

Macron invites Pashinyan to France on March 9



FRANCE- Nikol Pashinyan, Emmanuel Macron hold private talks on margins of Paris Peace Forum, November 12, 2019

French President Emmanuel Macron has invited Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to Paris on March 9 to participate in a meeting on French-Armenian cooperation.

Macron made the remarks in a message sent to Pashinyan to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and Armenia.

“I am glad that our political, cultural and economic contacts continue to be further strengthened due to the adoption of the roadmap for economic cooperation, the provision of vaccine doses to assist Armenia in the fight against the epidemic crisis, as well as the recent establishment of the French Institute in Armenia,” Macron said.

“This platform of dialogue, which aims to resolutely guide to the future, will unite French and Armenian high-ranking officials, local governments, enterprises, associations, as well as many in-

dividuals from various walks of life. It will give an opportunity to all those who bring our cultural, scientific-economic relations to life, to outline long-term structural projects to promote the sustainable development and prosperity of Armenia, with a special emphasis on the youth of your country. I will be glad to receive you in Paris on this occasion to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries.”

Macron said Armenia can rely on the decisive mobilization of France, both bilaterally and within the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship, to achieve the adoption and implementation of de-escalation measures for the lasting settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

“You can be confident that France will be fully committed to strengthening our partnership in the coming years to meet the many challenges of the modern world,” he added.

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The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a statement on the 34th anniversary of the massacres of Armenians in Sumgait. The statement reads:

34 years ago, on February 27-29, with the organization of the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities and the connivance of law enforcement, the massacres of the Armenian population in the city of Sumgait were carried out, resulting in the killing of hundreds of Armenians, including women, children, elderly, and forcible displacement of thousands.

Mass killings and tortures against the Armenians, that were aimed at forcibly suppressing the democratic expression of will of the Armenian of Artsakh and the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination on the basis of existing legal mechanisms, later continued in Baku, Kirovabad, and other settlements of Azer-

baijan with Armenian population. Azerbaijan responded to the expression of the will of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to free and secure life in their homeland by carrying out a policy of collective punishment against Armenians, which later turned into full-scale war unleashed against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The massacres of Armenians in Sumgait received a wide international response. A relevant condemning resolution was adopted by the European Parliament.

In continuation of the same policy, the Azerbaijani armed forces carried out a complete ethnic cleansing of all Armenian settlements fallen under their control during the aggression against Artsakh on September 27, 2020, taking cruel revenge on many detained civilians, prisoners of war, destroying, vandalizing Armenian cultural and religious monuments and sanctu-

aries.

The decision of the UN International Court of Justice on the application of provisional measures within the framework of the “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” issued on December 7, 2021, demonstrated the fact that more than three decades after the Sumgait atrocities Azerbaijan continues its policy of racial hatred towards Armenians and the destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage.

Today, we pay tribute to the memory of the innocent victims of the mass atrocities in Sumgait and other settlements, and emphasize that Armenophobia and the threat of use of force remain Azerbaijan's state policy, which clearly contradicts the regional and international efforts aimed at a peaceful, developing and sustainable region.

Defense Minister explains sackings of top generals

(RFE/RL) - The chief of the Armenian army's General Staff, Artak Davtyan, and several other senior generals were dismissed late last month as part of ongoing defense reforms, Defense Minister Suren Papikyan said on March 2.

Davtyan, one of his deputies as well as the commanders of the army's artillery and engineer units and the head of a General Staff division dealing with army morale were relieved of their duties on February 24 through presidential decrees requested by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The chiefs of Armenia's military intelligence and rear services were fired a few days earlier.

All of them except Davtyan were swiftly replaced by other senior officers. Pashinyan has still not installed a new army chief of staff.

An opposition lawmaker, Tigran Abrahamyan, expressed concern about this fact during the Armenian government's ques-

tion-and-answer session in the parliament. Abrahamyan cited grave security challenges facing the country.

Papikyan assured him that the acting head of the General Staff, Kamo Kochunts, is in a position to properly lead the armed forces for now. The minister also indicated that he is the one who initiated the sweeping changes in the army top brass.

“We have entered a period of very important reforms,” he said. “I believe that it's about time the military sphere was also entrusted to many of our capable and young cadres who went through war. I don't want to link this with individuals but at the same time cannot fail to say that everything depends on individuals.”

“Everything is being done to make sure that we have a more motivated top brass,” added Papikyan. “And this is a signal to all military officers. All worthy officers will be able to occupy high-level positions re-



gardless of their personal connections.”

Pashinyan promised a major reform of the military shortly after Armenia's defeat in the 2020 war with Azerbaijan. He has replaced three defense ministers since a Russian-brokered ceasefire stopped the six-week war in November 2020. Papikyan was appointed in November 2021.

Davtyan became Armenia's top general in March 2021. The previous holder of the post, Onik Gasparyan, was fired after he and four dozen other high-ranking officers accused Pashinyan's government of incompetence and misrule and demanded its resignation.

Armenian, Canadian FMs meet in Geneva

On the margins of the session of the High-level Segment of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan held a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Canada Mélanie Joly.

The Foreign Ministers of Armenia and



Canada discussed the prospects for further development of bilateral relations. The importance of promoting high-level contacts was emphasized.

The interlocutors underlined the importance of the mission of Canadian special envoy Stéphane Dion, who has been

Government sees tough economic times ahead for Armenia



Armenians should brace themselves for more economic hardship because of the intensifying war in Ukraine, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Thursday, March 3

Pashinyan and his economy minister, Vahan Kerobyan, predicted further increases in food prices in Armenia, which already soared in 2021. They clearly alluded to knock-on effects of Western economic sanctions imposed on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

“As we can see, there have been constant ‘inflationary earthquakes’ for the last two years,” Pashinyan said at a weekly session of his cabinet. “The first one was COVID and the second one is geopolitical developments, the events taking place in

Ukraine.”

“In this regard, nothing optimistic is expected,” he warned grimly.

Kerobyan likewise spoke of a “serious challenge to our food security” anticipated this year.

“We can already see a substantial rise in the cost of wheat and other basic goods and commodities,” he told reporters after the cabinet meeting. “There is a big risk in the sugar market.”

Armenia imports a large part of its wheat and other key foodstuffs from Russia. There are concerns that the Russian government might curb their exports in response to the severe sanctions.

Food prices in Armenia went up by an average of almost 13 percent last year, reflecting a global trend. Government data shows that they continued to rise significantly in January and February this year.

Kerobyan said that the further price hikes expected by the Armenian government are an opportunity for domestic farm-

ers. “Farming is going to become more lucrative,” he claimed.

Many farmers across the country have said in recent weeks, however, that they are planning to cultivate less land this year due to a spike in the prices of fertilizers. The government decided on Thursday to subsidize those prices, but with strings attached.

Pashinyan already expressed late last week concerns about the adverse impact of the sanctions on Armenia and other members of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. He said they should look into ways of minimizing “these negative effects.”

Russia is Armenia’s number one trading partner. According to official statistics, Russian-Armenian trade rose by almost 21 percent, to \$2.6 billion, last year, contributing to renewed economic growth in the South Caucasus country.

Pashinyan and other officials did not say on Thursday whether they expect slower growth this year because of the sanctions.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan receives Special Envoy of Canada to EU and Europe Stéphane Dion

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received Special Envoy of Canada to the European Union and Europe, Canada’s Ambassador to Germany Stéphane Dion.

During the meeting the Armenian PM said that Dion’s visit is a good occasion to discuss the Armenian-Canadian partnership agenda and attached importance to the fact that Canada shares the vision of Armenia’s reforms, the Prime Minister’s Office said in a press release.

“Armenia is committed to its democratic agenda and is grateful to Canada, the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for supporting our democracy,” PM Pashinyan said.

PM Pashinyan underscored that despite the difficulties after the 2020 war, the Armenian government is consistently advancing on the path of strengthening democratic institutions, and the assessments of reputed international organizations are a testament to this.

Stéphane Dion conveyed PM Trudeau’s warm greetings and underscored that he is visiting Armenia to discuss the prospects of the Armenia-Canada Strategic Dialogue.



“Canada is a resolute supporter of Armenia’s democratic agenda and is interested in implementing joint programs in Armenia,” Stéphane Dion said.

