

NATO sees Armenia as a reliable partner – James Appathurai



Armenia - President Serzh Sargsyan (R) meets with NATO envoy James Appathurai in Yerevan, 13 Jun 2017.

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Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Italy discuss bilateral, international issues



In the context of next year's chairmanship of Italy in the OSCE, the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Italy Edward Nalbandian and Angelino Alfano discussed its priorities, the most important issues that form the agenda of the Organization, the challenges it is facing.

At a meeting in Rome the parties also exchanged views on ur-

gent international and regional issues, including the situation in the Middle East, Syria, fight against terrorism, migration flows, last developments in the Gulf.

The Armenian Foreign Minister briefed his Italian counterpart on recent development in the efforts of Armenia and the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, aimed at creating conditions conducive to the advancement of the peace process of Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

"I would like to use this opportunity to appreciate Italy's precise stance expressed at the adoption of the decision on the Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE in support of the efforts of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, the three principles of international law, namely the non-use of force or the threat of use of force, territorial integrity and equal rights and self-determination of people proposed by them as the basis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement, as well as the creation of the mechanism for investigation of the ceasefire violations and the expansion of the team of the personal representative of the Chairman-in-Office," Minister Nalbandian told a joint press conference following talks in Rome.

At the meeting the parties touched upon Armenia's cooperation with the European Union. "We look forward to the signing of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement this fall, which defines the framework for active political dialogue, cooperation in many areas, as well as for dynamic trade and economic relations," Minister Nalbandian said.

Progress impossible unless atmosphere of trust established between parties

Armenia expects the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to ensure that the agreements reached in Vienna and St. Petersburg are called to life, Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Shavarsh Kocharyan says.

Speaking to reporters on June 8, Shavarsh Kocharyan said "progress in negotiations is impossible unless an atmosphere of trust is established between the parties. As a first step, he said, the shooting and provocations on the part of Azerbaijan should be excluded.

Commenting on forecasts on the possibility of resumption of war, which further intensified after the International Crisis Group published a new report, Shavarsh Kocharyan said "the escalation of the situation is surely a matter of concern, first of all for the mediating countries, all of which are permanent members of the UN Security Council and are responsible for peace anywhere in the world."

From this perspective, it is normal to raise alarm on one hand,



and take steps on the other hand, to prevent that destabilization, which benefits no one in the region.

Armenia condemns Iran attacks

Armenia's Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian has condemned the twin blasts in Iran.

"We strongly condemn attacks at Iran's Parliament and Mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini," the Foreign Minister said.

"We express solidarity with the people of

Iran," the Minister added.

Suicide bombers and gunmen stormed into Iran's parliament and targeted the shrine of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on Wednesday, killing a security guard and wounding 12 other people in rare twin attacks.



Armenian Parliament OKs New Anti-Corruption Body



(Yerevan –RFL/RE)

After making a last-minute concession to its opposition minority, the Armenian parliament unanimously approved on June 8 government plans to set up a new body tasked with combatting corruption in the country.

The Commission on Preventing Corruption will be formed and start functioning early next year. It will scrutinize income and asset declarations to be submitted by over 2,000 senior state officials and investigate possible conflicts of interest or unethical behavior among them. It will be empowered to ask law-enforcement bodies to prosecute officials suspected of engaging in corrupt practices or even making false disclosures.

Members of the commission will be nominated by a special council and appointed by the National Assembly. Each member of the council will in turn be named by the chairman of Armenia's Constitutional Court, other senior judges, the

human rights ombudsman, the national bar association and the Public Council, a presidential advisory body.

The government and the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) also agreed during this week's parliamentary debates to let the parliamentary opposition appoint the sixth member of the council. The opposition Tsarukyan Bloc and Yelk alliance will pick that member by consensus.

Deputies representing both opposition groups voted for the bill. "True, this draft is not the draft which we would have liked to see," Yelk's parliamentary leader, Nikol Pashinyan, said before the vote. "But we believe that this is one step towards creating an anti-corruption body and system reflecting our views."

As part of the same effort, the parliament also passed another bill that will introduce a "system of whistleblowing" enabling Armenians to report corruption cases known to them. They will be able to anonymously file such reports through a special website.

Armenian civil society representatives have been skeptical about the latest measures taken by the government. They say that the government is still not genuinely committed to tackling corruption.

