

## Last Saturday of April to be marked as Citizen Day



The Armenian government on March 21 endorsed a bill designating the last Saturday of April as Citizen's Day in memory of the victory of "the non-violent, velvet, popular revolution of April-May 2018."

In a Facebook post on March 21 Pashinyan said that Citizen's Day should be the day marking the victory of the people and democracy rather than the new government.

"And it should become a truly national holiday, a holiday like the revolution itself was," he said.

"As to what should be celebrated on that day, I think it will also be decided through

public, online discussions," Pashinyan added.

By the government's decision, in cases when May 1 will fall on Saturday, Citizen's Day will be marked on the last Sunday of April.

Pashinyan and his political team came to power following sustained street protests against the government of Serzh Sarkisian who in April 2018 was elected prime minister after two consecutive terms as president following a constitutional reform that curtailed presidential powers in favor of the head of the government.

Facing a popular movement against him

led by Pashinyan Sargsyan stepped down on April 23, 2018 after only six days in office as prime minister.

Sargsyan's then ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) eventually had to elect minority candidate Pashinyan as the next prime minister to placate mass demonstrations in support of the then popular opposition leader.

Pashinyan's My Step alliance gathered over 70 percent of the vote in the December 9 early parliamentary elections in which the HHK failed to clear the five-percent threshold to be represented in the next National Assembly.

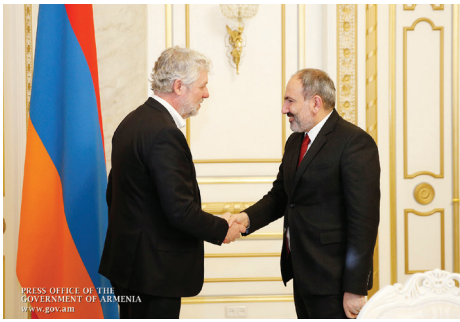
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## Armenia-Sweden cooperation prospects discussed



Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received the delegation led by Minister for International Development Cooperation of Sweden Peter Eriksson on March 21.

As Noyan Tapan was informed from the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, the PM welcomed the visit of the Swedish Minister to Armenia, noting that it's a good opportunity to discuss the prospects of Armenian-Swedish partnership.

Nikol Pashinyan noted that the democratic processes in Armenia are irreversible

and create new opportunities for deepening relations with the EU member states, including Sweden. According to the PM, Armenia has a great agenda for reforms and is ready to expand partnership with the EU in the sidelines of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

Thanking for the reception, Peter Eriksson noted that it's his 1st visit to Armenia and is happy for the opportunity to discuss the issues referring to the development of bilateral relations. The Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation saluted the changes taking place in Armenia. He noted that Sweden is ready to deepen relations with Armenia on both bilateral and multilateral formats, including in the sidelines of the Eastern Partnership as one of the countries to initiate the Eastern Partnership 10 years ago.

Nikol Pashinyan and Peter Eriksson discussed a range of issues of bilateral interest, including partnership prospects in protec-

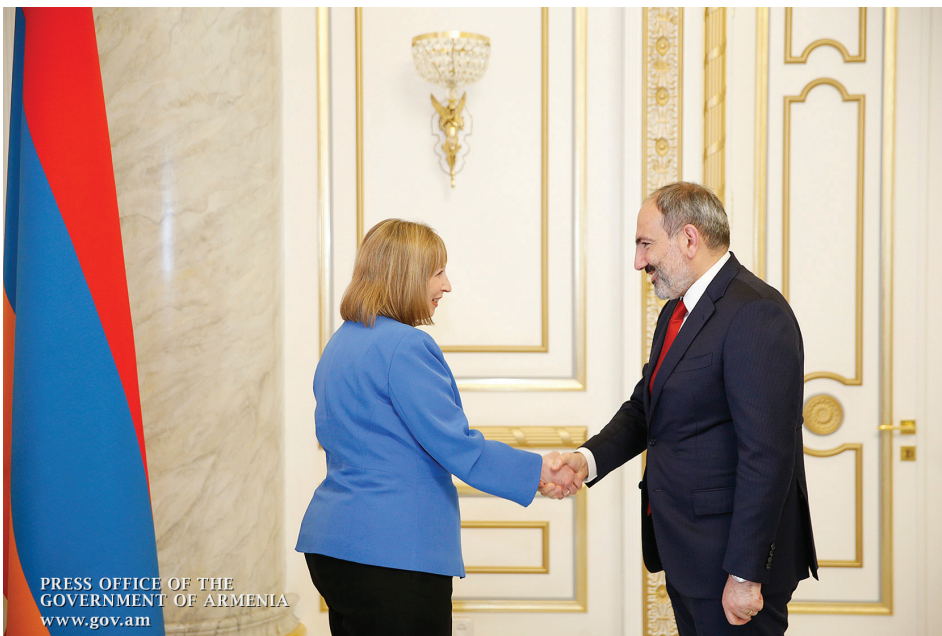
tion of environment, renewable energy and other spheres. The sides agreed to work jointly for developing a memorandum of understanding, which will indicate the concrete directions and projects for cooperation.

The sides also exchanged views on issues of regional stability, particularly referred to Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement issue.

At the end of the meeting Nikol Pashinyan conveyed his warm greetings to Prime Minister of Sweden Stefan Löfven.



## Nikol Pashinyan receives U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Lynne Tracy



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received Lynne Tracy, the newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Armenia. Welcoming Mrs. Tracy, Nikol Pashinyan congratulated her on appointment and wished her every success in her diplomatic mission. The

Prime Minister emphasized that the Government of the Republic of Armenia is interested in the continued development of partnership with the United States, including the political and economic spheres.

