

## Armenian diplomats brief European counterparts on Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh



The 11th Meeting of the Armenia-EU Human Rights Dialogue co-chaired by Avet Adonts, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs was held on March 25 via VTC. Among the participants were representatives of the number of Government agencies and the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports.

EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore attended the meeting for the first time on behalf of the EU. His presence underscored the importance that the EU attaches to human rights in EU-Armenia relations. He provided an overview of the developments related to human rights within the EU, paying particular attention to the tools and instruments used by the EU to address particular recent human rights challenges.

A wide range of human rights issues were discussed during the meeting, including reforms in the judicial and penitentiary spheres, anti-discrimination policy, labor rights, and electoral reforms.

The Armenian side informed the EU counterparts about grave consequences of the Azerbaijani large-scale military aggression against Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), unleashed with the direct

support of Turkey. It was underlined that Azerbaijan, in violation of the international humanitarian law, continues keeping Armenian civilians and prisoners of war as hostages and blocking the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Artsakh through the Lachin corridor.

The Armenian side brought to the attention of the EU colleagues the fact of non-compliance of Azerbaijan with the interim measures of the European Court of Human Rights.

Operational conclusions and joint press release were adopted as a result of the meeting.

The Armenian delegation was headed by Mr Avet Adonts, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, while the EU delegation was led by Mr Richard Tibbels, Head of Division for bilateral relations with Eastern Partnership countries at the European External Action Service. Mr Arman Tatoyan, Armenian Human Rights Defender, and Mr Vassilis Maragos, Head of Unit responsible for cooperation with Armenia at the European Commission, also participated in the meeting.

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## BBC investigation proves Azerbaijan destroyed Armenian Church after war



The BBC on March 25 released a video documenting the demolition of the Zoravor Surb Astvatsatsin Church near the town of Mekhakavan (Jebrail), which took place after the region fell under the Azerbaijani control. The same church had already been desecrated during the recent Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh.

BBC's Jonah Fisher traveled to the region to investigate the "disappearance", since a video posted online clearly showed the church was intact when the town was captured by Azerbaijani forces.

Fisher traveled to the exact location of the church, where not a single trace of it is left. When he asks a police escort what happened to the church, he replies that he has no information. When asked again, the Azeri policeman falsely claims that perhaps

the church was destroyed during the war – something that couldn't have happened because the videos clearly show that the area had come under Azerbaijani control when the church was still intact.

The Armenian authorities have numerous times warned the international community to take action and prevent the Azerbaijani policy of eradicating Armenian cultural and spiritual legacy in Nagorno Karabakh.

"We strongly condemn this yet another case of a crime committed by Azerbaijan on the grounds of religious hatred. At the same time, the attempts of the Azerbaijani leadership to justify this barbarism are even more concerning, as it shows that this manifestation of vandalism was intentional in nature and is reminiscent of the systematic destruction of Nakhichevan's historical and cultural heritage," Spokesperson for the Armenian Foreign Ministry Anna Naghdalyan said in a statement.

She said this case of destruction of the place of worship after the recent war is not an isolated episode.

"The destruction of the more than 200-year-old "Kanach Zham" church in the city of Shushi of the Artsakh Republic proves that the cultural vandalism carried



out by Azerbaijan is based on only one criterion – hatred towards the Christian Armenian people," Naghdalyan stated.

"Despite the efforts to present itself to the world as a "center of tolerance and multiculturalism," Azerbaijan has so far consolidated its position as a pioneer in the destruction of the Christian heritage," she added.

"The destruction of the Armenian historical-cultural and religious heritage once again demonstrates that the assurances on the preservation of the Christian cultural values by the Azerbaijani authorities are false. The international community should undertake measures to stop and condemn the crimes, including the cultural genocide being committed by Azerbaijan since September 27 last year to date," the Spokesperson said.

## Armenia's FM, Artsakh Republic President discuss humanitarian consequences of Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ara Aivazian met with the President of the Artsakh Republic Arayik Harutyunyan.

The interlocutors attached importance to regular contacts and consultations between the governing bodies of Armenia and Artsakh for the joint solution of the problems facing the Armenians in the region.

The meeting focused on the steps taken to overcome the humanitarian and socio-economic consequences of the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh, including the needs of the displaced. In this



context, both sides attached importance to the unhindered involvement of specialized international organizations on the ground.

In the context of the urgent humanitarian issues, President Harutyunyan and For-

eign Minister Aivazian exchanged views on the steps taken to repatriate Armenian prisoners of war and civilian hostages, assessing as unacceptable the unnecessary politicization of this humanitarian issue by Azerbaijan.

The sides stressed the need for a final political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group. In this regard, the cornerstone role of the recognition of the right of the people of Artsakh to live and self-determination in their historical homeland was emphasized.

## Historical and cultural heritage of Artsakh an inseparable part of world culture – Armenian FM

The historical and cultural heritage of Artsakh is an inseparable part of world culture, Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian said at the Q&A session at the National Assembly.

"The Minister said its destruction, desecration or falsification must be strictly prevented," he noted.

"It is known that ethnic cleansing of

Armenians has been carried out on territories of Artsakh, which came under the occupation of Azerbaijan. And today the destruction of the cultural heritage has been launched in an effort to erase or falsify the millennial cultural heritage of Artsakh," Minister Aivazian stated.

He stressed that "now more than ever we need to intensify our international co-

operation, our involvement with the international community."