Deputy parliament speaker Arpine Hovannisyan, who drafted both bills in her previous capacity as justice minister, lamented the skepticism. "The body is only just being set up but they are trying to create an atmosphere of mistrust around it," she said.

Hovannisyan admitted at the same time that the measures approved by the parliament will not lead to a "revolution" in the fight against corruption.

NATO sees Armenia as a reliable partner – James Appathurai

Armenia is a "reliable partner" of NATO and its close ties with Russia have caused no problems for the Western alliance, according to a senior NATO envoy.

The official, James Appathurai, described as "excellent" the South Caucasus nation's increased cooperation with NATO at the start of his latest visit to Yerevan on June 12.

"We fully respect the balanced foreign policy that Armenia has," Appathurai told a news conference. "It causes us no complication that Armenia is, for example, in the [Russian-led] Collective Security Treaty Organization or the Eurasian Economic Union."

"Armenia has been a reliable partner for NATO," added NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's special representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Appathurai met with President Serzh Sargsyan on Tuesday, June 13, for talks that focused on NATO-Armenia ties, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and broader regional security. Armenia's relationship with neighboring Iran was also on the agenda, according to a statement released by the presidential press office.

The statement said Sargsyan "recalled with fondness" his most recent meeting with Stoltenberg held at the NATO headquarters in Brussels in late February. Speaking after those talks, Stoltenberg praised NATO's "partnership" with Armenia and spoke of "opportunities for us to cooperate more closely on interoperability, defense reform and defense education."

Despite its close military alliance with Russia, Armenia has forged closer links with NATO -- and the United States in particular -- since the early 2000s. It currently contributes around 130 troops to NATO-led missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan and regularly participates in multinational exercises organized by U.S. forces in Europe.

In 2015, Yerevan expressed readiness to participate in more such missions abroad with specialized medical and demining units. U.S. military instructors began training Armenian military personnel for that purpose last year.

Appathurai cautioned that while the two sides will carry on with their "steady cooperation" he does not expect "dramatic leaps forward" in their relations.

Armenia, Japan International Cooperation Agency agree to expand cooperation

President Serzh Sargsyan received on June 14 Japan International Cooperation Agency President Shinichi Kitaoka.

Welcoming the guest, President Sargsyan expressed the hope that his visit would lead to new projects and ideas aimed at deepening the Armenian-Japanese cooperation that would, in turn, enrich the agenda of interstate relations.

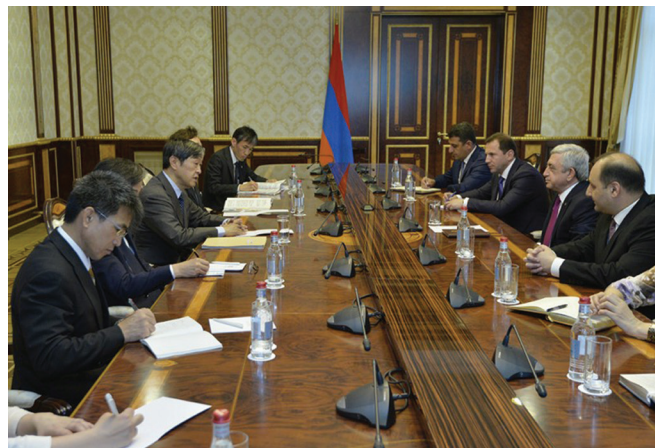
Serzh Sargsyan noted with satisfaction that “bilateral relations have been developing successfully since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Japan 25 years ago, with a positive trend recorded in recent years,” which, according to the President, are largely due to the opening of Armenia’s Embassy in Tokyo in 2010 and the inauguration of Japan’s Embassy in Yerevan in 2015.

President Sargsyan said to have kept warm memories of his June, 2012 visit to Japan and the fruitful meetings held with the Emperor and the Prime Minister of Japan.

Noting that through State-supported programs Japan has been promoting sustainable economic development in our country ever since Armenia’s independence, the President expressed his gratitude to the Japanese Government. Serzh Sargsyan highly appreciated Japan’s contribution to Armenia’s development, funneled through loans, grants, technical assistance and other programs, where a great role is being played by Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Serzh Sargsyan and Shinichi Kitaoka hailed the joint efforts in a number of spheres, including the prevention of natural disasters, infrastructure and information technology. The parties agreed to expand cooperation in the aforementioned areas.