The Premier said Armenia is consistently heading along the path of democratic reforms

by fighting against corruption and monopolies, promoting human rights and freedom of speech. In this respect, he stressed the importance of building closer ties of cooperation with the United States and implementing joint programs in the aforementioned areas.

Thankful for the warm welcome, Lynne Tracy said she was honored to meet with Prime Minister Pashinyan and reaffirmed the U.S. Government's strong commitment to assisting sovereign Armenia in implementing its democratic agenda and anti-corruption efforts, dealing with economic and regional bottlenecks, as well as in matters of international security. The U.S. Ambassador assured that during her tenure she would make all necessary efforts to promote the development of bilateral economic cooperation.

During the meeting, the parties discussed a number of issues on the agenda of the Armenian-American relations. Nikol Pashinyan and Lynne Tracy exchanged views on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process and other regional issues of mutual interest.

## Aliyev again rejects Armenian proposal to include Karabakh in peace talks

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev has again rejected an Armenian proposal on the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh as a full party to internationally mediated negotiations for the settlement of the protracted conflict.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reiterated the proposal at a press conference in Yerevan on March 19, insisting that it will not constitute a change of the current format of talks mediated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Minsk Group, but rather will be the restoration of the format that existed for several years after 1994 when Nagorno-Karabakh was a separate party to the ceasefire agreement that put a halt to active military operations in the region.

Aliyev, meanwhile, again referred to Armenia's proposal as "a change in the negotiations format," which he said is unacceptable.

"Azerbaijan cannot agree to that. And envoys of the Minsk Group co-chair countries made a serious statement, saying that the format of the negotiations should remain unchanged. Similar statements were also made by high-ranking EU officials. It is



definitely a serious message to Armenia, and it also proves that Azerbaijan's position is getting more and more support," Aliyev said on Wednesday.

Speaking at press conference, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan emphasized that his statements on the need for Nagorno-Karabakh's engagement in the talks was not a "challenge", but rather "an invitation to dialogue" in which Armenia was ready to listen to Azerbaijan's counterarguments.

"We will continue discussions on this subject with our partners and will try to continue this discussion in the field of arguments, because negotiations are negotiations only when we listen to each other. At least Armenia has shown its ability to listen

to its opponent, try to understand the other side, and we expect the same from them. Where our partners consider that our position can be viewed as excessively tough, we can soften this position, but we would expect the same from our partners, because otherwise no conversation will take place," the Armenian leader said, in particular.

Meanwhile, at a press briefing in Yerevan on March 20 Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Anna Naghdalyan said that the expected meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders will not be "negotiations around the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement issue proper, but an endeavor to elaborate appropriate interpretations regarding the principles and elements of the settlement process."

"There are different interpretations of the three principles and six elements included in the document. Azerbaijan interprets them its own way, the Armenian side also makes its own interpretation... Therefore, there is a need for a meeting just to work out an appropriate interpretation for all three principles and six elements, and only then understand how to move forward," said Naghdalyan.

## Armenian parliament Speaker suggests President of Bundestag to consider the issue of establishing Armenian-German University in Armenia



The delegation led by the Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan, which is in Germany on an official visit from March 18 to 21, met with President of the Bundestag Wolfgang Schäuble on March 19.

As Noyan Tapan was informed from the press service of the parliament of Armenia, the President of Bundestag noted in his welcome speech that they followed the Velvet revolution of Armenia in April-May 2018 with great enthusiasm, underlining

that no similar revolution has ever taken place in the world.

Thanking for the reception, Ararat Mirzoyan noted that this is his 1st official visit to Europe in the position of the Speaker of the National Assembly. The Head of the legislative of Armenia presented the incentive for the Armenian revolution to his German partner, the post-revolutionary period and the early parliamentary elections, that were highly assessed by the international observers.

Highlighting the parliamentary traditions of Germany, Ararat Mirzoyan noted that the experience of the Bundestag can be very useful for the National Assembly of Armenia. In this context the sides expressed readiness to make mutual visits more frequent.

During the conversation the members of the Armenian delegation and Wolfgang

Schäuble discussed a range of issues referring to the Armenian-German agenda, the ratification of the Armenia-EU agreement, visa liberalization, assistance of the European countries in the development of infrastructures in Armenia.

Referring to the cultural and educational links between Armenia and Germany, the Speaker of the parliament of Armenia suggested his German colleagues to consider the issue of establishing an Armenian-German university in Armenia, which will further deepen the relations between the citizens of the two countries.

Ararat Mirzoyan and Wolfgang Schäuble agreed to continue the constructive dialogue and the discussion of the issues of mutual interest in the evening, during the official dinner on behalf of the President of the Bundestag in honor of the head of the Armenian parliament.

## Armenian Investigators Probing Allegations Of 1998 Election Fraud



(Yerevan - RFE/RL) - The Special Investigation Service (SIS) is looking into claims made recently by a former senior official about massive falsifications during the 1998 presidential election that

allegedly gave victory to then Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, a spokesperson said on March 22.

Marina Ohanjanyan said probing other assertions that former deputy defense minister Vahan Shirkhanyan made in an open letter earlier this week, including that Nairi Hunanyan, the leader of a group that carried out a deadly attack on the Armenian parliament in 1999, was a National Security Service (NSS) agent, is “outside the scope of the SIS’s powers.”

Meanwhile, earlier on Friday director of the NSS Artur Vanetsyan neither confirmed, nor denied the claims made by Shirkhanyan, referring journalists to the SIS that he said led the relevant investigation. He also said that the entire related information will be published after a “special procedure.”