"In this sense, culture plays a very important role as a factor of "soft power," the Minister said. He added that by the recent creation of the Commission on Cultural Diplomacy "we are applying to make culture a powerful tool in our diplomatic arsenal."

## Armenia to amend the Electoral Code before June 20 vote

Armenia's ruling My Step bloc intends to amend the Electoral Code and switch to the proportional system ahead of the snap parliamentary elections on June 20, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on March 24.

Speaking at the National Assembly, PM Pashinyan said the agreement on holding elections has been reached as a result of discussions with the President of the Republic, the leaders of Prosperous Armenia and Bright Armenia factions of the National Assembly, the ruling My Step faction and representatives of extra-parliamentary forces.

According to the agreement, the Prime Minister will resign, the Parliament will not elect the Prime Minister twice and will be dissolved by virtue of law.

The Prime Minister said the two opposition factions will not vote in favor of changes to the Electoral Code to avoid sharing responsibility but will not mind if the ruling force decides to implement amendments.

"During all discussions I have asked our colleagues about their opinion on the electoral system," the Prime Minister said, adding



that the opposition parliamentary forces leave the issue to the discretion of the parliamentary majority.

According to the current electoral legislation, Armenian lawmakers are being elected via the mixed system – a combination of the proportional and rating-based system.

## Armenian Parliament triples penalties for defamation, Insults



The Armenian parliament has adopted amendments to the Civil Code dramatically raising the maximum penalties for defamation and insult offenses -- a move that local media organizations said would "significantly damage" freedom of speech and expression.

A total of 76 lawmakers on March 24 voted in the second and final reading in favor of the bill setting the damages for defamation at up to 6 million drams (\$11,400), and for insults at up to 3 million drams.

Forty members of the National Assembly voted against the changes authored by Deputy Parliament Speaker Alen Simonian, with three abstentions.

Earlier, the damages for defamation and insult offenses were

set at up to 2 million and 1 million drams, respectively.

The amendments passed in the first reading set higher punishments -- up to 10 million drams -- but they were lowered at the suggestion of the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

A number of media organizations in Armenia have called on President Armen Sarkisian not to sign the adopted bill into law, and send it to the Constitutional Court to check its constitutionality.

"This change is extremely dangerous, especially if we take into account the tendency of government officials, politicians, other public figures to perceive even objective criticism as insult and slander and take the matter to court," the organizations said in a joint statement.

Armenia decriminalized defamation and insults in 2010 following an appeal of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly to member states.

Also, on March 24, the National Assembly adopted in the second and final reading a package of amendments to the Law on Higher Education and Science.

Among other things, the amendments envisage that five out of nine members of universities' boards will be appointed by the Education Ministry, a proposal that has raised concerns among universities that this may be a way for the government to reduce their autonomy.

The package was passed by 79 votes to 36, with two abstentions.

## Constitutional Court upholds Robert Kocharyan's application, criminal proceeding terminated

Armenia's Constitutional Court on March 26 ruled that a penal code article under which ex-President Robert Kocharyan is being prosecuted does not comply with two articles of the country's basic law and is, therefore, invalid.

The ruling published by Constitutional Court Chairman Arman Dilanyan says that Article 300.1 of the Criminal Code that concerns "overthrowing the constitutional order" runs counter to articles 78 and 79 of Armenia's constitution that deal with the principles of proportionality and certainty in relation to restrictions of basic rights and freedoms.

Judge Dilanyan said that the decision of the Constitutional Court is final and comes into effect upon its publication.

The constitutionality of the penal code article was contested by Kocharyan, who faces up to 15 years in prison under the charge, as well as David Grigoryan, a lower court judge who ordered the former president's release from pretrial detention in May 2019, at the same time suspending

the case and applying to the Constitutional Court regarding the matter.

Kocharyan's lawyer Aram Vardevanyan told media after the publication of the ruling that since it comes into effect immediately, it means that there is no longer Article 300.1 in the Criminal Code of Armenia.

"[Judge] Anna Danibekyan will terminate the criminal prosecution under Article 300.1. By virtue of the decision of the Constitutional Court, all the acts that referred to Article 300.1 are no longer in force and are subject to review starting from 2009," Vardevanyan said.

The prosecution did not comment on the Constitutional Court's ruling immediately.

To the question of journalists whether Judge Danibekyan, who presides over the trial of Kocharyan and others, can resist it, Vardevanyan said: "There is no case for resisting here. There is no Article 300.1 in the Criminal Code anymore."

Kocharyan, his former chief of staff Armen Gevorgyan and two retired army



generals stand accused of "overthrowing the constitutional order" in the wake of a disputed presidential election held in 2008.

In particular, the matter concerns the alleged use by the Kocharyan government of the army to quell street protests.

Kocharyan and the three other defendants deny that the military was used in the dispersal of opposition demonstrations in which 10 people were killed.

They all reject the accusations as politically motivated.

Kocharyan's lawyers also find that since the article was not in the criminal code in 2008, it could not be applied retrospectively against their client.

## Russian language gains official status in Artsakh

Artsakh's National Assembly voted 27 to 0 with 2 abstentions on March 25 to approve amendments to the Law on language.

The changes will see the Russian language granted an official status in the Republic.

Armenian will still remain the only state language.

The bill was drafted by Vice-President of the National Assembly Gagik Baghunts, MPs Aram Harutyunyan and Metakse Hakobyan.

Co-authors of the bill say the necessity is based on "the historical memory of the cultural, military and economic relations between Artsakh and Russia and the fact that Russian is the second language of communication for many residents of Artsakh."