Shinichi Kitaoka spoke with great affection about the centuries-old Armenian civilization and culture, of which he is well aware by virtue of his specialization.



Yerevan’s re-elected Mayor inaugurated



Yerevan’s Mayor Taron Markaryan was sworn in for another four-year term on June 12 one month after leading the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) to a landslide victory in municipal elections.

Markaryan, in office since 2011, vowed to “honestly and diligently perform the mayor’s duties” at an inauguration ceremony attended by President Serzh Sargsyan, Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan and other top officials.

According to the official results of the May 14 elections, the HHK won more than 70 percent of the vote that gave it 46 of the 65 seats in the municipal council empowered to appoint the city’s mayors. The opposition Yelk alliance finished second with 14 council seats.

A more radical opposition group, the Yerkir Tsirani party, gained the remaining 5 seats. It decided not to boycott sessions of the Yerevan council after accusing the HHK of buying votes and resorting to other serious irregularities. The Central Election Commission (CEC) rejected last month Yerkir Tsirani’s demands to annul the official vote results.

Unlike their Yerkir Tsirani colleagues, the 14 council members representing Yelk chose to attend Markaryan’s inauguration. But they demonstratively refused to stand up when Sargsyan entered a conference hall where the city council holds its sessions.

In a speech at the ceremony, Sargsyan gave a largely positive assessment of the 38-year-old mayor’s track record, while urging him to do more to address Yerevan’s lingering problems and a lack of adequate public transportation in particular.

“You must work day and night in order to increase Yerevan residents’ respect and trust towards you, maintain you position as the most popular political figure in Yerevan, get even more votes in the next elections and continue to run Yerevan,” the president said.

Markaryan’s late father Andranik served as Armenia’s prime minister from 2000-2007. The inauguration ceremony coincided with Andranik Markaryan’s 66th birthday anniversary.

Armenia-Qatar ties “unaffected” by Saudi sanctions



Armenia will continue to seek closer links with Qatar despite serious sanctions that have been imposed on it by Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, a senior government official in Yerevan said on June 8.

Deputy Foreign Minister Shavarsh Kocharyan also suggested that Qatar is paying the price for its continuing relationship with Iran, rather than its alleged support for Islamist terrorism.

“It’s a different issue,” Kocharyan told reporters, commenting on the sanctions. “It is connected with the situation in the Middle East. It is connected with anti-Iranian sentiment in Saudi Arabia. It is connected with the fact that Sunni Muslim Qatar is not joining the anti-Iranian coalition and is more inclined towards cooperation [with Iran.]”

Armenia has long maintained a cordial rapport with Iran, one of its two commercial conduits to the outside world. By contrast, Saudi Arabia has refused to not only establish diplomatic relations with the South Caucasus state but also formally recognize its independence due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The unresolved dispute with Muslim Azerbaijan has not prevented

Armenia from developing ties with other Gulf Arab monarchies, notably the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. Both oil-rich nations have embassies in Yerevan.

As recently as in May, President Serzh Sargsyan and Qatar’s ruler, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, reportedly pledged to give “new impetus” to bilateral cooperation when they met during the Armenian leader’s official visit to Doha. According to Sargsyan’s press office, the two men discussed ways of boosting “mutually beneficial trade and economic relations.”

“The Armenian side proposed for consideration a number of investment projects in different areas,” the office said in a statement.

Serzh Sargsyan also held separate talks in Doha with the chief executive of the Qatar Airways national carrier, which launched regular flights to Yerevan in May last year. He stressed the importance of the flight service for a growing number of Qatari tourists visiting Armenia. He also said that the Armenian government would welcome Qatari investments in “various sectors of the Armenian economy, including civil aviation.”

In a related development, the Armenian government lifted visa requirements for Qatari nationals on June 1, four days before Saudi Arabia and its allies cut diplomatic and other ties with Qatar, accusing it of sponsoring extremist militant groups active in the region.

“We will carry on with our policy largely relating to tourism promotion,” Kocharyan said on Thursday. “Qatar is only one of the states. We will liberalize [the visa regime] with six more states soon.”

“Our policy and relations with Qatar must not be linked with the events happening in Middle East,” he stressed.

Asked about the implications of the sanctions, the Armenian official said: “This issue is beyond our scope.”