In his letter Shirkhanyan, who occupied the senior Defense Ministry post in the 1990s and is now facing coup charges in a trial of a group of individuals arrested in 2015 and accused of plotting to seize power, claimed that the then head of the NSS Gorik Hakobyan presented to Kocharyan and military prosecutor Gagik Jhan-

giryen “a file with the case of NSS agent Nairi Hunanyan”, but that file later allegedly disappeared.

Hunanyan led an attack in which then Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, Parliament Speaker Karen Demirchyan and six other senior lawmakers and government members were killed. Hunanyan and five other members of his group were convicted on charges related to the attack and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2003. Another member of the group was sentenced to 14 years in prison, but did not survive his term.

In his letter Shirkhanyan also claimed that Kocharyan falsified the outcome of the runoff of the 1998 presidential election with Demirchyan, a former leader of Soviet Armenia who made a political comeback and reemerged as quite a popular figure less than a decade after the USSR’s collapse.

Demirchyan conceded defeat and later allied himself with then powerful defense minister Sargsyan. The duo went on to win parliamentary elections the following year. Their tandem remained powerful in the country for several months until the October 27, 1999 terrorist attack in which both were assassinated.

Armenian opposition groups for years alleged that despite the arrest and trial of the immediate perpetrators of the attack its real mastermind has never been revealed.

Kocharyan, who served as president for two consecutive five-year terms in 1998-2008, is currently in pretrial detention on charges of overthrowing the constitutional order in connection with the 2008 post-election crackdown on the opposition during which eight demonstrators and two security officers were killed.

Kocharyan denies the accusations as politically motivated.

## Jailed ex-President Robert Kocharyan files fifth complaint to ECHR

Jailed former President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan has filed a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for the fifth time. The complaint argues that his objection regarding his arrest has not been examined immediately, Kocharyan’s lawyer Hayk Alumyan told reporters.

According to Alumyan, paragraph 4 of article 5 of the European Convention stipulates that any individual who has been incarcerated is entitled to object the arrest and a higher court is bound to immediately release them if the arrest took place unlawfully.

Alumyan says there are judgments where the ECHR has stipulated that the higher court must examine the complaint immediately.

The ECHR hasn’t yet responded to any of Kocharyan’s complaints.

Alumyan says they’ve filed a complaint to the Court of Cassation back in December of 2018.

“The court has not only not examined it, but it didn’t even launch proceedings”.

He argues that the delay can be considered a violation of the European Convention.

2nd President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan, who ruled the coun-

try from 1998 to 2008, spent two weeks in jail in summer of 2018, but was eventually freed. But on December 7, a higher court overruled the re-

lease and ordered him to be remanded into custody pending trial again.

At the time the court announced the verdict, Kocharyan turned himself in to authorities.

Kocharyan is charged with ‘overthrowing constitutional order’ during the 2008 post-election unrest, when clashes between security forces and protesters left 10 people dead, including two police officers, during his final days as president.

He vehemently denies wrongdoing



## Justice minister says Armenia recorded major progress in human rights after revolution

According to justice minister of Armenia Artak Zeynalyan, the two elections of 2018, which were transparent and enjoyed the people's trust, are one of the most important achievements of the actions of the government conducted in the field of human rights. In terms of democracy, significant progress has been registered in the country, but some problems still demand solutions.

“Touching upon the outcomes of the government's activities in the protection of human rights, I consider a key achievement the organization and holding of the parliamentary and the Yerevan City Council elections of 2018, which were free, transparent and enjoyed the people's trust.

I think these elections are a precondition to record the future stable progress of the government in the field of human rights. Armenia has recorded a significant progress in human rights and democracy following the April revolution of 2018. This has also been proved by the assessments of international organizations”, the justice minister said during the session of the par-



liamentary standing committee on human rights and public affairs.

However, he added that there are still problems in the field which require solution, noting that constant efforts must be made to record new progress. The minister

stated that the protection and guarantee of human rights is among the priorities of a democratic and legal state. He said this is enshrined by the Constitution of Armenia and the government's 2018 action plan.

## Alabama Recognizes Armenian Genocide



Alabama has become the 49th U.S. state to officially recognize Ottoman-era killings and deportations of Armenians as genocide.

Kay Ivey, Governor of the State of Alabama, proclaimed April 2019 as Genocide Awareness Month.

“We welcome this proclamation by Gov-

ernor Ivey, making Alabama the 49th state in the union to officially re-affirm this international crime against humanity,” said Armenian National Committee of America-Eastern Region Board Chairman Steve Mesrobian.

“This proclamation serves as a powerful

reminder that truth about genocides should never be held hostage to the denial of its perpetrators and those who continue to profit from that crime.”

Thus, all U.S. states except Mississippi have recognized the Armenian Genocide.

Since the 1960s, the Armenian community of the United States has sought Washington's reaffirmation that the massacres of 1.5 million Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 constituted genocide and its condemnation of the crime. However, the White House leaders have generally avoided the use of the term genocide in their annual addresses and offered their support in the reconciliation of Armenians and Turks.

The 44th and 45th U.S. Presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, used the Armenian expression “Meds Yeghern” in their April 24 messages.

## Reducing tax burden 'key' to economic growth

The Armenian government plans to reduce the burden of direct taxes as it considers it to be key to economic growth, according to a minister.

"But lower direct taxes at least in the short term and medium term imply risks that there will be less budget revenues," Minister of Finance Atom Janjughazyan told journalists on March 21.

"As we also have a ceiling for our debt, we would have to re-focus from taxing capital and revenues to taxing consumption," he added.