The lawmakers say the proposed changes will create necessary conditions



for deepening cooperation in all spheres, and in the foreseeable future will contribute to the development of relations within the legal framework.

"The need for a long-term presence of Russian peacekeepers in Artsakh, the joint solution of many social and communication problems, cooperation in the fields of construction, health, education and science requires a reassessment of the role of the Russian language," the authors say.

The bill will become law upon signing by the region's leader.

Still in February, Azerbaijan condemned the region's plans to give Russian an official status.

President Ilham Aliyev said at a press conference on February 26 that "there can only be one official language in Azerbaijan – the Azeri language."

Earlier, the Kremlin described the matter as "an internal affair."

"This is not a subject of talks, it is a de-facto situation when people speak Russian both in Azerbaijan and Armenia," the Russian president's spokesperson Dmitri Peskov said on December 2, according to TASS.

"This is an internal affair of any country – both Azerbaijan and Armenia," he added.

## MEPs deplore torture of Armenian POWs, urge Azerbaijan to release all captives

Members of the European Parliament have urged Azerbaijan to release the Armenian captives.

Chair of the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus, MEP Marina Kaljurand, the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Armenia, MEP Andrey Kovatchev and the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Azerbaijan, MEP Željana Zovko have issued a statement on the reported mistreatment of Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan.

“We are gravely concerned by numerous allegations of abuse of Armenian captives by Azerbaijan, as documented in particular in a recent Human Rights Watch



report. We urge the Azerbaijani authorities to investigate all such allegations and to bring those responsible to justice,” the MEPs said.

They stressed that full respect of international humanitarian law and the prohibition of torture and other degrading or

inhuman treatment must be ensured.

“We also deplore the fact that the Azerbaijani government has failed to comply with the interim measures of the European Court of Human Rights which ordered Azerbaijan to provide information on the conditions of detention of the detainees, their state of health, as well as the measures taken to return them,” the lawmakers stated.

Once again, they called on Azerbaijan to release without delay all remaining Armenian detainees, in line with the provisions of the ceasefire agreement of 9 November 2020.

## Armenia raises the issue of destruction of Artsakh's heritage by Azerbaijan with UNESCO



Armenia's Deputy Foreign Minister Artak Apitonyan had a video conversation with the head of the Office of the UNESCO Director-General Nikola Kasianides.

The interlocutors touched upon the issue of protection of the Armenian historical and religious heritage in the Nagorno

Karabakh conflict zone, and the possibility of sending a UNESCO fact-finding mission to Artsakh.

The Deputy Foreign Minister stressed the urgency of taking steps to protect the Armenian historical, cultural and religious heritage in the territories under the control of Azerbaijan, taking into account the steps taken by Azerbaijan to deliberately destroy, desecrate and distort the Armenian monuments.

Artak Apitonyan touched upon the recent manifestations of the Azerbaijani aggression against the Armenian cultural and religious heritage. In particular, it

was mentioned that a video was circulated on the Internet by the BBC news service today, where it is clear that the Armenian Church of Surb Astvatsatsin near Mekhavan (Jebrail) settlement was completely destroyed.

Referring to the preparations for the fact-finding mission, the Deputy Foreign Minister expressed strong concern over Azerbaijan's policy of hindering the effective involvement of UNESCO.

It was stressed that Azerbaijan's attempts to manipulate the mission and unnecessarily politicize it are completely unacceptable.

## EU welcomes Armenia's steps to abolish the death penalty

The EU has welcomed Armenia's decision to deposit the instrument of ratification on the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, becoming its 89th State party.

“While the Armenian Constitution already protects the right to life and prohibits the death penalty, Armenia makes this

abolition irreversible with its accession to this protocol,” Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Nabila Massrali said in a statement.

“The EU welcomes this important decision, which is in line with the world trend to abandon the most inhuman and cruel punishment,” she said.



## Programs worth 110 billion AMD to be implemented in Artsakh



A joint sitting of the Security Councils of the Republic of Armenia and the Artsakh Republic was held in Yerevan under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President of the Artsakh Republic Arayik Harutyunyan.

“For the second day this week, we are working and holding discussions with representatives of the Artsakh government. I would like to inform you that yesterday we

had a very productive discussion, as a result of which it was decided to implement housing and infrastructure programs worth about 110 billion AMD in Artsakh,” PM Pashinyan said in his opening remarks.

He said the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund will provide 58 million left from the recent fundraiser, the rest will be provided by the Government of Armenia.

“I think the decisions made yesterday can be a very solid basis for ensuring development. Today we will have discussions with the Security Council members, we will discuss issues related to the security environment and our strategic vision for the future. I am convinced that today’s decisions should also play an important role in our future actions and their implementation,” the Prime Minister noted.

President Harutyunyan noted, in turn, that the decision to allocate 110 billion AMD for the reconstruction of housing and infrastructure in Artsakh, adopted as a result of a joint consultation held on March 25, will be of key importance in the further development of Artsakh.

“Preliminary planning has been done for the construction of 4,000 houses, we will work out plans to build 2,000 more houses in the coming months. In these projects, we always take into account the current reality, at the same time plan land allocation, provide further employment for residents, discuss modern models of cooperation,” said the President of the Artsakh Republic, expressing confidence that all issues on the agenda will be implemented through joint efforts.

## Fitch Affirms Armenia at ‘B+’; Outlook Stable

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Armenia’s Long-Term Foreign-Currency (LTFC) Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at ‘B+’ with a Stable Outlook.