Spanish city of Valencia recognizes the Armenian Genocide



On June 9, the Valencia City Council adopted a motion on the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, reports the Armenian Embassy in Spain.

The municipal groups Compromís, València en Comú and Socialista voted in favor of the motion presented by the Armenian Association “Ararat” on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, thus condemning the first genocide of the 20th century and calling on the Valencian Courts, the Government of Spain and Turkey to follow suit.

Mediators Visit Armenia, Karabakh

U.S., Russian and French diplomats co-heading the OSCE Minsk Group have met with Armenia’s and Nagorno-Karabakh’s leaders as part of their continuing efforts to relaunch Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks.

The three mediators met with President Serzh Sargsyan and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian in Yerevan on June 10 at the start of their latest tour of the Karabakh conflict zone. They then proceeded to Stepanakert for similar talks with Bako Sahakyan, the Karabakh President, that were held on Monday. They are expected to travel to Baku later this week or early next.

The envoys gave few details of their talks when they spoke to reporters in the Karabakh capital. “France, the United States and Russia are making every effort to achieve progress on this issue,” Stephane Visconti, the Minsk Group’s French co-chair, was reported to say.

Neither the mediators nor official Armenian sources specified whether they pressed for the conduct of high-level Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations. Visconti’s American opposite number, Richard Hoagland, expressed hope in March that Nalbandian and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov will “prepare the ground” for a meeting of their presidents.

The two ministers reported no agreements

to that effect after they last met in Moscow in April. Nalbandian said on May 30 that an Armenian-Azerbaijani summit is unlikely to be organized “for the time being.”

Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev most recently met in Vienna and Saint Petersburg in May and June last year. The Karabakh peace process has been essentially deadlocked since then.

Meeting with Visconti, Hoagland and Russia’s Igor Popov on Saturday, Nalbandian accused Baku of continuing to ignore their calls for the conflicting parties to comply with confidence-building agreements that were reached by Aliyev and Sargsyan last year. According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, he said the mediators should take “concrete actions” in order to “rein in this unconstructive and provocative policy by Azerbaijan.”

Sahakyan likewise accused Baku of continuing ceasefire violations along the Karabakh “line of contact” when met with the co-chairs in Stepanakert. The spokesman for the Karabakh leader, Davit Babayan, was quoted by Artsakhpress.am as stressing the importance of bolstering the ceasefire regime.

Babayan also said that the warring sides still have a “long way to go” to resolve the conflict. Their positions on a peaceful settlement are “almost diametrically opposite,” he said.

New prospects of cooperation between Armenia and China in the field of strategic studies

On 8 June 2017, the National Defense Research University of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia (NDRU, MoD, RA) hosted the newly-appointed Military and Air Attaché of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the RA, Senior Colonel Zhan Fenghua. The guest was welcomed by the Head of the NDRU, Doctor of Political Science, Professor, Lieutenant-General Hayk Kotanjian. The meeting was also attended by the NDRU Deputy Head for Research – Head of the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), PhD in History Benyamin Poghosyan and NDRU INSS Research Fellow, PhD in Economics Azat Davtyan.

At the beginning of the meeting, Lieutenant-General Hayk Kotanjian congratulated the Military Attaché for taking up his new position, wishing him every success during his service in Armenia. Dr. Kotanjian presented the steps taken towards the establishment of cooperation between the NDRU and similar institutions of China, particularly touching upon the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the NDRU and the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (CIISS).



The basis for cooperation between the two institutions was laid in 2014 during the visit of NDRU's Head Hayk Kotanjian to the CIISS. The MOU was signed during the visit of NDRU's Deputy Head for Research Benyamin Poghosyan to Beijing in October 2016, when he participated in an international conference organized by the CIISS.

Another example of the establishment of cooperation between the NDRU and similar institutions of China is the arrangement for signing a Memorandum of Coopera-

tion with the Xian Institute of Contemporary International Studies (XICIS), which was reached during the NDRU INSS Research Fellow Azat Davtyan's visits of October 2016 to Xian and of April 2017 to Beijing.

During the meeting, Senior Colonel Zhan Fenghua highlighted the cooperation between the NDRU and the CIISS, as well as the XICIS, expressing confidence that it would further deepen the relations between the two nations.

More Armenian companies to be privatized

Armenia's parliament allowed the government on Friday to privatize the national postal service and dozens of other state-run enterprises, hospitals and recreation facilities.