At the same time, according to Janjughazyan, the government has found it reasonable to refrain from changing the value added tax, which is the main source of revenues, since it contains risks from the point of view of the country's competitiveness.

"There are not so many options left and in taxes on con-

sumption it is excise taxes and taxes on certain types of activities where the tax burden can be revised. Somewhere the rise will be higher, somewhere it will be lower...It's another question whether it is good or bad," he said.

Workers of a number of currency exchange offices and pawnshops have been holding protests against a considerable rise in their license fees envisaged by the package of planned reforms.

Opponents have criticized the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for his economic policies in this regard, claiming that the changes will hit small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Armenian National Congress party of ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian, which has supported the Pashinyan government politically, joined the criticism on Wednesday by out-



lining possible risks that it said the planned reform of the tax legislation poses to small and medium-sized businesses. In its statement the extra-parliamentary party particularly pointed out risks of raising license fees for currency exchange offices and lending organizations.

Meanwhile, Minister Janjughazyan said: "Any change may lead to the change in the behavior of the consumer, and hence it may affect a particular type of activity or an entity engaged in that type of activity. It

is impossible to have regulation that will have an equal effect on all and all will be equally satisfied with it."

As to whether the government may consider lowering the tax burden in connection with certain discontent in some sectors, Janjughazyan said: "As discussions are not over yet, changes are possible in any direction."

The minister said the draft amendments to the tax legislation may be sent to parliament as early as next week.

## Pashinyan upbeat on Armenia's investment prospects

The Armenian government is currently discussing 802 investments projects worth a total of about \$2.7 billion, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at a press conference on March 19.

"Forty-two of these projects worth a total of \$774 million are, in fact, already at different stages of implementation, others are at the stage of active discussions. This means that we have a certain increase in investment interest in the country," Pashinyan said.

The head of the Armenian government also presented some other data testifying to some growing interest in unfolding economic activities in Armenia.

Thus, according to him, in February 2019 the volume of mortgage lending in Armenia grew by 100 percent, with the growth of

mortgage lending within the framework of government programs making 145 percent as compared with the relevant data for last year's February.

"In general, at present the volume of mortgage loans in the country has grown by 30 percent. According to experts, this is a huge increase. This means that in the near future we will have demand in the construction market, which in its turn will create new jobs not only in construction, but also on the building materials market, in the service sector and so on. This is a very important indicator, which in its turn will lead to the reduction of unemployment," Pashinyan said.

The Armenian premier also spoke about expected financial assistance from the European Union concerning major infrastruc-

ture programs. He said that the EU is ready to provide funding, including in the form of grants, for some major projects, but expects Armenia to co-finance these projects. According to Pashinyan, this, in term, raises the issue of whether Armenia should raise the ceiling for its foreign debt level in order to borrow more for the co-financing of these projects.

"Now we should discuss whether we are ready to go this way, and in the next 20 days we are going to have a joint discussion with the Central Bank that will also involve representatives of the expert community in order to make a decision on this matter," the Armenian premier said.

## The innovations made are serious positive signal for business – Pashinyan receives James Tufenkian

Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received on March 19 U.S.-Armenian businessman, philanthropist and prominent designer James Tufenkian.

As the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia informs, the PM saluted the activities of James Tufenkian in Armenia and Artsakh, noting that the implementation of projects in various spheres by ‘Tufenkian’ Foundation are very important for the development of both Armenia and Artsakh. Nikol Pashinyan noted that on the path to the economic revolution the Government of Armenia carries out reforms aimed at the continuous improvement of business environment, fostering business initiatives, simplifying legislative regulations that will make doing business in Armenia easier and will foster investments. PM Pashinyan emphasized that among the priority goals of the Government is to encourage people to initiate something, since it’s possible to reach solution of problems only through work.

James Tufenkian said that Diaspora-Armenians are very proud of and inspired by the changes taking place in Armenia and there is great desire and interest among Di-



aspora-Armenians to visit Armenia, get acquainted with the processes on site, be involved in the development projects and support the implementation of reforms. He noted that he has personally felt the positive changes, which is the application of a new culture in business, significant simplification of regulations for doing business and so on. According to Tufenkian, the mentioned improvements are important for attracting investments, and the innovations made so far are a serious positive signal for business.

The PM and James Tufenkian discussed the projects of ‘Tufenkian’ Foundation and particularly referred to the investment project of the construction of a hotel complex in Areni community of Vayots Dzor Province. Zpashinyan highlighted the construc-

tion of the hotel, noting that it will have positive chain reaction not only for Areni, but also for the surrounding communities, it will improve the business environment in the province and will foster the development of tourism, economic activity and improvement of infrastructures.

James Tufenkian noted that the ‘Tufenkian’ hotel will be the largest in the country and it’s expected to be put into operation in 2 years. He emphasized that he is ready to continue the implementation of development projects both in Armenia and Artsakh and support the Government in bringing into life the reforms.

The interlocutors also exchanged views on the prospects of implementing new projects.

Businessman James Tufenkian makes investments and carries out projects in Armenia and Artsakh through Tufenkian Foundation. The Foundation’s programs in Armenia are aimed at overcoming poverty, creating educational opportunities, protecting the environment, social justice and human rights protection. The Foundation has implemented and implements large-scale infrastructural and development projects also in Artsakh.

## Government reduces interest rates of educational loans by 3%



The Armenian government has lowered the interest rates for student loans and increased the maximum annual sum of provided credits.

The decision was adopted during Cabinet meeting on March 21.

Currently, 10 commercial banks are dealing with crediting as part of the education loan interest rate subsidy project.

As of January 15th, 2019, more than 1400 loans worth a total of 258,000,000 drams have been issued,

Minister of Education and Science Arayik Harutyunyan said.