Armenia’s ‘B+’ IDRs reflect fairly high government and external indebtedness, relatively weak external finances and geopolitical tensions that have the potential to escalate into military conflict. These are balanced against high income per capita; governance, development and ease of doing business indicators that outperform the ‘B’ rated median; and institutions that have facilitated orderly political transitions and weathered the 2020 pandemic shock and six-week war with Azerbaijan. It also



has a robust macroeconomic and fiscal policy framework, and credible commitment to reform, both of which are underpinned by the IMF stand-by arrangement (SBA).

Fitch expects that prime minister Nikol Pashinyan’s ‘My Step’ alliance should be able to maintain a working majority coalition in parliament at the 20 June 2021

snap elections. After Pashinyan signed a Russia-brokered and maintained ceasefire agreement on 9 November 2020 to end the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the country has seen a period of heightened protests and political interventions by the military calling for his resignation. Although we expect Pashinyan to retain power, support for his government has diminished since the war and could exacerbate the challenges of implementing structural reforms and tackling corruption.

Fitch positively assessed the activity of Armenian banks, which were able to withstand the shocks of 2020.

## Armenian DM, Russia’s Army chief discuss operation of joint military units

Armenia’s Defense Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan had a telephone conversation with the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Army General Valery Gerasimov.

Issues related to the Armenian-Russian military cooperation, in particular, joint actions of the Armenian-Russian joint military groups, as well as a number of issues

related to the security issues in Syunik were discussed.

Reference was made to the programs of modernization and large-scale reform of the Armed Forces of Armenia.

Vagharshak Harutyunyan and Valery Gerasimov agreed on the upcoming visit of a high-ranking delegation of the Russian Federation to Armenia in the near future for

more detailed discussions on these issues and holding negotiations.



## FRV reaches financial close with IFC, EBRD, and Ameriabank for largest Utility Scale Solar Power Plant in Armenia

FRV has reached financial close with IFC, EBRD, and Ameriabank for the largest Utility Scale Solar Power Plant in Armenia.

55 MW Masrik-1 Solar Farm will produce enough clean energy to supply more than 20,000 homes and avoid the emission of over 40,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually.

The project signed a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Electric Networks of Armenia which will distribute the electricity produced by the plant delivering significant benefits to the community.

IFC and EBRD will support the project with senior loans and an investment grant from the European Union, mobilized by EBRD

Ameriabank will support the project with tailored VAT financing loan facility.

This is currently the largest utility-scale solar power plant in Armenia.

Fotowatio Renewable Ventures (FRV), part of Abdul Latif Jameel Energy and a leading global developer of renewable energy projects, has closed the financing agreement for the development of the largest utility-scale solar power plant in Armenia. Located in Mets Masrik municipality, Gegharkunik region, the 55MW solar power plant is the first-of-its-kind in the country, and it will help boost Armenia's supply of renewable energy while reducing its dependence on fossil fuels.

In 2018, FRV and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure signed a Government Support Agreement (GSA) to design, finance, build, own and operate the solar power plant with the support of the Renewable Resources and Energy Efficiency (R2E2) Fund, the implementation agency authorized by the Government of Armenia. "Masrik-1" solar power plant will generate more than 128 gigawatt-hours of electricity annually at a competitive tariff of 41,9 USD/MWh. The



electricity will be sold under a power purchase agreement to Electric Networks of Armenia, the utility company responsible for distribution of electricity in the country. The plant will produce enough energy to supply more than 20,000 Armenian households and is projected to avoid the release of over 40,000 tons of carbon emissions annually.

The project is supported by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Union (EU). They will extend up to USD 38.4 million financing structured indifferent tranches of debt. Ameriabank will provide AMD loan facility to finance company's VAT needs.

"Armenia has great potential when it comes to the development of renewable energy, in particular solar energy" said Tristán Higuero, Chief Operations Officer of FRV. "The financial close of our first solar project in the region is a milestone for FRV as it allows us to expand our reach worldwide. Through this project, we will contribute to the country's sustainable economic growth through the generation of wealth and employment, helping to build a more sustainable future".

Artak Hanesyan, Ameriabank's Chairman of the Management Board-CEO, highlighted the importance of the project and said that the renewable energy projects are a priority for the Bank: "We support international business in Armenia and have prioritized this project for its role in economic development, addressing environmental

issues, creation of new job opportunities and improvement of the living standards in our country. We provided a loan to support development of the largest utility-scale solar power plant thus contributing to formation of a more independent and secure power system in Armenia". According to Artak Hanesyan, Ameriabank has been actively supporting the Energy sector in the

country through financing of hydropower plant (HPP) and solar power plant (SPP) projects: "Masrik-1 solar power plant is yet another daring and critical project for our country which, I am sure, will be a success due to our joint efforts".

Fady Jameel, Deputy President & Vice Chairman of Abdul Latif Jameel, said: "Abdul Latif Jameel Energy, through FRV, is providing Armenia's largest utility scale solar plant which is a testament to our commitment to developing the renewable energy sector. In finalizing this financial agreement for Masrik Solar Farm, we move closer towards our objectives and take pride in assisting Armenia's shift towards a renewable future".