Issues relating to the strengthening of democracy in Armenia and in this context the expansion of the Armenian-Canadian partnership were discussed.

The Armenian Prime Minister offered the Canadian side to consider the opportunities of joint projects in Armenia in the areas of road construction, reservoir construction, renewable energy, green economy and educational infrastructures. Stéphane Dion found the proposals interesting and noted that he will present them to the Canadian Prime Minister and the

government.

Views were exchanged around international and regional security issues. PM Pashinyan presented Armenia’s stance over the delimitation and demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, opening of the regional connection routes, and addressed the agreements reached as a result of the meetings mediated by international partners. PM Pashinyan noted that Armenia attaches importance to peace and stability in the region and expects the support of international partners in this process.

The PM and Stéphane Dion stressed the importance of democratic institutions in the context of handling security challenges. Pashinyan noted that Armenia is ready to actively work with Canada around the joint political, economic, cultural and humanitarian agenda and programs.

PM Pashinyan asked Stéphane Dion to relay his greetings and best wishes to his Canadian counterpart, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Vahagn Khachaturyan elected President of Armenia

Vahagn Khachaturyan has been elected President of the Republic of Armenia. He received a total of 71 votes in the second round.

Khachaturyan, nominated by the ruling My Step faction, failed to pass the confirmation vote in the Parliament in the first round.

He received only 69 votes of the 81 required as the opposition factions boycotted the election.

In the second round he needed just 64 voted to be elected as President.

High-Tech Industry Minister Vahagn Khachaturyan was the sole candidate vying for the post as the two opposition blocs

said they would not nominate candidates to avoid participating in the election in any way.

Vahagn Khachaturyan, will have largely ceremonial powers, just like his predecessor Armen Sarkissian. The latter unexpectedly resigned in late January, saying that during his nearly four-year presidency he has lacked “necessary tools to influence” political and socioeconomic developments in Armenia.

Khachaturyan, 62, is an economist who had served as mayor of Yerevan from 1992-1996 during former President Levon Ter-Petrosian’s rule. He was a staunch political ally of Ter-Petrosian until agreeing to join Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s



government last August.

Vahagn Khachaturyan will be sworn in as President of Armenia on March 13.

The President-elect will take the oath at the special session of the National Assembly to be convened at the Karen Demirchyan Sports and Concerts Complex in Yerevan.

Armenian FM discusses issue of POWs with UN Human Rights Commissioner

On the sidelines of the 49th High-Level Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan met with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michel Bachelet.

The sides highly commended Armenia’s close cooperation with the UN, particularly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Ararat Mirzoyan noted that this year is symbolic; it marks the 30th anniversary of Armenia’s accession to the UN. In this regard, the Foreign Minister stressed that Armenia has established itself as a responsible and reliable partner of the international community and has consistently contributed to the promotion of multilateralism and the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the world.

Presenting the situation resulting from

the 44-day war unleashed by the Azerbaijani armed forces against Artsakh, Ararat Mirzoyan stressed the importance of unhindered involvement of international organizations for the full settlement of humanitarian issues in Nagorno-Karabakh, including the implementation of humanitarian missions by the UN High Commissioner.

Touching upon the Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh and its people, Minister Mirzoyan underlined that it was accompanied by gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, documented in detail and presented to international law enforcement organizations.

Minister Mirzoyan stressed that Armenian prisoners of war and civilians are still being illegally detained in Azerbaijan, and official Baku refuses to release and re-

turn them, grossly violating international law. Attention was also drawn to the pre-planned acts of vandalism and destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage in the territories fallen under the control of the Azerbaijani armed forces as a result of the war against Nagorno-Karabakh.

The sides also exchanged views in detail on the ongoing reforms in Armenia and the achievements made with its framework, particularly in the spheres of strengthening of democracy, promotion of human rights and the rule of law, as well as the judiciary system, and the fight against corruption. The interlocutors highly appreciated the coordinated interaction with international structures in this process.

The UN Commissioner for Human Rights stressed the importance of Armenia’s leadership in the promoting the agenda of prevention of genocides and crimes against humanity.

Russia does not intend to violate the rights of the people of Ukraine. Lavrov

The special military actions implemented by Russia are aimed at saving people, demilitarizing and denazifying that country, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov announced in a video message at the session of the UN Human Rights Council.

He announced that Russia respects the Ukrainian people and does not intend

to violate the rights of the citizens of that country.

“Millions of Ukrainians today live in Russia. We take them for ours. Together we always were and will be strong and successful”, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said. According to him “the consistent dissemination and the attacks on truth and freedom” are implemented by the permis-

sion of the US and its allies.

“Exactly the policy of the West headed by Washington led to that since 2014 Kiev regime has been fighting against its own people, against all those who do not agree with the neo-Nazi values of Maidan, criminal policy of the Ukrainian authorities.” said Lavrov.

Armenia supports solution of issues through peaceful, negotiated means – ruling faction MP on Ukraine situation



Armenia is concerned by the developments taking place in the territory of Ukraine, Chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on foreign affairs Eduard Aghajanyan said at a press conference, asked what is Armenia's position on the situation in Ukraine.

“Armenia, of course, is deeply concerned about the current situation. Having felt the consequences of the horrors of war on ourselves, of course, we are able to empathize and assess the situation. Any war has very painful consequences, and the Republic of Armenia, is, of course, acting as a supporter of the solution of issues through peace and negotiated means. Of course, this situation is concerning, and Armenia, being a member of the international community and having a certain position, is concerned also by the consequences of this process in our region. Of course, we

very closely follow the developments, and Armenia must also be ready to all the consequences that could result from any development”, he said.

According to him, the cessation of military operations and shift to the solution of the issue through diplomatic means would be the most desirable development for Armenia.

“But these are issues that are out of Armenia's control, and the only thing we are left with at this moment is to assess at best the risks in our region and thus move forward”, Eduard Aghajanyan said.

Ukraine is ready for negotiations, but considers the ultimatums unacceptable. Embassy of Ukraine in Armenia



Ukraine is ready for real talks with Russia, but considers the ultimatums unacceptable, the representative of Ukraine in Armenia, Chargé d'Affaires Denis Avtonomov told ARMENPRESS, commenting on Kyiv's expectations from the talks on the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

According to the Ukrainian diplomat, the talks are always useful and necessary, but the conditions that Russia, in the person of President Vladimir Putin and Russian diplomats, puts forward for the settlement of the issue are unacceptable for the Ukrainian side and are considered an ultimatum.

“Negotiations are always needed, but what the Russian President said to the French President yesterday, what the Russian Ambassador to the UN Nebenzya said, is an ultimatum. We are talking about “demilitarization”, “denazification”, Ukraine's neutral status, abandonment of plans to

join the European Union and the NATO. I did not see any willingness of them to change that position. And our position is to stop the fire and withdraw the troops. After that we are presented with ultimatums, we have no choice but to fight. As a diplomat, I can assure you that the ultimatum - the talks are different things,” said the Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine.

To the question of ARMENPRESS in which case Ukraine will consider itself a winner or what will it consider a victory, Denis Avtonomov answered. “Complete liberation of Ukrainian territories, including Crimea and Donbass.”

Armenia abstains from UN vote on Ukraine

Armenia has abstained from voting on a UN General Assembly resolution that deplores “in the strongest terms” Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The resolution, approved on March 2 by 141 members of the 193-member body, demands that Russia immediately stop its war in Ukraine and withdraw all of its troops from Ukrainian territory.

Russia was joined by Belarus, which has served as a launch pad for Russian

invasion forces, Eritrea, North Korea and Syria in voting against the non-binding resolution.

Thirty-five UN members abstained. They included China, India, Iran as well as Armenia and three other members of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization. Eleven other nations, including Azerbaijan, did not vote at all.

Armenia had repeatedly voted against UN General Assembly resolutions con-

demning Russia's annexation of Crimea and upholding Ukrainian sovereignty over the Black Sea peninsula.

Last week, it also voted against the effective suspension of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe. The decision was backed by 42 members of the Strasbourg-based organization. Armenia was the only member state that joined Russia in opposing it.



Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Fatemi Amin hails his visit to Armenia as constructive, saying Tehran and Yerevan agreed on launching joint ventures, the Embassy of Iran in Armenia said in a news release.

“We have clinched new agreements with Armenian officials on joint production of pharmaceutical products and home appliances based on which the raw materials or parts will be imported to Armenia. The joint products will be made in Armenia and exported to other countries,” Reza Fatemi Amin said on Friday.

He had already announced that the visit to Armenia was aimed at expanding bilateral trade ties via joint investments. “This visit is focused on deepening ties between Iran and Armenia via joint ventures”, said Reza Fatemi-Amin upon arrival in the Armenian capital of Yerevan on Thursday.

Fatemi-Amin also described the meet-

Iranian companies to participate in construction of transit road in Armenia

ings with Armenian officials as helpful, saying they would facilitate bilateral trade between the two neighboring countries. “During the two-day visit we had helpful meetings with Armenian officials aimed at paving the way for the joint activities by Iranian and Armenian companies in trade transit, marketing and sales activities,” said the Iranian Minister of Industry, Trade and Mine.

Dozens of the CEOs of Iranian private companies accompanied the Iranian delegation during the visit to Armenia.

According to Fatemi-Amin, Iran and Armenia also agreed on launching Infrastructure projects in Armenia. “During the meetings with Armenian Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan and Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Gnel Sanosyan and the Armenia deputy PM, we made preliminary agreements on a range of issues such as building dams and roads by Iranian companies in Armenia,” the Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade said. “We agreed on building a transit road to complete the infrastructure projects in Armenia in the long run. Iranian

companies will also participate in the relevant tenders,” he noted.

In its statement the Embassy reminded that Iran has already announced its readiness to cooperate with Armenia in the construction of a new transportation route (Kajaran-Sisian road). The 64-kilometer long route is part of the Iran-Armenia-Georgia Transportation Corridor which comes as part of Iran’s bid to launch the North-South Transport Corridor. The International North-South Transport Corridor is a 7,200 kilometer long multi-mode network of ship, rail, and road routes for moving freight between Iran, India, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Armenia, Central Asia and Europe. It is aimed at boosting trade connectivity among the regional as well as ultra-regional states.

Iranian and Armenian officials also agreed on cutting transit tariffs as part of the joint effort to boost bilateral trade. “Regarding transit of goods, we had two short-term and long-term agreements with Armenia. We agreed to slash tariffs for transit trucks in short term,” Reza Fatemi-Amin said.

FlyOne Armenia launches direct flights between Yerevan and Moscow



On March 1st, FlyOne Armenia launched direct flights on Yerevan-Moscow-Yerevan route. The flights will be operated from Zvartnots International Airport to Vnukovo International airport twice a

week, on Monday and Friday with a convenient schedule at an affordable price for everyone.

The launch of regular direct flights took place at the Yerevan Zvartnots International Airport. Head of the Advisory Board of FlyOne Armenia Aram Ananyan cut the symbolic ribbon and stressed: “Today we mark the launch of regular flights to Moscow. This occasion is essential for us, and the company is planning to extend the frequencies and quantities of the flights.”

Commenting on the launching of flights to Moscow, General Director of

the company Mircea Maleca noted: “The launch of regular, direct flights to the Russian Federation has a special value and importance for the passengers of FlyOne Armenia. Now we can guarantee, that all our passengers are able to visit their relatives, friends, travel or make business trips to Moscow and Yerevan.”

Tickets and additional services can be purchased from the website www.flyone.am or through the mobile application, available in the Google App or App Store, also all partner agencies.

World Bank approves EUR 26.5 million loan for improvement of Armenia's public sector performance



The World Bank Board of Executive Directors approved today a EUR 26.5 million loan for the **Forth Public Sector Modernization Project (PSMP IV) for Armenia**. The project is the fourth in a series of public sector modernization projects in Armenia and will assist the Government in improving the efficiency of, and access to, selected government services for businesses and citizens.

Accessing many public services in Armenia still requires the physical presence of citizens. This is most apparent in rural areas. Challenges also exist for citizens to access already existing digital services. A World Bank ICT survey found that only five percent of Armenian citizens and businesses currently use online government services.

The Government of Armenia has prioritized the digital economy as a key pillar of economic growth and GovTech. The project recognizes that a whole-of-government approach is needed for digital transformation to promote simple, efficient, and

transparent government systems and public services. The Digitalization Strategy for 2021-2025 lays the foundation for the development and implementation of this approach.

“Modernization of public administration and efficient delivery of public services can foster inclusive growth and reduce inequalities,” said Carolin Geginat, World Bank Country Manager for Armenia.

“Streamlined and digitized business processes promote resource efficiency and improve the productivity of public services. A more effective public sector, capable of delivering efficient and accessible services, also provides greater equality of opportunities for citizens and supports productivity of the private sector.”

The project will support the Government's approach to public sector modernization, through three components anchored in public administration, data management, and digital service delivery systems. The first component focuses on

the overall efficiency of public administration and supports improvement of the productivity of the Civil Service Office, public service administration, the Ministry of Justice.

The second component supports digital public service delivery, with a focus on modernizing tax and customs administration systems to improve the efficiency of revenue mobilization and strengthening of government service delivery. Support of local governments, through the piloting of activities related to re-engineering databases, data infrastructure and computing systems, will align them with the business processes of central government agencies.

And the third component supports the underlying technological foundations needed for the successful implementation of the project, by improving and strengthening data governance/management, cloud computing, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence.

The proposed project builds on the gains of the previous three Bank-supported operations focused on modernization of public sector functions and services in Armenia, with the application of technology for more efficient and accessible services.

The World Bank will provide a EUR 26.5 million (\$29.9 million equivalent) IBRD loan of variable-spread, with a 14.5-year grace period and a total repayment term of 25 years. The Government contribution is EUR 5.3 million (\$6 million equivalent). Since joining the World Bank in 1992, and IDA in 1993, commitments to Armenia have totaled approximately \$2,477,870 million.

Taxes, government measures for economic growth: Finance Minister's interview to ARMENPRESS



17,7% more taxes were paid in Armenia in this year's nearly 50 days compared to the previous year's same period, Minister of Finance Tigran Khachatryan said in an interview with ARMENPRESS, when asked whether or not the government could revise the projected 7% economic growth and what actions the government must take to guarantee this figure.

Khachatryan said they've tried to understand whether or not they are now in a reliable interval against the projected figures of tax revenues.

"We recorded those 17,7% more taxes were paid this year compared to the previous year. And this is in line with the annual growth indicators which we have for 2022. Why is the government bringing forward the economic growth indicator in discussions with the public, for several reasons? Because first of all economic growth shows the result created by our population and the increase of revenues at the expense

of it," he said.

According to Minister Khachatryan, this 7% new economic value is created especially in the private sector thanks to the efforts of active companies who are producing goods, exporting or rendering services.

"The second question is what the government must do to guarantee or contribute to this 7% economic growth. The government is one of the major actors in the economy. We make more than 2 trillion in spending annually, most of which are spending of social significance, some are salary expenses, and some parts are procurement of products and services. And all this together contribute to economic activity," Khachatryan said.

Speaking about the kind of services which create new value in the economy, for example the construction of roads, reservoirs or implementation of economic projects aimed at the rapid development of

individual sectors of agriculture, Khachatryan attached importance of how swiftly the government is making this procurement, how accurately the participants are explained with the intentions, how effectively it is cooperating with the participating or winning organization of the procurement in order to implement the work in time and in full scale.

"In all these issues our organizational actions with the private sector are directly contributing for the work to start and end within the timeframes. For example, we have planned for 2022 to make 60% more capital spending than it was planned for 2021, and in its value, it is the size exceeding 350 billion drams: nearly 4,5% of the GDP. Compared to the previous year, these are very significant positive changes. And we must be able to organize it in a way so that we remain within the boundaries of what was planned in terms of time. And it is also this way that we should contribute for economic growth to be in the size that was planned. And I think that making decisions and following their implementation in a timely manner in all these issues is the action which the government must do, but of course not limiting to only this," he said.

Asked if the government will achieve the 7% economic growth, the finance minister said they've numerously noted that they aren't simply predictors. "The government doesn't only project, but also has assumed obligations to fulfill it. And we not only project this, but we have the toolbox with which we are doing everything for this to happen," he said.

