Festival (founded by an Ar-*

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During the lecture a question was raised about the terms of introduction of 5G (fifth generation of mobile technologies). Ralph Yirikian responded that the 5G standard is already outlined, however devices at affordable prices for the market are not yet available. According to the Company Founding General Manager, it will take up to 2 years for these devices to become widely available. *“Regarding the question of when will the 5G become available in Armenia, my answer is that VivaCell-MTS has started preparing for the introduction of 5G for quite a long time, as the equipment used in the company’s 4G network can also work in the 5G network, with only software changes,”* said Yirikyan.

The entrance to the lecture was free; the participants were given a chance to join by pre-registration on the website of the “Leadership School”.

*nally, legendary “Dr T”, - **James Truchard**; his Natl Instruments is active investor to the Engineering City. “We believe we’ll have long and steadfast cooperation with Dr Kanade as well”, - Mr Mousayelyan concluded.*

Ambassador of Japan to Armenia H.E. Mr **June Yamada** was a special guest at that event. Talking to TV cameras he told he was honored for awarding his compatriots first Dr Tsugio Makimoto, in 2013, and now, - Dr Kanade. (In your correspondent’s memory appeared a scene how excited and impressed were Mr and Mrs Makimoto when visiting The Armenian Genocide Memorial, and so how they’ve decided to stay here in Armenia, at their own, for one more week to get know our country closer... )

A brief video clip was shown on the Award and its Laureates that was finalized by the following words of Prof. Takeo Kanade on awarding him: *“I am honored and humble”.*

To remind, the Award was founded on 6 July 2009 and is awarded annually for exceptional contributions in global IT industry (technologies, education, entrepreneurship, financial services) that come in various shapes and forms to personalities whose ideas have been revolutionary or near revolutionary for the development of ICT.

2019 marks the tenth Award to be handed over. It includes a Golden Medal symbolizing Armenia and high tech industry as well as a souvenir trophy.

The awarding is coordinated by the Organizational Committee, and selection of the winner is performed by Selection Panel comprised of international experts.

Let’s remind The Highlights readers that the list winners of the Award: retired Chief of “Intel Corporation” Craig Barrett, the Co-Founder of “Apple Inc.” Steve Wozniak, Chairman Emeritus of “Synaptics, Inc.” and President of “Federico and Elvia Faggin” Foundation Federico Faggin, former CEO of “Hitachi” Tsugio Makimoto, Chief Development Officer of “Sysco Systems” Mario Mazzola, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of “Kaspersky Lab” Eugene Kaspersky, one of the founding fathers of Internet and CEO at “Open-Root” Louis Pouzin and the founder of “Nest labs”, the creator of iPod Tony Fadell, and the founder of the company “National Instruments” James Truchard.



## Constantine Orbelian Nominated for Grammy Award for the Fourth Time Already!

By Gourgen James Khazhakian  
Chief Correspondent

### News from Constantine Orbelian: Success (Tremendous One), Only Success, Nothing But Success...



Very recently The Highlights has got a terrific news: Artistic Director of Yerevan



Opera and Ballet Theater **Constantine Orbelian** has been nominated for a Grammy Award.

*A TE, O CARA*, an album recorded by Maestro in cooperation with Metropolitan Opera soloist **Stephen Costello** and **Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra**, has been nominated in the Best Classical Solo Vocal Album category, the Grammy Awards official website reported.

The 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Grammy Awards ceremony is scheduled for January 26, 2020, at Staples Center in Los Angeles. It will recognize the best recordings, compositions, and artists of the eligibility year, running from October 1, 2018, to August 31, 2019. Nominations were announced in all 84 categories on November 20.

This the fourth already Orbelian's Grammy nomination:

At the 61<sup>st</sup> annual Grammy Awards recording of Giuseppe Verdi's "Rigoletto" released by Delos Music in November 2017, was nominated in the Best Opera Recording category, was conducted by Orbelian and featured a legendary Russian baritone **Dmitri Khvorostovsky** of the blessed *memory* in the title role, American soprano **Nadine Sierra**, Italian tenor **Francesco Demuro**, the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra, and the Men of the Kaunas State Choir.

Maestro Orbelian received his second Grammy nomination in 2017, for his recording of **Georgy Sviridov's**

"Russia Cast Adrift" (Rus Otchalivshaya) featuring Dmitri Khvorostovsky and the State Symphony Orchestra of St. Petersburg.

And the very first Grammy nomination Constantine Orbelian received in 2014, for conducting a recording of Rossini's virtuosic arias, performed by American tenor **Lawrence Brownlee** with the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra.

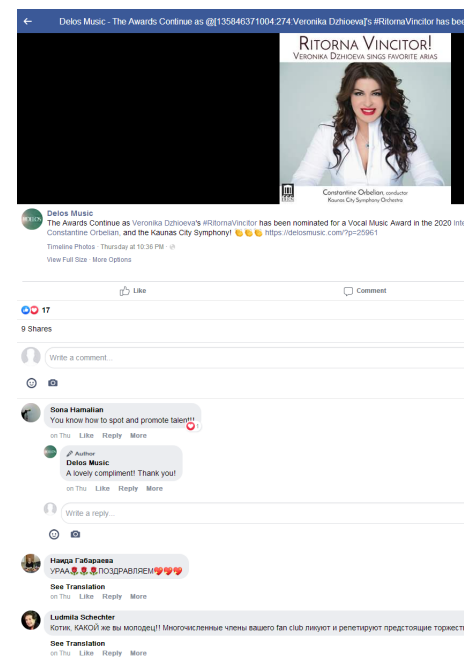
And a very recent post from Delos Music, and again it is about Maestro Orbelian:

"The Awards Continue as **Veronika Dzihioeva's** #RitornaVincitor (...sings favorite arias) has been nominated for a Vocal Music Award in the 2020 International Classical Music Awards (ICMA)! Congratulations to Veronika, Constantine Orbelian, and the Kaunas City Symphony!"

The last, but not the least, NOT AT ALL: just a few days ago Maestro Orbelian conducted the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra with the Maltese super tenor **Joseph Calleja** at the Moscow Zaryad'e Concert!

...When watching the *encore* – «Ochi Chyorniy» (the Dark Eyes – in Russian) of the sold out concert (that was co-organized by **European Foundation for Support of Culture** and the **Maltese Embassy to Russia** included the best opera aria's

from Verdi, Gounod, Puccini, Chilea, A.I. Khachaturian, others...), the first word



that is coming to your mind is FANTASTIC! Especially when the world-famous singer said to the jam-packed audience in Russian "*Ja ljublju vas !*" (I LOVE YOU!)



SO WE ALL SEE THAT ORBELIAN'S SHOW MUST GO ON !





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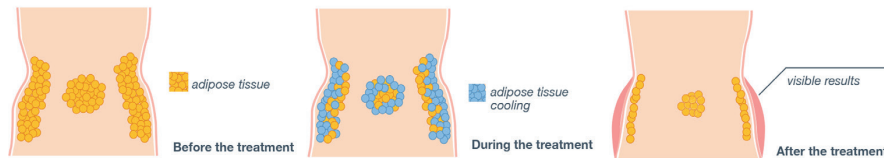
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