### About FRV

FRV, part of Abdul Latif Jameel Energy is a leading global renewable development company. Aligned with our ambition to be a leading player in the world's transition to a sustainable energy future, FRV moved from a pure PV utility-scale developer to a renewable energy IPP (Independent Power Producer). We want to transform ourselves into the future's main 'green utility/energy platform', therefore we have a rapid growth strategy that will be realized through project generation revenue, shareholder contributions and rotation of assets through minority stake sales and pipeline sales. To this end, FRV plans to invest over USD 1.5 billion in fixed assets to double the total installed capacity, from 2 GW in 2020 to 4 GW by 2024. For more information please visit: [www.frv.com](http://www.frv.com)

## Armenia, Iraq seeks to deepen defense cooperation



A delegation led by the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Iraq Juma Anad Saadoun Khattab has arrived in Armenia on an official visit.

After the official welcoming ceremony at the Armenian Ministry of Defense, a private conversation took place between the Ministers of Defense of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Iraq, which was followed by a meeting with the delegations.

The interlocutors discussed the prospects of bilateral cooperation between Armenia and Iraq in the field of defense, attached importance to the opportunities for cooperation in a number of areas of mutual interest: exchange of experience, regular military-political consultations, military-technical cooperation.

Issues related to regional security were also discussed during the meeting. Armenian Defense Minister Vagharshak Ha-



rutyunyan presented the situation created as a result of Azerbaijani aggression, the process of implementation of the agreements reached after the end of hostilities.

The parties signed a Statement of Intent on cooperation in the field of defense between the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Iraq and the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia.

The document also envisages the preparation and signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of defense.

The delegation led by the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Iraq visited the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial to pay tribute to the memory of the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide.



## Armenian Ambassador to the US holds meeting with Congressional staff

On March 24th, Varuzhan Nersisyan, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia hold a zoom meeting with US Congressional staffers.

During the meeting Ambassador briefed the consequences of Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh and the massive humanitarian challenges that followed the 44-day war. In that regard Ambassador stressed the importance of the immediate release of the prisoners of war, captured civilians and other detainees by Azerbaijan.

Ambassador emphasized the peaceful political settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict based on the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination under the auspices of OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship.

Yeghisheh Kirakosyan, Representative of the Republic of Armenia to the European Court of Human Rights was invited to the meeting as a guest speaker, who represented the actions being undertaken by the Armenian Government towards the

unconditional release of Armenian POW's according to the respective principles of international law.





## Official says soviet-era military maps ‘temporarily’ used at Armenian-Azerbaijani border

(RFE/RL) - Armenia and Azerbaijan are not engaged in the formal delimitation of their borders, while border guards are being temporarily deployed according to 1975-1976 military maps, Armenia’s Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan said.

In an interview with RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on March 26, Avinyan said that a process of border delimitation and demarcation would require at least the establishment of bilateral relations between the two neighboring nations that waged a war over Nagorno-Karabakh last fall.

“These are legal processes. As such we do not have legally fixed borders with Azerbaijan. For such processes, I think, we first need to have bilateral relations, because these processes presuppose the establishment of at least bilateral relations,” he said, adding that border delimitation and demarcation are a long process requiring much effort.

The need for specifying borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan arose after the two countries signed a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement last November



putting an end to a six-week war in which more than 6,000 people were killed.

Under the terms of the document called a trilateral statement, a chunk of Nagorno-Karabakh and all seven districts around it were placed under Azerbaijani administration after almost 30 years of control by ethnic Armenian forces.

The agreement also led to the deployment of around 2,000 Russian peacekeepers along frontline areas and a land corridor connecting the disputed territory with Armenia.

As Armenians withdrew from several districts it created an additional border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The matter, in particular, concerns Armenia’s southern Syunik province and eastern Gegharkunik province.

In the interview Avinyan again insisted that Armenia and Azerbaijan have signed no other document besides the November 9 ceasefire agreement and the trilateral statement signed in Moscow on January 11 this year.

“In any case, I am not aware of any such document. As for the agreements on the Goris-David Bek section [of the road in Syunik], these agreements are with the Russian side, and Russian border guards are stationed there on the basis of these agreements,” the deputy prime minister explained.

Addressing the issue of Armenian captives in Azerbaijan, the official expressed confidence that Armenia will achieve results in getting them released by Baku.

“The Russian Federation unequivocally shares our approach that all prisoners of war and detained persons must be returned... And I am definitely convinced that we will achieve results. I also want to emphasize that international pressure on Azerbaijan in this regard is growing and will continue to grow,” Avinyan said.

## Canadian PM Justin Trudeau pressured on arms exports to Turkey



Member of Canada’s House of Representatives Michael Chong has questioned Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on whether the government will prioritize Canadian interests and values over arms exports and commit to not repeating this reckless mistake again.

“Documents released last week by Global Affairs paint a troubling picture of naivety of the government’s foreign policy.

After bit of pressure was put on the government by the arms export lobby and by Turkish authorities, and after the government was told these exports would be used for the defense of human rights, the government naively reversed its earlier decision and approved the arms exports to Turkey,” the lawmaker said.

He asked Prime Minister Trudeau whether he accepted it was a mistake.

“When the reports first came out of the possible utilization of Canadian technology in unsanctioned areas, we suspended the export permits to Turkey, because we take very seriously the responsibilities, we have under some of the most constraining regulations in the world around arms ex-

ports. We will continue to push for proper accountability and transparency in arms exports. a system that was left in very shady state after ten years of Conservative Government. We’ll continue to ensure that we have full accountability and full transparency including for our NATO allies like Turkey,” Trudeau said in response.

“In my conversations with the Prime Minister of Armenia during this conflict and during many conversations we had including several years ago I said that we would always be there with our brothers and sisters in Armenia, we recognize the challenges that they are facing as a country and we will always support them, because this is the country with whom we share values and strong ties,” Trudeau stated.