However, the finance minister doesn't rule out that the projected growth could not happen due to factors which don't depend on the government.

Azerbaijan continues its policy of human rights abuses on borderline areas of Armenia, FM Mirzoyan tells UN

On February 28, the High-level Segment of the 49th session of the Human Rights Council was held in Geneva, chaired by the Vice-President of the UN Human Rights Council, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations Office and other international organiza-

tions in Geneva Andranik Hovhannisyan. During the session, Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan delivered remarks, in which he particularly noted:

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a particular pleasure for me to

greet you, Mr. Vice-President, as you chair this session of the Council. I would also like to congratulate all members of the Bureau under the able leadership of Federico Villegas, the President of the Council.

The Human Rights Council is one of the

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page 8 → key achievements of multilateral diplomacy as it provides an indispensable platform for sustaining and promoting dialogue on human rights irrespective of various international and regional crises. This Council has been envisaged to stand for all and everyone in all times. It is the inherent dignity of human beings that we have at stake here. With so many existing and evolving crises all over the world, the human rights of people in the situation of conflicts should be of particular focus of the Human Rights Council and its special procedures.

It is with these vision and objectives that Armenia has entered the third year of its fully-fledged membership of the Council. I believe that we have been able to prove ourselves as a trustworthy and reliable partner in reacting to and addressing the outlying thematic issues and critical country situations. We are determined to continue our contribution in a most constructive and positive manner.

In this context I am glad to announce that Armenia intends to table anew the draft resolution on the Prevention of genocide at this session of the Council. That is a subject that Armenia has been championing for many years. Our team in Geneva is going to organize a transparent process of consultations with all interested States and other stakeholders.

After the difficulties and political crisis after the 44-day war launched by Azerbaijan snap-parliamentary elections were held, where people of Armenia reconfirmed their commitments and devotion to the values of democracy and human rights. The international observers of the snap parliamentary elections assessed that they passed in compliance with the human rights commitments and democratic standards. Most recently in this year's Democracy Index published by the Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia was ranked as a leader of the region based on such findings as electoral process and pluralism, functioning of the government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties.



Mr. Vice-President,

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Armenia's membership to the United Nations. I hereby reiterate my nation's unwavering commitment to multilateralism with the United Nations at its core, and our full adherence to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

It was no coincidence that the opening line of the United Nations Charter referred to "We the peoples" as the source of its legitimacy. People and their rights must be placed at the forefront and center of everything done by the United Nations as a whole. The right to self-determination has been one of the main purposes of the United Nations and use of force against this right can trigger an entire chain of human rights violations including mass atrocities and ethnic cleansing. This is something we observe during and after the war initiated by Azerbaijan against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020.

The UN and its bodies have been bestowed with a universal mandate to enjoy unconditional, unimpeded, unhindered access to the people in need, wherever they are and in all circumstances. We call upon the international community to assume responsibility for ensuring unconditional access to the whole territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The UN Special Procedure Mandate Holders issued several communications to Azerbaijan raising questions with regard to the use of mercenaries, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, destruction of religious and cultural heritage in the context of the

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan declined to give a proper response and in fact failed to answer to the last communications at all, in a sheer defiance to the UN Human rights machinery.

The impunity leads to new violations. Apart from Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan continues its policy of human rights abuses now on the borderline areas of the Republic of Armenia, wherein the civilian population suffers from constant provocative actions of armed forces of Azerbaijan.

This aggressive policy is accompanied by the overt violations of international humanitarian law. After 16 months of ceasefire in place Azerbaijan continues to hold 38 Armenian prisoners of war, including civilians, while the fate of hundreds of missing persons and dozen cases of enforced disappearances remain unclarified.

Mr. Vice-President,

The plight of people to whom the UN does not have access should not be forgotten. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh should not be discriminated because of their origin, language, religion, political or other opinion, national origin or other status. We strive to achieve the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the Armenians to their ancestral homes in all parts of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The provisional measures put forward by the International Court of Justice on December 7, 2021 which instructs Azerbaijan to cease racist and discriminatory policies against Armenians including destruction and vandalism of the Armenian cultural heritage should be unconditionally implemented. These measures come to prove the Anti-Armenian policies of Azerbaijan including its bellicose rhetoric, depriving the people of their means of subsistence, constantly terrorizing Armenian population and threatening with new use of force.

Only by urgently addressing these issues will we be able to ensure stability, peace, justice and protection of universal human rights in our region.

I thank you.

Armenia should be more understandable to the world, and the world should be more understandable to Armenia: PM Pashinyan



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Mrs. Anna Hakobyan attended the event dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Armenia's membership to the United Nations and the Diplomatic Service of the Republic of Armenia at the National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet after Alexander Speniaryan.

Alen Simonyan, Acting President of the Republic, Hakob Arshakyan, Acting President of the National Assembly, Arayik Harutyunyan, Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan, representatives of the public administration system, the parliament and the diplomatic missions accredited in Armenia were present at the event.

In his speech, Prime Minister Pashinyan particularly said,
“Dear colleagues,

Diplomatic servants of the Republic of Armenia,

Distinguished representatives of diplomatic missions and international organizations accredited in the Republic of Armenia,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today is a really significant day for our state. 30 years ago, on March 2, the Armenian flag waved in front of the United Nations headquarters, heralding the return of Armenia to the family of free, independent, sovereign states.

The same day, March 2, is celebrated in Armenia as the Diplomat's Day and today we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the independent Diplomatic Service of independent Armenia, on the occasion of which I wish to congratulate all the diplomatic service officers and thank all those diplomats who during this period have made efforts for the security and welfare of Armenia.

The path of diplomatic service over these decades has not been smooth for many reasons. Armenia is located in a very complex region, where geopolitical interests often clash, putting our country in the epicenter of contradictions and conflicting

interests. And in this regard, the primary task of the Armenian diplomatic service is to make Armenia and Armenia's communication manners more and more understandable to the world, and to make the world and world communication manners more and more understandable to Armenia.

And because the world is not homogeneous, the solution to this extremely complex problem becomes even more difficult.

But it is this work that should help advance the state interests of the Republic of Armenia, and I want to say that I believe that as a result of our joint work and reforms, we will be able to best implement this task.

Armenia should be more understandable to the world, and the world should be more understandable to Armenia, and this has a very practical goal – to multiply, to improve the opportunities for normal development, to ensure the security of Armenia and Artsakh.

The Government is guided by the logic that the most effective guarantee of security is peace. This is the reason why opening an era of peaceful development for our country and region has been adopted as a state strategy. The most important goal of the strategy is to create a regional and international friendly environment around Armenia.

The Government's 2021-2026 Action Plan places a special emphasis on our regional foreign policy; this is a circumstance that I would like to specially emphasize.

Today we are actively working in this direction. A new dynamic has emerged in Armenia-Georgia relations, we must develop it. There is an active dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Iran, which we should be able to solidify with concrete results.

Armenia-Turkey talks have started at the level of special representatives, the issues of opening regional communications, delimitation and demarcation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, launching negotiations on a peace treaty with Azerbaijan are on the agenda.

In this context, the biggest and priority issue for us remains the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. We have said many times that we see the settlement of the issue based on the principles and elements put forward by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. Full protection of the rights of the Armenians of Artsakh is one of the key issues on our foreign policy

agenda.

Armenia is currently in an active dialogue with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries on this and many other issues on this foreign policy agenda.

Russia continues to be our strategic partner and ally, the relations with which are at a high level, experiencing normal development, which is strengthened by our joint participation in the EEU, the CSTO and the CIS.

We have started a strategic dialogue with the United States and we are confident that it will continue normally.

Armenia continues to have unique relations with France; our task is to enrich those relations with economic agendas.

Dear attendees, I would like to mention democracy as a foreign policy factor. Today our country is rightly considered a member of the democratic family, one of the tasks of our diplomatic service is to materialize this perception in the foreign policy sphere, to use it for the benefit of the security, development and welfare of our people.