The decision was adopted because the current tuition fees in several educational facilities are higher than the maximum an-

nual sum of loans. Therefore, the amendments enable new opportunities in terms of accessibility.

“In particular, it is planned to raise the annual maximum sum of provided loans up to 700,000 drams instead of the current 450,000 drams”, the minister said.

“At the same time, it is planned to reduce the maximum interest rate of crediting up to 9% annually, instead of the current 12%,” Harutyunyan said.

“This is a favorable change for students,” Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan added during the Cabinet meeting. Pashinyan said that factually the move increased the maximal threshold of the loan and reduces by 3% the educational loan interest rate.

## Church Saves AGBU Center in Toronto In a Last-Minute Financial Arrangement

By Harut Sassounian

This week's article is about a major controversy in the Armenian community of Toronto, Canada, which has been fortunately resolved for now.

On October 30, 2018, the AGBU Toronto Chapter issued a statement, announcing that it could no longer afford to pay its Center's operational cost which "has become staggering."

The AGBU Chapter further announced that it has received an offer from the Centennial College to buy the AGBU Center. Subsequently, it became known that the price for the AGBU Center was 8.5 million Canadian dollars. The Central Board — the headquarters of AGBU in New York City — had endorsed the decision to sell the property which was built in 1981.

The immediate impact of this potential sale was on the operations of the adjacent Holy Trinity Armenian Church whose members had used both the parking lot and the facilities of the AGBU Center. Furthermore, the Church had "the first right of refusal" to acquire the AGBU property which meant that if the Church chose to or could afford to purchase the AGBU Center, it had the priority to do so before its sale to the Centennial College, under the same terms.

On November 10, 2018, the AGBU Chapter issued a second statement expressing its regret that "a few have chosen to mischaracterize the recent announcement" regarding the potential sale of the AGBU Center to the Centennial College. The AGBU Chapter further stated that "while we understand that some did not like this decision, it is neither fair nor constructive to react with information intended to mislead the greater Toronto community, particularly those involved with the church."

In response, the Diocese of Canada and the Holy Trinity Armenian Church issued a joint statement on November 19, 2018, describing the AGBU Chapter's two statements as "futile attempts for self-justification. Moreover, they contained comments that were intended to mislead and divide our community. In either case, they failed. Clearly, these statements are void of genuine feelings for a healthy community and are a reflection of dictated un-



democratic decisions with no transparency."

Confused by the contentious press releases, the Toronto Armenian community tried to find out what exactly was going on behind closed doors. The absence of concrete information triggered plenty of rumors. The concern was that Toronto Armenians would lose one of its main centers. The rumor mill was fueled by AGBU's previous decisions to close down Armenian schools, such as the Melkonian Educational Institute in Cyprus, even though the Toronto AGBU Chapter had announced that after the sale of its Center, it would move to a new more centralized location for the community in Toronto.

The other unusual situation was the public feud between AGBU and the Diocese which normally enjoy the best of relations around the world. Furthermore, Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II, the spiritual leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church, is also the Honorary Central Board member of the AGBU. The Catholicos could have easily mediated the conflict between the two institutions, if it had become necessary.

On November 11, 2018, the Holy Trinity Armenian Church convened a special membership meeting under the presidency of the Primate, Bishop Abgar Hovakimian. The congregation adopted a resolution committing to raise the necessary 8.5 million Canadian dollars by January 29, 2019, in less than three months, to purchase the AGBU Center. A Mandated Committee was formed to that effect. The Church announcement stated that "Bishop Hovakimian, in support of fundraising, made an impressive gesture by donating his Panagia and Crosier as the first donation to the fundraising drive."

To everyone's surprise, the Holy Trinity Armenian Church issued an announcement on January 29, 2019, confirming that the

Diocese has "exercised its right of first refusal to purchase the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) property." This unexpected and miraculous development raised a new round of questions as to how the Church was able to raise the large sum of 8.5 million Canadian dollars to purchase the property in such a short time! Inquiries to the Church for some details went unanswered, fueling more rumors as to the true source of the funding for the purchase of the AGBU Center.

After several more emails and phone calls to the Church and its Mandated Committee, Ara Boyajian, a member of the Committee, was kind enough to respond. Initially, Boyajian wrote to me that "the AGBU property next to the HTA [Holy Trinity Armenian] Church in Toronto was purchased by the Diocese and registered in the name of the Diocese. In 90 days the Diocese secured the required financing, exercised its right of first refusal, and completed the 8.5 million [Canadian] dollar transaction on Feb 28, 2019."

When asked for further details, Boyajian and the Mandated Committee disclosed to me the following information:

"1. The Diocese was able to secure the financing of the project, which of course means that it got a Loan, purchased the AGBU property, and registered it in the name of the Diocese.

2. The Loan is secured by a 5-year term mortgage using only the subject property as collateral. The financiers currently want to remain anonymous, and the Diocese is obliged to respect their wishes.

3. The Diocese's own feasibility study and the cash flow projections ensure that over the next five years the Diocese will head lease the premises and be able to carry the property, including making the interest payments. This will include any loss of income due to granting AGBU the right to continue its operation and activities in the building free of charge for eleven months, at absolutely no cost to AGBU.

4. The principal amount of the Loan will be due in five years. This will provide enough time for the Diocese to strategize and plan to undertake a much needed proj-



## 11.7 million Euro project “Organic Agriculture” to kick off in Armenia

The results of the EUR 3.3 million project “Organic Agriculture Support Initiative (OASI)” funded by the European Union and co-funded and implemented by the Austrian Development Agency were wrapped-up on March 22. The project launched in 2015 for the development of organic agriculture in Armenia and was implemented close cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Armenia, ARMENPRESS was informed from the Organic Agriculture Support Initiative (OASI).