## Media Defense files case against Azerbaijan at ECtHR over bombing of journalists in Nagorno-Karabakh

Media Defense has today filed a case at the Strasbourg court on behalf of four Armenian citizens following the bombing of the town of Martuni by Azerbaijani forces during the recent armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The applicants – three journalists who were injured and the brother of a journalist fixer who was killed – allege that as a result of this attack their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights were violated by Azerbaijan.

The bombing took place on 1 October 2020 when the center of Martuni was hit by around 40 missiles over a short period. Four people were killed, and a number of others were seriously injured. Later that day the Azerbaijani government, referring to the bombing, accused Armenia of endangering the lives of journalists and violating international law. In fact, attacks on journalists by Azerbaijani armed forces were a regular occurrence over the course of this conflict. Many journalists reported being harassed and threatened by Azerbaijani armed forces while trying to carry out their journalistic work.

The applicants' case is that their right to



life and right to freedom of expression were violated by Azerbaijan when they bombed Martuni. These rights are protected by article 2 and article 10 of the Convention.

The applicants are represented by Pádraig Hughes and Carlos Gaio from Media Defence along with Armenian lawyer and president of the Freedom of Information Centre Shushan Doydoyan, who said:

“This case has a strategic meaning for the Armenian journalistic community. As a result of shelling by Azeri military forces at least six reporters were injured and one fixer was killed in Artsakh in October, 2020. Even though media professionals working in conflict zones have the status of civilians and are protected by international humanitarian law, this principle was

not properly respected. Journalists are not military targets; their safety should be guaranteed because they are carrying out their professional duty in the war zone by risking their lives. I am proud to be a part of the legal team which developed this strategic litigation case to demand recognition of the violation of the affected reporters' rights and compensation from the Azerbaijani Government”.

Media Defence Legal Director Pádraig Hughes said, “The importance of accurate and informed reporting during armed conflicts cannot be overstated, not least because reporting often has an impact on how warring parties behave. This attack prevented journalists from doing their job and was just one part of a number of attacks on the media by Azerbaijan during the conflict. The way in which the conflict was conducted has since been described as showing the ‘future of warfare’ and we hope the Court decides that that future must include proper protections for journalists so that the quality and independence of the information they are able to provide is not compromised.”

## Italian culture figures call on Azerbaijan to release the Armenian captives

Several Italian culture figures including **Antonia Arslan, Dacia Maraini, Laura Efrikian, Carlo Verdone and Giovanni Donfrancesco** have appealed to the Azerbaijani government to release the Armenians taken prisoner during the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, [Avenire](#) reports.

They underline that the “immediate release of all captives would help strengthen the trust between the two countries, essential for the stability of the region and in the



hope of lasting peace.”

The Italian personalities appeal “to Azerbaijan to immediately and unconditionally return all prisoners of war and all other captives to their families in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and the Tripartite Statement.”

They expressed deep concern over the spread of videos demonstrating the degrading and inhumane treatment of Armenian prisoners of war, describing it as “a flagrant violation of the principles of international law.”

# Gyumri Office of the Armenian Missionary Association of America:

## “In the World of Miracles ...”

By **Gourgen James Khazhakian**  
Chief Correspondent



In Gyumri, I’m talking to **Karen Manukyan**, Manager of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) Gyumri Office.

*- Please tell our readers when and how your Office’ activities have started ...*

K. M. - The Gyumri Office of the Armenian Missionary Association of America was opened in 1999 on the ground floor and the basement of a residential building on Sayat-Nova Street. At that time, as today, the main direction of our charitable programs was to help the socially vulnerable class. So we had sponsoring programs that included more than 500 families. It is interesting to note that at that time our Office also worked remotely in Maralik, Amasia, Artik (small towns in Shirak Region-**edit.**) implementing social programs as well.

Until 2010, **Lusine Khachatryan** headed the Office.

And in 2018, on the occasion of AMAA’s centennial, a new two-story building of the Gyumri Office was constructed in the style of the “Kumairi” Reserve (red and black tufa stone) behind the Sayat-Nova Park. The new building serves both the AMAA Gyumri Office and the Gyumri Evangelical Church of Armenia (ECA).

In the same building we have “Shogh” (Ray) an after-school, educational day care center where 60 under-served children and teenagers aged 7 to 14 attend. They eat hot meals, prepare their homework (Armenian, mathemat-

ics, Russian and English), attend life skills courses, and receive social-psychological services to grow into productive citizens.

In “Shogh”, they also attend painting, computer classes. These children can also participate in cultural classes offered by the AMAA and ECA such as Dance, Theatrical Art, Gobelin Tapesstry, Macrame, Design and Embroidery. These classes serve 220-230 children and adults aged 3 to 25... Agree that it is an impressive number for Gyumri...

Karen continues:



-We have classes, such as of embroidery, design where even students’ parents accompanying them, mostly mothers, participate.

*- How many employees do you have in your staff?* - I interrupt my interlocutor.

- We have 28 staff and about 12 volunteers who are very helpful in our activities.

... In general, volunteering is a very important principle here, but not only for the young...

Thus, a driver of the Office, **Mushegh Gasparyan** of senior age, who loved the woodworking since his childhood, has been training boys in his free hours, because in his own words, he “did not not want this craft to be lost.”

The following words of Karen are pleasant, and even a thrilling surprise, especially for the author of these words whose ancestors were born and bred in Alexandropol/Leninakan since the very beginning of the 19th century.