I would like to note the role of the European Union in supporting democratic reforms in Armenia, and we should work to further develop the dynamics that have emerged in our relations. Many countries in the European Union and around the world, such as Canada and Japan, are becoming more and more visible in their willingness to support our democracy; we must be able to realize this potential. We are outlining new opportunities to develop relations with the world's largest democracy, India, and we must work to live up to expectations.

Dear attendees,

During these 30 years, Armenia has been a responsible member of the international community, a reliable partner, bringing its contribution to the strengthening of comprehensive international law, international cooperation based on the goals and principles of the UN Charter, peaceful settlement of disputes, promotion of sustainable development and protection of fundamental human rights.

Armenia has assumed responsible functions in the international arena, including currently being the Vice-President of the UN Human Rights Council.

We have always attached importance to multilateralism and international cooperation based on the UN Charter and the international law, believing that only through joint

➡ page 11

page 10 ➔ efforts it is possible to overcome global crisis and ensure sustainable development.

Our goal is to build a modern individual-centered state based on the principles of democracy, the rule of law, equality, protection of human rights and good governance. Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia states: The foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia is implemented on the basis of international law in order to establish good-neighborly, mutually beneficial relations with all states.

And it is just this provision of the Constitution that should push us to pursue an active policy, the goal of which, in addition

to the above, should also be the growth of Armenia's economic ties and foreign trade. And modern technology allows us to overcome distance, to be in closer political and economic relations with the countries of East and South East Asia, to enrich traditional political ties with economic ties with traditionally friendly Latin American countries. In 2019, I visited China, Vietnam, Singapore. The process interrupted by coronavirus should be intensified.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to once again congratulate our diplomats of the Armenian Diplomatic Service, as well as all of us, on the 30th anniversary of Armenia's membership in the

UN. I am confident that with joint efforts we will be able to achieve our goals and dreams for the glory of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian people.

Dear attendees,

During this event dedicated to diplomacy and foreign relations, I cannot help but talk about the events unfolding in Ukraine. We are deeply saddened by the ongoing actions, which is now clear that will have global repercussions.

Our hope is that the planned Russian-Ukrainian talks will take place, that they will have results, that diplomacy will be able to silence the artillery.

Thank you".



Congressman Brad Sherman has issued a statement commemorating Azerbaijan's massacre of Armenians in Sumgait and Baku:

"I stand in solidarity with the Armenian American community in commemorating the February 1988 Sumgait Pogroms. On today's solemn anniversary, we reaffirm our resolve to oppose anti-Armenian hatred and work to ensure such history will not be repeated," stated Rep. Sherman.

His full statement is below.

I stand in solidarity with the Armenian American community in commemorating the February 1988 Sumgait Pogroms. Thirty-four years ago, in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait, Azerbaijani mobs targeted and assaulted peaceful Armenian residents on the basis of their ethnicity and endured unspeakable crimes. The violence left hundreds of Armenian civilians dead and in-

jured, women and girls were raped, some victims were burned alive, and thousands were forced to flee their homes.

This tragic anti-Armenian massacre helped touch off a wave of anti-Armenian violence that spread to Kirovabad in November 1988 and to Baku in January 1990, which culminated in the forcible expulsion of 390,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan and the 1991-94 war over Artsakh.

As we pause to honor the memories of the victims of the Sumgait Pogroms, must also use this solemn anniversary to remember the consequences that ensue when aggression and ethnic hatred grow unchecked.

This stark reminder remains evident today as the government of Azerbaijan continues its state-sponsored policy of aggression against Armenia and Artsakh. The world witnessed the consequences of Azerbaijan's unchecked hatred against Armenians during the invasion of Artsakh in 2020 as Azeri forces committed horren-

dous war crimes against Armenian civilians, including women and the elderly, and illegally imprisoned Armenian POWs after the cessation of hostilities. Many POWs are still held by Azerbaijan.

The government of Azerbaijan must be held accountable by the international community for its legacy of aggression against the Armenian people – from the pogroms committed thirty-four years ago, to their relentless belligerence against Armenians that persists today. Such crimes against humanity must never go unrecognized or escape accountability, whether they occurred yesterday or 30 years ago or 100 years ago.

As a Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Congressional Armenian Caucus for 25 years, I have worked in Congress to shed light on such atrocities and hold those responsible accountable. On today's solemn anniversary, we reaffirm our resolve to oppose anti-Armenian hatred and work to ensure such history will not be repeated.

Azerbaijan corruption scandal forces Rep. Henry Cuellar into Texas run-off election

Azerbaijan corruption scandal has forced Rep. Henry Cuellar into Texas run-off election, raising risk that Azerbaijani dictator Ilham Aliyev will lose his top ally in Congress.

The primary battle between longtime Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar, a fixture of South Texas politics, and progressive challenger Jessica Cisneros will continue on.

Neither candidate received more than 50% of the vote in Tuesday's primary, according to the *Associated Press*,

meaning both will advance to a runoff in May. A third candidate, Tannya Benavides, got a small share of the vote and has been eliminated.

The race's runoff status shows that Cuellar, the incumbent, is on shaky ground after serving nine terms in the seat. Results show that Cisneros outperformed her 2020 primary performance, when she lost to Cuellar by just under 4 points, according to *The Hill*.

Cuellar's involvement in an FBI inves-



tigation into ties between Azerbaijan and U.S. businessmen has recently shaken up the dynamics in the race. Cuellar's home and campaign offices were raided by the FBI last month, which the Cisneros campaign pounced on in an ad attack.



Armenian FM briefs UK Minister for Europe on situation after 44-day war

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan had a telephone conversation with UK's newly appointed Minister of State for Europe and North America James Cleverly on the initiative of the British side.

Ararat Mirzoyan congratulated James Cleverly on his appointment as Minister of State and wished him success in his responsible mission.

The interlocutors referred to the 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, noting that a great deal of work had been done in the past to develop the bilateral relations. The parties stressed their readiness to strengthen and expand cooperation based on common values and mutual trust.

The importance of the democratic reform process in Armenia was emphasized, in this context the support provided by the United Kingdom was noted.

The issues of regional security and sta-

bility were touched upon during the conversation. Minister Mirzoyan presented the situation created by the 44-day war, and the infiltration of Azerbaijani troops to the sovereign territory of Armenia.

Touching upon the urgent humanitarian issues, Ararat Mirzoyan stressed that Azerbaijan continues to hold 38 Armenian prisoners of war and civilians hostage, while the fate of hundreds of missing persons, including dozens of forcibly disappeared people, remains unknown.

Other issues on the international agenda were also discussed.

US must call for release of Armenian POWs, end assistance to Aliyev regime, Rep. Schiff says on Sumgait anniversary

Armenian soldiers are still illegally detained and subject to torture while thousands of civilians still live in danger, Member of the US House of Representative Adam Schiff said in a statement on the 34th anniversary of the Sumgait and Baku pogroms.

He noted that religious and cultural Armenian sites that have fallen under Azerbaijani control are under constant threat.

Below is the full text of the statement:

Yesterday, we marked the 34th anniversary of the Sumgait and Baku pogroms. Beginning on February 27, 1988, and for three days following, Azerbaijani mobs assaulted and killed Armenians – leaving hundreds of civilians dead and injured and women and girls were raped. Some victims were thrown from windows and burned alive. Tens of thousands were forced to flee.

After two years, it was estimated that only 40,000 of the 250,000 Armenian residents of Baku remained in Azerbaijan. On January 13, 1990, organized Azerbaijani mobs turned on them, too, killing hundreds and injuring many more.

The pogroms came as a direct result

of years of vicious, racist anti-Armenian propaganda by Azerbaijani authorities, dehumanizing the Armenian residents of Azerbaijan and laying the groundwork for mass violence. Azerbaijani authorities made little effort to punish those responsible, instead attempting to cover up the atrocities and deny the government's role in instigating the attacks.

As we reflect on yesterday's anniversary, we honor the victims of this ghastly injustice and pledge to speak out against hatred so that history will not repeat itself. But tragically, more than three decades later, that is exactly what has happened. Beginning on September 27, 2020, and over 44 days, Azerbaijani forces once again targeted and murdered innocent Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh, and displaced tens of thousands more. Today, Azerbaijani aggression against the people of Armenia and Artsakh continues. Armenian soldiers are still illegally detained and subject to torture while thousands of civilians still live in danger. Religious and cultural Armenian sites that have fallen under Azerbaijani control are under constant threat.