The closing event was combined with the presentation of the upgraded Green Training Centre (GTC) in Dzoraghbyur (Kotayk) and the opening of the new GTC in Archis (Tavush), where the project provided brand new machinery, tools and equipment to enhance the demonstration capacities of both centers. During the event, Ambassador, Head of the European Union Delegation to Armenia H.E. Mr. Piotr Świtalski cut the ribbon to mark the re-opening of the Green Training Centre (GTC) and planted an organic tree.

“The European Union supports agriculture as one of the main sectors of the Armenian economy contributing about 18% to the GDP and providing about 36% of the labour force. Agriculture and rural development are among the cornerstones of the broader sustainability agenda - as it is stated in the current Armenia Development Strategy 2014 – 2025.

Organic agriculture could be a niche in Armenia, and that it is in line with the local context to rely on the high quality of products instead of the quantity. The EU’s Organic Agriculture Support Initiative (OASI) has contributed to implementation of the Armenian Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy by supporting the revision of the Law on organic agriculture and other regulatory documents. Among the activities of the programme was the promotion of



organic extension services, raising awareness on organic production and products, increasing market access for the producers and promoting agricultural education sector”, said Ambassador Świtalski.

With the financial assistance of the European Union, the OASI project has provided about EUR 1 million directly to 45 Armenian farmers and processors to start or expand their organic production. An organic agriculture curriculum was integrated into Armenian agricultural colleges to educate future agronomists, and respective schoolbooks and training manuals were developed. The project also provided concrete input to the government to improve the legislative and regulatory framework for organic production and trade.

The organic products were provided with new branding and packaging and promoted at local and international markets. Through campaigns like “Organic September” the awareness on the advantages of organic food among the population in Armenia has increased by 40%. While creating 680 permanent and seasonal jobs, the turnover of the organic producers has significantly increased.

“We embarked to this journey in 2015 with the goal to consolidate, strengthen and grow the organic sector in Armenia. I am delighted that since then, the number of organic producers has doubled. Tasty Armenian organic products also caught the attention of international buyers at exhibitions in Dubai, Germany, and the UK, resulting in contracts worth over 0.5 Million Euros”, - said the OASI Project Team Leader Mr. David Muckenhuber (ADA).

Another project milestone was the founding of the “Organic Armenia Association”, which was created to provide a strong and unified national voice for domestic certified organic farmers and processors and to build and support a producer-led national organic movement and national policy platform.

“Every end is a new beginning – through the good work of the project ADA could prove itself as trusted partner of the EU in the field of agriculture, and soon we are to launch a EUR 11.7 million project on Green Agriculture Development in Armenia with the generous support of the EU”, emphasized Gerhard Schaumberger, ADA Head of Office for the South Caucasus.

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ect which will benefit the Toronto community at large.”

In a follow-up email, Boyajian explained that the term “head lease” in the above point 3 means: “a Tenant leases the entire leasable space from the Landlord and pays rent to the Landlord, or in this case to the Diocese as the owner of the building. Parallel to securing the financier(s), the Diocese was able to find, negotiate and sign a ‘head lease’ with a reputable Tenant prior to the purchase (during the 90 day Right of First Refusal period), to enable the Diocese for the next five years to cover all the expenses of the building, including the interest payments of the Loan. This was supported by a Feasibility Study and Cash Flow Projections.”

## “Armenian Genocide must be recognized” – 2020 U.S. Presidential Candidate Tulsi Gabbard



U.S. Presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard issues statement on Armenian American issues

Hawaii Congresswoman and Presidential Candidate Tulsi Gabbard (D) has called for a just resolution of the Armenian Genocide and pledged to promote the security and prosperity of Armenia and Artsakh in a video statement released to the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA). It is the first presidential campaign statement on Armenian American concerns released in preparation for the much anticipated 2020 election.

“I was so grateful to have the opportunity in 2017 to visit Armenia and Artsakh, where I gained a deeper understanding about both the challenges and the opportunities facing the Armenian people,” began the two-minute statement.

“The Armenian community here in the United States has played a positive and integral role for well over a century, and I am proud to support and stand with this community’s objectives to realize a just resolution of the Armenian Genocide and to promote the security and prosperity of the citizens of Armenia and Artsakh,” she added.

Commenting on the broad range of foreign

policy challenges facing the United States today, Rep. Gabbard noted “it’s especially critical that we pursue a foreign policy that rejects this fossilized, zero-sum thinking of ‘you’re either with us or against us. In order for us to win, you must lose.’ Instead, we must pursue a foreign policy that is based on cooperation with other countries, rather than confrontation.”

Rep. Gabbard stated her support for the continued role of the U.S. as a mediator in Artsakh peace talks through the OSCE Minsk Group, then noted, “but this does not mean that we continue a policy of false parity and fail to speak honestly when either party violates the cease-fire. In order to maintain credibility as an impartial broker, the United States should not promote a resolution that’s based on immediate and permanent concessions by Armenia or Artsakh only, in the absence of equivalent concessions by Azerbaijan. And while the principle for respect for territorial integrity must be adhered to, we also must stand for the right to self-determination for all people.”

Rep. Gabbard urged that the “Armenian Genocide must be recognized in order to bring about justice for one of the most egregious crimes against humanity in history.”

“We want to thank Congresswoman Gab-

bard for clearly communicating her constructive policy priorities, on video and in person, with Armenian American voters,” said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hambarian.