*“An important observation: AMAA encourages breastfeeding.*

*However, many mothers cannot do it ‘cause of health and other reasons.*

*Therefore, the Office is implementing an infant formula program for babies from 0 to 1 year old that includes about 110 children. Infants are admitted into the program only by the pediatrician’s prescription.*

*Ten families from Artsakh are also beneficiaries of this Program. There are also children of 240 socially vulnerable families who receive financial assistance quarterly, 35,000 drams.”*

Mr. Manukyan continues. *“The number of families from Heroic Artsakh was quite large, but most of them have already returned to their Homeland. About 40 families were provided with clothing, and about 30 families’ utility expenses were paid, their children were provided with stationery as well.*

*Currently, 12 children from Artsakh attend the “Shogh” center.”*

According to the head of the office, *“this is not a school nor a homework assistance program, but rather, a collection of programs that discover and help develop the talents of children, and plant in them love of learning”.*

*And... “we also organize Christmas and Easter events. Mostly, they are of theatrical performances, and we invite about a thousand children, along with their parents, and the children receive gifts. In other words, about 2,000 people take part in those events.*



page 11 ➔ *And in summer camps are organized at the Gyumri residential buildings' yards, for 120 children and 60 teenagers."*

Your author gets to know that every



year the AMAA and the ECA jointly organize summer camps in the resort town of Hanqavan for children from all over Armenia. 120 children and youth from Gyumri participate in these summer camps.

*-What other programs do you have?*

- Last year, when due to pandemic the lockdown was imposed, we helped many families with food, our teachers worked with children via Zoom or phone, so the educational process was not interrupted. We also cooperate with various organizations such as "Caritas", also the local authorities, the municipality and the regional administration.

For instance, when we have a child whose family problems are beyond our level of authority, we contact the appropriate government agency to handle the situation. ...Currently we don't have disabled children at "Shogh", but are working on inclusive programs with "Caritas".

We work with Caritas to help Artsakh children to adapt to the local culture, customs, psychology ...

Teachers are permanently being trained as well as social workers and the psychologists, mainly in Yerevan, or by an invited specialist from Yerevan.

We are in constant communication with specialists, to ensure that our staff receive the best training and are always up-to-date on their professional knowledge.

Karen Manukyan especially empha-



sizes that Christian Education programs are held at the Gyumri ECA by Rev. **Aram Babajanyan**.

*"What are they like?" - I ask.*

- Sunday worship service for adults, Sunday School for children where they learn Bible stories, sing gospel songs, and participate in various events.

The head of the AMAA Gyumri office emphasizes that their team is very united, many of them have been working since the opening of the office.

Of course, being there, I just couldn't not to visit classes...

And so...

... In the design group, children made compositions of crepe paper, the central part of which was the rose, and the candy inside. The gypsum, other materials were used. Also, they have already started preparing large bouquets. The Group's teacher is **Anahit Sassounian**.

Then we visited the Armenian language classroom.

Teacher **Alina Sargsyan** who has been working in the center for many years, the first three years of which as a volunteer, was honest:

*"Alas, not all children are diligent, but in this case you have to motivate them using games, and creative exercises administered by psychologists and other professionals ..."*

... For the writer-journalist, being in this impressive center, of course, it was simply impossible not to visit its library ...

There your humble servant met volunteer **Tatev Torosyan** in whose hands I saw one of the Great Garegin Nzhdeh's books, and I immediately recollected one of the banners in Yerevan: "Read Nzhdeh, Save Lives!" ... According to Tatev, *"taking the books, we develop their skills through individual work."*

And the program coordinator of the "Shogh" center **Tamara Snkhchyan** said: *"The general direction of the programs of this center is a package of educational, social and psychological services, a model that is common to all "Shogh" centers throughout Armenia ..."*

*-And why are the pictures of Harry Potter appear everywhere?*

The answer is the following: *"Adolescents are very interested in the image of Harry Potter, and we are very interested in the Author's image who had great success, overcoming great difficulties, and this is a very good example for our kids who, living under challenging conditions, have a chance to succeed as well"*.

...So what kind of impressions from this interesting and highly saturated "voyage" your author received?

a) A brilliantly organized educational process, both at the teaching level, diversity of subjects thoughts, in an atmosphere that fosters curiosity and learning;

b) The children are instilled with proper values and thought good behavior, for example, they, especially girls, are politely greeting you, smiling, and are sociable;

c) students are diligent to subjects, both in homework preparation and creative classes;

And many and many things that make you want to come back here again and again ...

Well, your humble servant tried to best introduce this, - I think here would not be a great exaggeration to say, - wonderful institution, and you can judge yourselves ...



## The Kardashians, Serj Tankian join challenge to urge Biden to recognize Armenian Genocide

Armenian-American reality TV stars Kim and Kourtney Kardashian, their mother Kris Jenner, System Of A Down frontman Serj Tankian, producer Eric Esrailian have joined the challenge to call on President Biden to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Anyone willing to join the challenge should share an Instagram post by Samadeus D. Arnoqyan and challenge five friends to recognize the Armenian Genocide and take action on ANCA's website to



ensure the US fully and formally recognizes this crime as well.

“April 24th, 1915 marks the beginning of The Armenian Genocide, when Turkey began their massacre of 1.5 million Arme-

nians. Today, Turkey denies this as they also deny their Greek Assyrian and Kurdish genocides.