These are the horrific consequences when aggression and hatred grow unchecked – and it is why, whether these crimes against humanity occurred one year, thirty years, or a hundred years ago, we can never allow them to go unrecognized. More than that, it is why the United States must fully step into its role as a defender of democracy and peace around the world. We must not relent in our calls for the safe and unconditional release of the remaining Armenian prisoners of war and captured civilians, for the end of U.S. assistance to the Aliyev regime, and for stronger efforts to support democracy in Armenia and a free, independent Artsakh.

So let us pause to remember those who suffered in the atrocities of the Sumgait and Baku pogroms. But let us also recommit ourselves and our nation to doing everything we can, today, to bring liberation to our Armenian brothers and sisters abroad, once and for all.

NATO rejects Ukraine's call for establishing no-fly zone

Ukraine's President has condemned Western leaders for repeatedly ruling out the introduction of a no-fly-zone over his country, the BBC reports

Speaking during a televised address to the Ukrainian people, Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Western leaders knew Russian aggression against the country was likely to increase and accused them of granting Vladimir Putin license to continue bombing towns and cities.

"Knowing that new strikes and casualties are inevitable, NATO deliberately decided not to close the sky over Ukraine," he said in a video address from the capital

city of Kyiv.

"Today the leadership of the alliance gave the green light for further bombing of Ukrainian cities and villages, refusing to make a no-fly zone."

On March 4, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg described the situation in Ukraine as "horrific", but said allied forces would not move into Ukraine either by land or air.

"We are not a party to this conflict. We, as NATO allies, must prevent the escalation of this war outside of Ukraine, as it will be even more dangerous, more destructive," NATO Secretary-General Jens



Stoltenberg said at a news conference.

Western officials have argued that a no-fly-zone would oblige NATO jets to fire on Russian fighters, potentially sparking World War Three.

Armenia ready to accept compatriots, other refugees from Ukraine – MFA



Citizens of the Republic of Armenia who intend to return to Armenia from Ukraine, crossing the borders of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova, will not need to obtain a visa in advance, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' informs.

Other options for evacuating the Armenians from Ukraine are also being considered, the Ministry said.

At the same time, the Ministry informs that the Republic of Armenia is ready to accept compatriots, their family members, as well as other refugees from Ukraine. The Armenian Embassy in Kyiv, the Armenian Consulate General in Odessa, as well as the Consulate General in Rostov-on-Don, Russia continue to work normally.

Below are the contact numbers:

Embassy in Kyiv

+380442349005

+380671090506

+380689602524

+380685000782

Consulate General in Odessa

+380487039176

+380487039178

Consulate General in Rostov-on-Don

+79614084423

Russia does not seek to divide Ukraine into parts - Kremlin spokesman



Russia's special military operation in Ukraine is not aimed at dividing Ukraine as Russia just seeks to ensure its own security, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sky News Arabia, reports TASS.

He pointed out that after the 2014 coup, Ukraine had fallen under the influence of Nazi ideas. "We want to see Ukraine demilitarized, we want to see Ukraine free of Nazi ideology", Peskov noted. "Also,

we want to see that the neutral status of Ukraine is fixed in its Constitution and we want to have guarantees that weapons being able to change the security balance in Europe cannot be deployed to Ukraine", he added as quoted by TASS.

The Kremlin spokesman emphasized that Russia did not seek to divide Ukraine into parts but only wanted to ensure its own national security.

Armenian Ambassador presents details about situation in Ukraine and work of Embassy



Ambassador of Armenia to Ukraine Vladimir Karapetyan presented details about the ongoing developments in Ukraine, the actions taken and being taken by the Embassy.

In an interview to ARMENPRESS, the Ambassador said currently the military operations continue in different – northern, eastern and southern, parts of Ukraine, including in the outskirts of capital Kiev.

He added that the Embassy staff is in constant, daily touch with the Armenian citizens, provides consulting support about the departure ways and possibilities from Ukraine to Armenia, prepares and provides necessary documents for that purpose.

- How are the developments going on in Ukraine now?

- At the moment the battles continue in different – northern, eastern and southern, parts of Ukraine, including in the outskirts of the capital Kiev. The second round of the Russian-Ukrainian talks was held in Belarus on March 3, as a result of which some promising agreements were reached, particularly relating to the humanitarian corridors for the exit of the civilian population and the temporary ceasefire in that sites. Armenia has expressed its position over this matter and has great hopes that it would be possible to settle issues around a negotiation table.

- We know that before the start of the military operations some embassies in Kiev evacuated firstly the families of their diplomats, and then the diplomats. What policy has Armenia adopted in this regard?

- The diplomatic representation of Armenia in Ukraine has been one of the unique embassies (there are 100 embassies in Kiev), which has been in Kiev with its whole staff from the very start of the military operations and fulfilled its functions. The Embassy has also been in constant touch with the Armenian citizens, ethnic Armenians and local authorities.

Due to the deterioration of the situation around Kiev, according to the decision of the Foreign Minister of Armenia, the Ambassador and the Embassy staff moved to the city of Lviv on March 4 and will temporarily work there for security purposes. A consular point has already opened in Lviv for providing support to the Armenian citizens. Tomorrow another such consular point will open in Uzhhorod.

- What does the Embassy do for assisting the Armenian citizens?

- The Embassy staff is in constant, daily touch with the Armenian citizens, provides consulting support about the ways and opportunities of leaving Ukraine for Armenia, prepares and provides necessary documents for this purpose.

Within its modest opportunities, the Embassy, together with the Armenian community of Ukraine, helped those people who wanted to leave their homes, their cities. It's important to consider an essential factor: several hundreds of thousands of Armenians live in Ukraine, and most of them are citizens of Armenia. I say this so that you can imagine the overload under which the Embassy has worked in Kiev: constant calls, we answered several thousand calls, dozens of visits of citizens and applications for assistance. No embassy had the volume of workload which we had, given the big size of the community and the number of applications.

And all of these works have been done in the war situation. Two of the Embassy diplomats spent the nights in shelters from the first days of the war, sheltering from

the explosions and shootings, and sometimes they communicated with our compatriots from shelter, received calls and gave consulting.

Today as well the Embassy continues its service around the clock, by providing both consulting and also in respective cases certificates of return to Armenia to those citizens who currently do not have a valid Armenian passport for crossing the border of Ukraine. Within its capacities the Embassy is also assisting the Armenian citizens who are in different difficult situations.

I would like to specifically highlight the caring attitude of the Foreign Ministry leadership towards our compatriots facing difficulties. The only direction and goal of all our orders and tasks are our citizens and relate to the measures of providing them with proper assistance.

You are aware also that with the efforts of the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova and Hungary have allowed Armenian citizens leaving Ukraine to cross their land border checkpoints without a visa. Moreover, Armenian diplomats are working in the border sections between these countries and Ukraine, assisting our compatriots who need help.

- How many Armenian citizens are there in Ukraine? Is there any support also for Ukrainian-Armenians?

- It's impossible to mention the exact number because only a small part of the citizens goes through a consular registration which is a voluntary process.

As for Armenians who are citizens of Ukraine, we must note that we receive most of the calls also from the Ukrainian citizens. I want to remind the statement of the Armenian Foreign Ministry that Armenia is ready to host Armenians arriving from Ukraine. We are also ready to provide necessary support to the persons with Ukrainian citizenship who are crossing the Armenian border, regardless

Congress urged to enforce Section 907 against Azerbaijan

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) renewed calls on Congress to strike presidential waiver authority of Section 907 restrictions on U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan, in the wake a long-awaited General Accounting Office (GAO) report revealing that the State Department consistently failed to inform



Congress of the impact of over \$164 million in assistance to Baku on the military balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

“The human consequences of the terrible war in Nagorno-Karabakh underscore the deep concerns that I have long had about providing U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan,” said Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Robert Menendez (D-NJ), who had requested the report. “This report finds that, for several years, the State Department consistently failed to provide sufficient details about the quantity of assistance to Azerbaijan, the status of the military balance, and the impact of the assistance on peace negotiations. These findings are further proof that the status quo is unacceptable, and we must exercise additional scrutiny over the U.S. government’s ongoing provision of assistance to Azerbaijan. In the coming weeks, I will be renewing my efforts for the State Department to reconsider any future planned assistance to Azerbaijan, respect Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, and improve its reporting to Congress in the future.”