“Her proven track record of legislative support - including, of course, her fact-finding mission to Artsakh and Armenia - has earned her an ‘A+’ rating from the ANCA. Heading into the 2020 primaries, Congresswoman Gabbard’s pro-active campaign outreach has set the standard for candidates seeking the support of a highly engaged Armenian American electoral constituency that is well-positioned to play a decisive role on Super Tuesday and in other nominating contests across the country,” he added.

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard is among over a dozen Democrats who have announced their intention to vie for the U.S. presidency in 2020. In order to participate in nationally televised primary debates beginning in June, 2019, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) has announced that candidates must have garnered 65,000 unique donations of any amount.

# Armenia preparing to properly host Iranian tourists during Nowruz

Armenia’s state agencies are preparing to properly host Iranian tourists during their New Year – Nowruz.

The Tourism Committee of Armenia told Armenpress that they attach importance to the strengthening and development of the Armenian-Iranian cooperation, as well as providing favorable conditions to Iranian tourists. The Committee informed that this year as well it has requested the instructions of the Armenian Prime Minister. According to them, mobile ambulance service will operate in certain parts, mainly visible sites of Yerevan-Meghri highway during the Nowruz days.

The ministry of transport, communication and information technologies will ensure the lighting and improvement of the Yerevan-Meghri highway. Iranian tourists will be provided with the updated version of Persian journals on Armenia and Yerevan at the border checkpoints. The Police of Armenia will ensure enhanced traffic control



ans visited Yerevan, in 2015 – 144.160, 2016 – 188.851, 2017 – 220.147. But in 2018 a decline was registered, the number of Iranians visiting Armenia comprised

nia.

Armenia and Iran signed a Memorandum of Understanding on June 5, 2016 relating to the visa-free visits which has been ratified by the Armenian Parliament on June 17, 2016.

The actions carried out within the framework of the cooperation aim at strengthening the future tourism partnership of Armenia and Iran, ensuring growth in tourist visits between the two countries, forming an Armenia-Iran joint regional tourism result and properly presenting this in the international market. In particular, a cognitive visit has been organized for the Armenian and Iranian tour operators and specialized journalists.

By the support of the Tourism Committee, EXPO Group plans to hold the 6th InTour Expo 2019 international tourism exhibition in Yerevan from April 26 to 28. On the sidelines of the Armenia-Iran public-private partnership, an invitation will be sent to the Iranian side to participate in the EXPO by providing a pavilion for free.



on the Yerevan-Meghri highway. At the same time, a proposal was made to the Mayor of Yerevan to ensure the launch of fountains of the Republic Square during the Iranian New Year.

The Tourism Committee informs that in recent years activeness has been registered in the Iranian tourist visits to Armenia. Starting from 2014, including 2017 as well, the visits from Iran to Armenia have dynamically increased. In 2014 116.324 Irani-

160.645. The Committee said this decline is linked with the economic situation in Iran.

At the same time, it’s worth noting that the tourism season has already been extended in Armenia, and the active season starts in March instead of April, mainly thanks to the visits from Iran to Armenia. Iranians celebrate their New Year in March and prefer to spend their holidays in Arme-



## “How to START UP for Young People” project to open new prospects for participants



Within the framework of a one-year project “How to START UP for Young People” the international team of professional experts and trainers who have designed the project will train and teach young people entrepreneurship, leadership skills and knowledge how to START UP their own small business and match their education with labor market.

On this purpose the project will involve 8 participating countries in total, where the unemployment problem is the highest in Europe such are: Greece, Italy, Croatia, Portugal and France (5 from EU Programme Countries) and Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine (3 from Easter Partnership Countries).

The project will be implemented totally with 3 main stages (2 Capacity Building Activities + 1 Mobility Activity). Workshop,

Exchange and Evaluation. Workshop and Exchange will be implemented in Armenia; the last part of the project evaluation with leaders will take place in France in October 2019.

The first stage will be Workshop in Yerevan, Armenia, 8 working days, from March 30 - April 7. Youth leaders, workers and decision-making bodies of NGOs from 8 countries 24 in total will participate in this workshop. Each 8 countries will be presented by 3 delegates specialized in the topic of unemployment, youth inclusion, leadership, entrepreneurship. During working days, the professionals will discuss the problem of unemployment in each participating country; each country-delegation will present a detailed presentation about the problem in their country, what their home countries and organizations do to support young people. Professional experts specialized in the topic of entrepreneurship will be invited to transform to youth leaders the necessary knowledge and tools in the process of helping young people to START UP.

As a result of one-year project Electronic and Printed Guide Book “How to START UP for Young People” in 8 official lan-

guages of the participating countries will be prepared. Professional web page [www.startupyoungpeople.com](http://www.startupyoungpeople.com) will be prepared with all information, materials and contacts of experts. A video film about project and results will be prepared. This project will no doubt be a beginning of continuous cooperation between countries and experts in the topic of the project the main aim of which is and will be to help young people living in Europe.

The project is financed by European Commission within Erasmus Plus projects and will be devoted to fighting against unemployment among young people, especially from vulnerable groups, poor background and fewer opportunities.

The problem of high rate of unemployment among young people is one of the major and even N1 problem (especially in participating countries) that young people face today in Europe, a problem that needs a solution. For example in Greece, according to World Bank Statistics, the rate of unemployment among young people is 47. % every second young person is unemployed, which is the highest among participating countries, followed by Italy – 36.6% and Armenia 35.1%.

## Armenian Genocide Museum to open in Buenos Aires



Buenos Aires has given a green light to the construction of an Armenian genocide Museum in the city, Estacao Armeniareports.