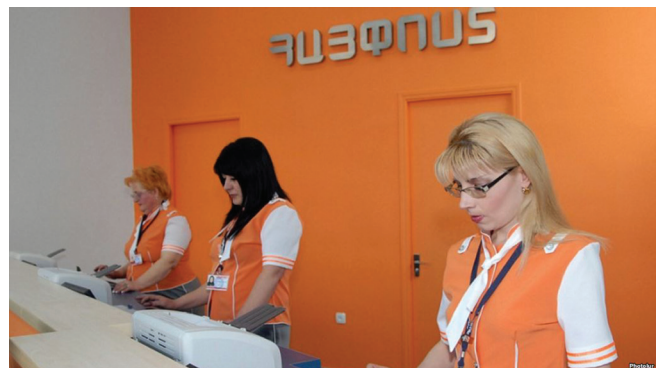
The National Assembly approved a list of 47 entities subject to privatization over strong objections voiced by its opposition minority. Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan's cabinet says that they are in need of serious capital investments which can only be raised from private sources.

Previous Armenian governments had tried unsuccessfully to sell off some of these entities. "We hope that we will finally find buyers for them," Arman Sahakyan, head of Armenia's Department of State Property Management, told lawmakers.

Opposition deputies were particularly critical of the inclusion on the list of about a dozen medical centers, including the country's main oncology clinic and a children's hospital in Yerevan. They said private ownership would only increase the cost of medical services provided by them.

The children's hospital called the Arabkir Medical Center was for many years managed by Ara Babloyan, a veteran pediatrician who was elected parliament speaker last month. Its current director is his son.

Gevorg Gorgisyan of the opposition Yelk alliance expressed concern that Babloyan or his family could benefit from the hospital's privatization. The speaker affiliated with the governing Republican Party of Armenia ruled out any conflicts of interest.



The most important business enterprises on the privatization list are the Haypost postal service and a jewelry factory based in Yerevan. Haypost has been managed for the past decade by a company controlled by Eduardo Eurnekian, an Argentinian billionaire of Armenian descent who has extensive business interests in Armenia. With some 900 offices across the country, it not only provides traditional postal services but also collects utility payments and some taxes and duties, handles wire transfers of cash and even distributes travel insurance.

Most state-owned Armenian companies were privatized in the 1990s and early 2000s. The private sector now accounts for more than 80 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

Hayastan All-Armenian Fund begins construction of sports complex in Ditavan



On June 8, the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund held a groundbreaking ceremony for the future sports complex of Ditavan, a village in Armenia's Tavush region. Guests attending the event included the sponsor of the construction project, Argentinean-Armenian benefactor Nadya Ekserciyan, as well as her daughter.

The planned sports facility having a total area of 504 square meters, will be used for a wide range of physical exercises and match-

es. The structure will also feature classrooms for preschoolers, and an underground bomb shelter where the residents of Ditavan, which is located near the border with Azerbaijan, will be able to take cover in case of an emergency.

"Ditavan is burgeoning in front of our very eyes," said Ara Vardanyan, executive director of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, and continued, "With its recently built infrastructures and community institutions, this village stands apart as among the best in not only the Tavush Region, but Armenia as a whole. For this achievement, the support of the Ekserciyan family has been invaluable. Today, we are delighted that Mrs. Nadya continues the benevolent work of her late husband, Armen Ekserciyan, by providing ongoing support for the steady growth of Ditavan."

Through the Ekserciyan family's contributions totaling nearly \$1.5 million, since 2007 the fund has implemented a string of development projects in Ditavan, which has a population of 412. They include natural-gas and water networks, as well as a school and a multifunctional community center. In addition, the Ekserciyans provide social assistance to Ditavan's newly-wed couples and families with newborns, and contribute to agricultural-development projects carried out in the village.

In recognition of the Ekserciyans' far-reaching support, Ditavan has named its school, main street, and square after the benefactors, who have also been made Honorary Citizens of the village.

Longest zip-line expected to be commissioned in Armenia by the end of June



The world's longest zip-line is expected to be commissioned in Armenia's Yenokavan community by the end of June.

Tigran Chibukhchyan, founder of the Yell Extreme Park project,

which has undertaken to construct the zip-line, says \$22,167 has been raised in a month-long crowdfunding launched on May 4. An overall \$100 thousand has been collected during different fundraisers.

Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan and Russia-based businessman Ruben Harutyunyan have been the biggest contributors, having donated \$1,000 each.

He said, however, that a total of \$200 thousand is needed, and the rest will be funded by private investors.

Authors of the project hope it will help boost the development of tourism.

Today the longest line is 750m long with the height of 200-300m and the speed of 5-7m/s.

The new zip-line is expected to be 2,680 m long and have a height of approximately 250 m and a speed of 120 km/h. There will be four parallel zip-lines from Yell Extreme Park to the village of Yenokavan.

After completing the project in Armenia, Yell Extreme Park plans to have 2-3 bases in Artsakh.

Armenia, Georgia agree to discuss border demarcation

On June 7, consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Georgia on the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers Sharvarsh Kocharyan and Davit Dondua took place in Yerevan.

During the meeting, a wide range of issues of bilateral agenda, the process of implementation of agreements reached between the heads of the two countries were touched upon. The sides outlined the perspectives of deepening and strengthening of collaboration and steps to be undertaken in that direction. The sides agreed to organize this fall political consultations and discussions on the issues related to delimitation between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries.



New opportunities, ancient routes: Armenia as a gateway to Eurasian and Iranian markets



Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian participated in the Armenian-Italian business forum in Rome. Addressing the forum, Minister Nalbandian presented the investment opportunities of the country, the reforms implemented to improve the business climate, integration processes, etc. The Minister's full speech is provided below:

I am glad to participate at the opening of the Armenian-Italian Business Forum, organised in the margins of the meeting of Intergovernmental commission.

As the title of this forum rightly indicates, the Armenian – Italian trade and business interests have an ancient history that especially flourished during the medieval period between the Cilician Armenian Kingdom and Genoa, Venice and Pisa. As Venetian famous traveller and merchant Marco Polo wrote in his book, the trade routes from Europe to Asia passed through the port of Ayas in Cilicia that was kind of a hub for trade and cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

These ancient, traditional connections have gained new momentum since Armenia's independence. Within the past 25 years we have witnessed steady expansion of our interstate relations with involvement of more and more sectors of economy.

The convening of the Armenian-Italian intergovernmental commission and the organisation of Business forum will definitely open new horizons in our economic ties, contributing to deepening of our partnership in different areas. Obviously, there is a huge potential for that and the Government of Armenia stands ready to do its utmost in facilitating the bonds between the business communities of our countries.

Today, Armenia is a country of opportunities – modern, educated, hard-working human resources, with a proximity to major markets and participation in different integration formats, application of European stan-

dards and business practices. The presence of significant Armenian diaspora worldwide, and in Europe in particular, essentially contributes in strengthening of our trade and economic relations, keeping our country closer to the international markets, sometimes even connecting those markets through Armenia.

The significant reforms have been conducted during the last decade in order to improve business climate, to make Armenia more favorable destination for foreign investments. These efforts of the Government of Armenia have resulted in better ranking of Armenia on different international reports. The World Bank 2017 Doing Business Report ranked Armenia the 38th among 190 countries. Moreover, Armenia has been placed the 9th with regard to the simplicity of starting business. As for the Economic Freedom Index of the Heritage Foundation, Armenia is currently the 33rd among 180 countries, having improved the position by 21 notches compared to the previous year.

Armenia is leveraging regional preferential trading arrangements with a view to broadening regional and global integration. We provide guarantees to investors and protection of foreign investments, as well as a number of advantages and privileges. The foreign investors are subject to general legislation, which provides them not only with non-discriminatory treatment, but also envisages a number of privileges for them. Among these privileges are property ownership, right of companies registered in Armenia to acquire land, unrestricted access to any sector and geographic location within country, free repatriation of property and profits, unlimited currency exchange on market rates, etc. Besides, Armenia has bilateral treaties on investment promotion and protection with 41 countries, including Italy.

We have adopted a new tax code that provides a number of benefits to businesses and investors in Armenia and simplifies the procedures of tax administration bodies.

Armenia registered high growth rates in information and communication technologies, innovation, precise engineering and relevant research areas of capacity building sectors aiming at strengthening its regional leading role in this regard. To give more momentum to the development of Information and Communication Technologies we provide tax privileges to the start-ups exempting them from profit tax and levying only 10% tax on income. As a result in recent years we have seen 25% average increase in the field of ICT. At the intergovernmental commission meeting we have already highlighted a number of sectors, with advantageous prospects of cooperation, including energy, transport, machinery, agriculture, food processing, science, education, health, culture.