“This report – prepared by our nation’s highest government watchdog – shines a spotlight on a dark corner of U.S. policy, confirming what we have always known – that the reckless U.S. military aid program to Azerbaijan has been irresponsibly implemented and inadequately reported, in violation of U.S. law,” said ANCA Exec-

utive Director Aram Hamparian. “The oil-rich, racist, and openly aggressive Aliyev regime does not need and surely does not deserve a single dollar from U.S. taxpayers. President Biden must act on this report by immediately revoking his Section 907 waiver – fully enforcing this longstanding provision of U.S. law.”

The GAO report confirmed that the Departments of State, Defense (DOD), and Energy and the U.S. Agency for International Development provided about \$808 million in US aid to Azerbaijan in fiscal years 2002 through 2020, about \$164 million of which (20 percent) was for security assistance pursuant to the Section 907 waiver.

“In fiscal years 2014 through 2021, State’s reporting to Congress did not address some required elements, such as the impact of proposed assistance on the military balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia,” asserts the GAO report. “State’s 2021 guidance to agencies did not provide detailed instructions about the information required for its reporting to Congress. Unless State takes steps to ensure its reporting addresses all required elements, Congress may lack important information about U.S. assistance to the government of Azerbaijan.”

The GAO report went further, to explain that State and DOD, from fiscal year 2014 to 2020, “did not document

how they determined that their programs would not be used for offensive purposes against Armenia.” While program-level considerations of the waiver provision are not statutorily required, documenting such considerations would help ensure State’s access to quality information to support its certification of the waiver extension and its related reporting to Congress, explains the report.

Adopted in 1992, Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act restricts U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan until that country takes demonstrable steps to end its aggression and lift its blockades against Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh). In 2002, the President was given waiver authority of Section 907, if they determined and certified that, among other items, providing US assistance will not “undermine or hamper ongoing efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan or be used for offensive purposes against Armenia.” Section 907 has been waived annually since then.

The waiver authority requires that State submit a report to appropriate congressional committees within 60 days of exercising the waiver, specifying (1) the nature and quantity of all training and assistance provided to the government of Azerbaijan pursuant to the waiver, (2) the status of the military balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the impact of U.S. assistance on that balance, and (3) the status of negotiations for a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the impact of the U.S. assistance on those negotiations. The statute also requires consultation with the Committees on Appropriations prior to the provision of assistance made available pursuant to the waiver.

Armenia provided 250 identification data to CIS Counter-Terrorism Center on mercenaries deployed by Azerbaijan



Armenian authorities provided nearly 250 identification data on foreign mercenaries whom Azerbaijan deployed in the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war to the CIS Counter-Terrorism Center, the Deputy Director of the Armenian National Security Service (NSS) Samvel Hayrapetyan revealed.

“Nearly 250 identification data were entered to their information resources in order to prevent [the mercenaries’] access to various countries in the future,” he said in parliament in response to a question from MP Armen Gevorgyan (Hayastan faction) during debates on the ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Council

of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism.

Gevorgyan inquired from the deputy chief of the NSS whether or not the ratification would give new opportunities to condemn and raise in international bodies the issue of Azerbaijan’s deployment of mercenaries during the 2020 war.

In response, Hayrapetyan said the matter could be problematic from the point of view of the international community that Nagorno Karabakh could be recognized as a party participating in the ratification, but he said that the NSS used its international regulations to make the information accessible to different international bodies. The information on the foreign mercenaries was provided through the foreign ministry channels, while the NSS gave the information to the CIS Counter-Terrorism Center.

Turkey recruited and sent foreign mercenaries to fight for Azerbaijan against Armenia in the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war.

Despite Ankara denying this, the Armenian authorities have presented numerous

evidence proving the participation of the Syrian mercenaries from the Azeri side.

The Russian foreign intelligence service had also gathered information on Sultan Murad mercenaries’ participation in the Karabakh war.

The President of France Emmanuel Macron also said that his intelligence agencies have information that Turkey is sending mercenaries to Azerbaijan to fight against Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh.

Earlier in 2021, the Armenian authorities said that the investigation has revealed that Azerbaijan pre-planned the war back in June 2020 and recruited more than 2000 Syrian mercenaries and deployed them via Turkey. Azeri authorities transferred payments namely to the Suleyman Shah and Sultan Murad terror groups.

Audio recordings of the Sultan Murad fighters in Nagorno Karabakh were intercepted during the war.

Two Syrian mercenaries captured by the Armenian forces were subsequently sentenced to life in prison.

Armenian currency also affected by War in Ukraine

Armenia’s national currency, the dram, has weakened against the U.S. dollar by more than 5 percent since the start of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Armenian commercial banks on March 4 charged customers an average of 513 drams per dollar, up from 485 drams a week ago.

Analysts agreed that the dram’s depreciation is a consequence of crippling economic sanctions slapped by the West on Russia over its continuing military assault. The Russian ruble has already lost around half of its nominal value against the dollar and the euro.

Bagrat Asatryan, a former governor of the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA), said Armenians are converting their savings

into dollars in anticipation of the sanctions’ knock-on effects on their country heavily dependent on economic ties with Russia.

“What we have seen in the last couple of days is just emotions,” Asatryan told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service. “We will see more practical impacts [of the sanctions] very soon.”

It is not yet clear whether CBA will intervene in the domestic currency market to shore up the dram.

In a statement issued on March 1, the bank acknowledged that the weaker ruble will have a negative impact on Armenian exports to Russia and remittances from Armenian migrant workers in the short term. But it said Armenia is now less dependent on remittance inflows from Russia than it

was a few years ago.

Asatryan suggested that the worsening of economic conditions in Russia will start affecting the Armenian economy in earnest “one or two months later.” “That’s when fundamental economic factors will start working,” he said.

The Armenian government predicted on March 3 that the fallout from the conflict in Ukraine will further push up food prices in Armenia. The South Caucasus country imports a large part of its wheat, cooking oil and other basic foodstuffs from Russia.

Russia is Armenia’s number one trading partner and export market. Russian-Armenia trade totaled \$2.6 billion last year.

Vahram Dumanyan receives the Resident Coordinator of the UN in Armenia



Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Armenia Vahram Dumanyan on March 4 received the Resident Coordinator of the UN in Armenia Lila Pieters Yahia, the Ministry said, mentioning that Deputy Minister of ESCS Artur Martirosyan was present at the meeting.

Vahram Dumanyan congratulated Lila Pieters Yahia on the occasion of assuming the position of Resident Coordinator of the UN in Armenia and wished effective work. The Minister emphasized and highly appreciated the jointly carried out programs with the support of the UN in Armenia and in partnership with the Ministry of ESCS of Armenia.

Vahram Dumanyan specially highlighted the cooperation with the UN Children's Fund with the aim of comprehensive reforms of early childhood development as well as with the UN World Food Programme in the framework of school food provision. Vahram Dumanyan referred also to the issue of strengthening of Education – Job Market connection in the context of development of professional education.

The Resident Coordinator of the UN in Armenia Lila Pieters Yahia in her turn mentioned that the Ministry of ESCS currently stepped on a big phase of large-scale reforms, highlighting that without education development is not possible and education is the axis of development of any country. She specially highlighted the reforms of development of early childhood and Professional Education and Teaching field, as well as the necessity of cooperation with private sector, with the aim of making the Professional Education and Teaching more attractive. Lila Pieters Yahia emphasized that the UN Office in

Armenia and structures are ready to support the process of effective implementation of reforms.

Referring to the issue of cultural development Vahram Dumanyan drew the attention of the UN Resident Coordinator to the threats to Armenian cultural heritage in the territories taken under control of Azerbaijan. The Minister hoped that by the support of UNESCO it will be possible to ensure the immunity of that heritage, because these are values of universal significance.

At the end of the meeting Lila Pieters Yahia informed that this year by the initiative of the Secretary General of the UN António Guterres a summit on education is planned for developing world strategy of education sphere as well as with that anticipation that the member states of the UN will increase the share of education of their GDPs.