Because “those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it,” I hope YOU join us in this month-long campaign for recognizing The Armenian Genocide. I’m posting this Forget-Me-Not because I’ve contacted my representatives at [anca.org/genocide](http://anca.org/genocide) – so that they too never forget,” initiator of the campaign Samadeus D. Arnoqyan says.

## U.S. Embassy’s 2021 American Film Showcase opens in Yerevan

The U.S. Embassy brings back the fifth iteration of the American Film Showcase. This year the film festival will be comprised of free film screenings, three public lectures and two workshops.

### Free Film Screenings

Eleven documentary films will be screened during the 2021 American Film Showcase. The showcase opens at 19:00 on March 28 at the Moscow Cinema with a screening of the festival’s feature film “In Search of Greatness,” which tells the story of how prominent athletes from around the world unlocked the secrets of genius. Their stories will inspire audiences to use their natural abilities and develop key skills to rise to greatness.

“We chose to open the showcase with this film because its lessons are universal. They cross cultures and show that despite our differences, we share many commonalities. This concept is at the root of the U.S.-Armenia relationship.” U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Lynne Tracy, said.

Ambassador Tracy continued, “We have



much in common on which to continue to build our partnerships – our mutual respect for a free press and strong civil society to hold our leaders accountable; our commitment to the development of vibrant science, technology, engineering, and mathematics sectors; and our appreciation of a good, old-fashioned jazz concert!”

The American Film Showcase’s free film screenings will continue at the Moscow Theater daily from March 29 to April 3, at 18:00 and 20:00 each day. The films include: “The Dawn Wall,” “In Search of Greatness,” “The Jazz Ambassadors,” “King in the Wilderness,” “Make It Work,” “Mike Wallace Is Here,” “Miles Davis: Birth of the Cool,” “The Most Unknown,”

“Netizens,” “Quincy,” and “RBG.”

### Public Lectures and Workshops

The 2021 American Film Showcase is more than free film screenings.

On March 27, seven-time Emmy Award-winning producer, director, editor and composer Brian Malone will host a public lecture on “Finding Your Story”. Producer Jenna Ricker will speak about “Pitching for Funding” on March 29. The third talk will be hosted by producer, editor, and writer Lara Stolman on March 31 on “Documentary Self-Distribution”. All public lectures are free and will be at 20:00 via Zoom.

From March 28 to March 30, film director Denali Tiller will run a workshop on “Documentary Ethics and Creative Responsibility.” Casey Regan, a film cinematographer, will lead a workshop on “Technical and Interpersonal Skills for Documentary Film Cinematography” from March 31 to April 3. About 20 of Armenia’s top young filmmakers were selected, through an application process, to participate in these workshops.

## Fortress: Film co-produced by Armenia to get support from Eurimages



The film *Fortress* – a joint production of Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Bulgaria and Armenia – has been selected as one of the 24 co-productions supported by Eurimages in 2021.

Anzhela Frangulyan is the co-producer

of the film from Armenia. The shooting is expected to start in August 2021.

At its 162nd meeting held online, the Board of Management of the Council of Europe's Eurimages Fund agreed to support 24 feature film projects, including 3 documentaries and 3 animation films, for a total amount of €5,822,000.

The share of eligible projects with female directors examined at this Eurimages Board of Management meeting was 39.80%. 45.83% of the projects supported were directed by women and €2,213,000 was awarded to these projects, representing

38.01% of the total amount awarded.

Since it was set up in 1988, EURIMAGES has supported 2 187 co-productions for a total amount of approximately 629 million euros



## Montserrat Caballé's album "The island of Christianity: Armenia and Artsakh" presented in Madrid

Madrid hosted on March 23 the presentation of an unpublished album by Montserrat Caballé titled "The island of Christianity: Armenia and Artsakh," a work that the artist recorded in 2013 during her visit to Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).

The event highlighted the art of the great soprano and the Christian heritage that she valued and admired so much during her visit to Armenia and Artsakh.

The presentation of this record was or-



ganized by the Starmus Festival, since its director, the astrophysicist Garik Israelian, is also the executive producer of the record.

Ambassador Vladimir Karmirshalyan, Director of the Starmus Festival and producer of the work, Dr. Garik Israelian, as well as the singer's daughter, soprano Montserrat Martí, delivered speeches.

"My mother was a very believer, with a deep faith, and this is for me not only an artistic treasure, but also on a personal level," said Montserrat Martí. The event was attended by the great friend of the Armenian people, Miguel Ángel Nieto, who spoke on the theme of the album.

## Environment Ministry rejects Lydian Armenia's request for more water use from Arpa River

The Ministry of Environment has refused to grant Lydian Armenia a permit for using more water from Arpa River's lower currents for the exploitation of Amulsar – the gold mine currently halted pending the government's decision whether or not to allow its resumption due to environmental concerns.

The head of the ministry's department in charge of issuing permits, Artyom Mkhitarian, told ARMENPRESS that in 2020 the company received a permit for using

water in volumes of 11 l/s from the Arpa River's lower channels, and now the company requested to have a permit for 41,3 l/s.

Mkhitarian said they rejected the request based on the 2016-2020 government decision regulating the Ararat basin territory. Mkhitarian said it doesn't envisage allowing the use of such volumes.

Lydian Armenia had earlier applied to the authorities to get permission for using more water from Arpa River's Darp stream-



let and the Arpa River's upper channels, but was rejected in both cases.

Lydian Armenia is now disputing the ministry's decision concerning the Darp streamlet at the administrative court.

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