The Buenos Aires legislature voted 54 to 2 last week to approve at second reading a bill that enables the Memory Foundation of the Armenian Genocide to build a Museum of Armenian Memory, History and Culture.

The property is located on Gurruchaga Street, very close to most of the institutions of the Armenian community that are located in the neighborhood of Palermo.

The foundation received the building for a period of 30 years with the possibility of renovation.

The establishment of the museum aims “to promote the creation of a museum that maintains the contribution of the Armenians to the social construction of Argentina. Thus, an archive of the history of the Armenian presence in Argentina will also be created.”

A library and archive of Armenian genocide is also expected to be created.

Argentina was one of the first countries to recognize the Armenian Genocide. In September 1987, Raúl Alfonsín (president of Argentina from 1983 to 1989) described the massacre of a million and a half Armenians at the hands of the Turks between 1915 and 1923 as genocide.

Two decades later, in 2007, Argentina declared April 24 as “Day of action for tolerance and respect among peoples” in remembrance of the Armenian Genocide.

**City Spa**, one of the founders of Aesthetic medicine in Armenia, that was established 14 years ago, is still following the main principles that were implemented since the launch: to use only clinically and scientifically approved, highly effective and safe with FDA approval products and equipments imported mainly from UK and Europe.

**Depilation:** Last year City Spa launched a very safe, painless and fast acting new machine for permanent hair removal. It is the "Primelase" produced by Cocoon Medical. The machine has an innovative



international leading brands such as ZO Skin health (Beverly Hills US), GLO therapeutics (ColoradoUS), Skin Ceuticals (US) etc.

**And that's not the all: pedicure, manicure and massage will make your day.**

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method (dynamic mode) which allows to treat very large areas of the body within few minutes.

**Localized fat removal:** In Armenia the first cryolipolysis method was implemented by City Spa in 2016. Cooltech is an innovative machine that acts as a none surgical lyosaction, with a new method of cryolipolysis for permanent localized fat removal and body reconturing. It is safe, painless and very effective. City Spa is equipped also with the Wellshape machine for anti-cellulite treatment.



**Anti aging Facial treatments and Care:** City Spa offers the latest scientifically approved anti aging treatments and products for care. The doctors are regularly improving their qualifications in London and Paris, bringing the new inventions to Armenia. The products used in City Spa are only



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## Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

It is the beginning of a new year for you. You likely will find it to be energizing. Now is the time to focus on new plans for this next year of your life. Just this week may seem to be a tough start in the arena of relationships, but that will soon pass.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

Have compassion for yourself this week. You need not mope, but if old and painful circumstances surface, hold onto the fact that you did your best at the time. That's all there is to it. Don't swallow pseudo guilt. That will make an unnecessary knot in your belly.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Early in the week an opportunity to expand your social life brings smiles. You may be invited to a party or you might meet someone new. This aspect is from Venus, goddess of love and creativity. The muse may be at your side as you produce a particularly creative idea or solution to a problem.



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

Your planetary ruler, Venus, is now squaring warring Mars. The relationship challenge concerns a lover or possibly a child. If it is a lover, then the initial difficulty may have to do with intimacy or the sharing of resources. You will find a solution if this is a truly ongoing relationship. This may be a turning point that tests your level of commitment.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

In the late summer of 2017 you likely began a new relationship. It might have been the redefinition of an ongoing situation. Now Venus is making a last quarter square to Mars. You are starting the last leg of the journey begun in 2017. You have learned by now whether or not this relationship is worthwhile. Don't eliminate it without seeing the big picture.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

considerable worry at this time. The probability is that it is based only upon the assumption of a third party. The reason you worry is that you and one or more significant others are not communicating well. Concentrate on productive communications and don't carry this false "fact" around in your heart.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Your ruling planet, Mercury, is continuing its retrograde motion. This is a good week to review material you have considered in the past. Maybe you will catch a previously made error. If you are doing taxes at this time, check everything twice in order to avoid the hassle of a mistake.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

Your carefully maintained peace may go flying this week. There are signs of metal or machines breaking. Drive and handle tools carefully. Do not press yourself to do more than you can readily accomplish. There might be a clash between you and a loved one. Walk and talk on the mature side for a smooth landing.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

It is possible you will have a conflict on the topic of personal security. This may be a contest between you and another. Alternately, it can be an issue within your psyche, uncertainty about the path of greater promise down the road. Remember that Mercury is retrograde and whatever you decide will likely change later. Take your time.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Your energy level is good. Positive outcomes related to your career or work in the world are reflecting well upon you. Almost anything you set out to accomplish is handled in unusually quick time. You have what it takes to be a warrior on behalf of yourself or others. People will listen to you now. Let go of concerns for problems you can do nothing about.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

In the summer of 2017, you opened your life to a new person, whom you consider a friend. This is a time of evaluation. If this friend has been good in your life, then make an effort to get beyond a problem that surfaces between you now. The "friend" may be represented by an organization that you helped to begin, or a group with whom you have shared time and work together.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Mercury continues to retrograde in your sign. Remain cautious about signing contracts or making a final decision on anything important. You might have made an error in logic somewhere along the way. Discuss your thoughts with a trusted friend before you sign on the dotted line.

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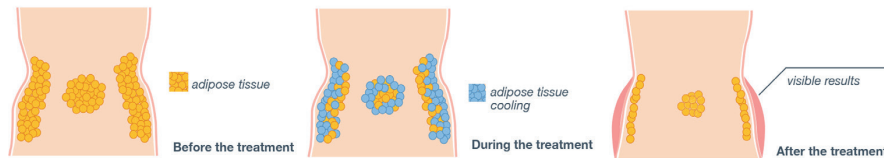
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