Other issues of mutual interests were discussed.

Exhibition on 30th anniversary of Armenia's membership opens at UN Geneva Office



An exhibition dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Armenia's membership in the United Nations, organized by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Armenia, opened on February 28 at the UN Office in Geneva.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat



Mirzoyan and Director General of the UN Office in Geneva Tatiana Valovaya offered opening remarks at the event.



Eleven Armenian companies to participate in Wine Travel Awards

Armenia will participate in the first ever Wine Travel Awards 2021-2022 online wine tourism awards to be held in March 2022. Under the auspices of the German Association for International Cooperation (GIZ), Private Sector Development and Vocational Education and Training in the South Caucasus program, Armenia will present 11 wine tourism projects with the support of the Viticulture and Enology Foundation of Armenia.

Voting starts on March 1 at www.winetravelawards.com. The winners will be decided both by public voting and a jury of wine and enotourism experts.



“This is the first time this innovative competition will be organized. It includes implementation of joint advertising and information campaigns in the target countries. They will contribute to the popu-

larization of the proposed wine tourism projects, competition partners, and the participating countries,” says Hayarpi Shahinyan, expert in innovative enotourism.

Articles about the candidate projects and profiles will be published in the Wine Travel Awards Guide catalog, which will be on display at some of the most prominent and famous wine exhibitions, including London Wine Fair and ProWein.

In addition, before the competition, public awareness campaigns will be conducted in the target countries: Spain, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

COAF and Embassy of Japan to transform public transportation in Armenia's Lori region

Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) and the Embassy of Japan in Armenia signed the Grant Agreement for the “Project for Provision of Public Bus in Lori Province” on March 01, providing grant aid of \$90,000+ to promote more sustainable transportation in Armenia's Lori region through a new, disabled-friendly bus, an expanded network of transport routes, and the renovation of poor transportation infrastructure.

Hosted by the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, the signing ceremony was launched with a series of welcome remarks by the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Gnel Sanosyan, the Ambassador of Japan to Armenia H.E. Mr. Masanori Fukushima, and COAF Managing Director Korioun Khatchadourian.

The public transportation system in Armenia's northern Lori region is rudimentary and insecure, offering residents access to one dilapidated bus that connects Dsegh and the region's capital, Vanadzor, only once a day without passing through the villages along the route. The self-initiative of the local bus driver, who has replaced the



old bus with a new one, coupled with the new, state-of-the-art bus provided in the scope of this initiative, allows for the establishment of an efficient transport route that runs at hourly intervals, connecting seven communities along the Dsegh-Vanadzor path, with integrated stops at the COAF SMART Center in Debet village and the forthcoming SMART Health Center in Dsegh.

The advantages of upgrading the transportation system in Lori reach far beyond ensuring mobility: the provision of a new bus extends the accessibility of public transportation to people with disabilities; improves rural residents' access to new

markets, stimulating competition across the region; and facilitates the shift from private vehicle to public transport, ensuring eco-friendly, safe, and economical travels.

Moreover, to ensure that local interests and concerns are adequately taken into account, COAF, the consolidated community of Pambak, and the community-based non-profit organization (CNO) have concentrated their efforts

on furthering the community's interests through the interactive exchange of expertise.

The offer of a developed transport system goes hand in hand with the offer of sound, modern transportation infrastructure, including all related equipment such as at-stop signages displaying real-time information. In 2021, COAF took the first successful step in this direction by building a new, well-equipped bus stop in the organization's flagship SMART Village, Debet. Going forward, the bus stations of four additional communities will be renovated with potential for further geographic expansion.

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Yerevan Address: 8, Khorenatsi St.



Armenian Identity Card

The goal of the Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) non-profit organization is to unify Armenians worldwide in a common platform so that through contacts, queries and referenda they can express their views and positions regarding issues of general interest to Armenians around the world and issues of particular interest to Armenian communities in various countries.

Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) also makes it possible to establish business networks, the cardholder can participate in various charitable projects, and can obtain discounts from Armenian and non-Armenian businesses all over the world. Armenians should feel themselves to be full-fledged "citizens" of a reborn Armenia and the Armenian Identity Card is the «passport» for all Armenians.

The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID)

network is an effective environment where Armenians can implement various projects and pan-Armenian programs. At the heart of HyeID is the creation of an Armenian database which will become the reliable and objective basis to realize the potential of all Armenians around the world. Based on that database, it will be possible to implement various permanent and temporary initiatives through the Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) organization.

- The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) worldwide network enables cardholders to elect and get elected to the leadership of The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) network structures.

- The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) cardholders can benefit from the possibility of discounts intended for HyeID cardholders when shopping for products and services in various countries of the world.

- The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) cardholders can participate in queries and referenda initiated by the HyeID network and vote on issues of national interest to Armenians.

- Ensure the security and privacy of The Armenian Identification Card (HyeID) cardholders.

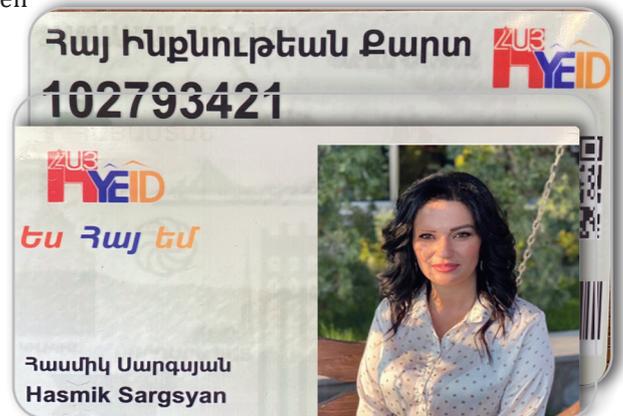
The Armenian Identity Card (HyeID) cardholders who live in the Diaspora intend to utilize the possibilities made available through HyeID to form a Diaspora representative body — Diaspora Armenian Parliament — through democratic elections.

Armenia Office of the Armenian Identification Card (HyeID) Organization

Address: 1 Amiryar str, Yerevan, RA, 0001 (In Armenia Marriott Hotel)

Phone: +374 55 509050, +374 91777739:

E-mail: armenia@hyeid.org, Website: armenia.hyeid.org



AZAD

AZAD Pharma AG AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Switzerland

AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Durachweg 15
CH-8200 Schaffhausen
Phone No: +41 52 632 09 10
Fax: +41 52 632 09 11

AZAD Pharma AG

Bahnhofstrasse 9
CH-3125 Toffen
Phone No: +41 31 810 40 10
Fax: +41 31 810 40 11

Canada

AZAD Fine Chemicals Ltd.

1895 - 55th Avenue
Dorval, Qc H9P 1G9
Phone No: +1 514 636 19 99
Fax: +1 514 636 75 55

Atlit Inc.

16 Westminster Ave.,
Suite 306A
Montreal, Qc H4X 1Z1
Phone No: +1 514 369 25 91
Fax: +1 514 369 81 67

China

Hangzhou Representative Office of AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Room 801-087, Lixin Plaza,
#102 Moganshan Road
310051 -Hangzhou China

Phone +86-571-8761 5336
Mobile +86-153-5505-0903
Fax: +86-571- 8895 8963

Germany

AZAD Pharma GmbH

Fritz-Reichle-Ring 6a
DE-78315 Radolfzell
Phone No: +49 7732 939101510
Fax: +49 7732 9391016

Armenia

AZAD Pharmaceuticals LLC

Vanahovit 8, Proshian
Ashtarak Ave., Kotayk Maiz
Phone No: +374 93 40 40 62
Fax: +374 93 40 34 40



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E-mail: contact@nt.am
URL: www.nt.am

Address in Armenia:
28 Isahakian Str., Yerevan, 0009, RA
Tel.: (+374 60) 35-11-22 (+374 60) 35-11-24

Address in France: Masion De L'Armenie,
Paris 17e-95, Bld. Gouvion, France
Tel.: (+33) 01 43 59 66 72

Address in USA: 1146 E. Lexington Dr., #112,
Glendale, CA, USA, 91206
Tel.: +1 (818) 646 10 72

Հասցե՝ Իսահակյան 28, Երևան, ՀՀ, 0009