Tourism represents another promising field of cooperation. Armenia's religious heritage bears special importance as the first Christian nation of the world. Last year His Holiness Pope Francis visited Armenia in his words as a pilgrimage to the first nation to receive the Gospel of Jesus.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current economic policy of the government is aimed at expanding geography of exports. Armenia enjoys the EU GSP+ preferential trade regime. The GSP regime is implemented with Canada, Switzerland, Japan and Norway. Armenia has free trade agreements in force with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and neighboring Georgia.

The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the European Union will greatly contribute to expanding EU-Armenia trade and economic relations. The Agreement has already been initialed and we are going to sign it with the European Union in November. In January 2015 Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union that opens new opportunities for cooperation. Armenia can play a bridge role in utilizing the opportunities and providing its services and investment tools as a platform for trade activities between EAEU and EU member states, particularly, Italy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you fruitful deliberations and productive outcome that will pave the way for further enhancing and deepening of our cooperation.

We are looking forward to the next meeting that we will be happy to host in Armenia to take stock of our deliberations and review the results.

Turkish Prime Minister's Family Owns \$140 Million in Foreign Assets



*Harut
Sassounian*

Last week, we disclosed the improper enrichment of Pres. Erdogan of Turkey by receiving a \$25 million oil tanker as a gift from an Azeri billionaire. This week, we expose the Prime Minister of Turkey, Binali Yildirim, who turns out to be just as corrupt as his boss!

Craig Shaw and Zeynep Sentek revealed in their article posted on the website theblacksea.eu, based on a report by the European Investigative Collaborations' (EIC) Malta Files, that the Yildirim family owns shipping and other foreign assets worth \$140 million.

In 2009, when Yildirim was Minister of Transport and Maritime, he told a gathering of large ship owners in Istanbul: "From now on any Turkish businesses owning ships, yachts or sea vessels that flew foreign flags would be 'treated with suspicion' by the government." Yildirim gave the ship owners three months to change the registration of their vessels. Yildirim added, "Now they have no excuse. If they insist on not changing to the Turkish flag, we don't see that [they have any] good intentions." The Minister was apparently promoting the creation of a strong, national shipping fleet which would pay taxes to Turkey.

Ironically, sitting just a few feet away from Yildirim during the speech was his 30-year-old son Erkam who was "the registered owner of at least one general cargo ship called the 'City,' through the family's offshore company in the Netherlands Antilles. This freighter flew not the Turkish flag, but that of the Dutch Caribbean Islands," according to EIC investigators.

Since then, EIC reported the Yildirim family owned 11 foreign-flagged ships registered "in a network of secretive companies in Malta, the Netherlands, and the Netherlands Antilles — specifically now Curacao, with more suspected in the Marshall Islands and Panama."

In addition, theblacksea.eu revealed that "Yildirim's son, daughter, uncle and nephews have purchased seven properties in the Netherlands, worth over \$2.5 million — all of which were paid in cash."

Yildirim started his career in shipping in 1994 when he managed Istanbul's Fast Ferries Company (IDO), owned by the city. However, he was fired in 2000 over revelations he awarded a contract to manage the ferries' canteens to his uncle, Yilmaz Erence," according to Shaw and Sentek.

Yilmaz is the same uncle who registered the Turkish company, Tulip Maritime Limited, in Malta in 1998. Yilmaz's partners were: "Salih Zeki Cakir, a known ship-owner who briefly employed Yildirim, Ahmet Ergun, President Erdogan's advisor from his days as Istanbul Mayor, as well as a former MP [Member of Parliament] and high court judge, Abbas Gokce," according to Shaw and Sentek.

The Black Sea and EIC reported that six of the 11 ships owned by the Yildirim family — "worth between 1.9 million and 33 million Euro — appear to have been bought without any bank loans. If so, this suggests an enormous cache of funds exists in the Dutch operation, despite on paper being a money-losing business."

On June 9, 2016, two weeks after Pres. Erdogan appointed Yildirim as Prime Minister, he acquired four new shipping companies registered in Malta. The director of these companies is Suleyman Vural, Yildirim's nephew. Two of these companies, linked to a business in Istanbul, were set up in 2015 by uncle Yilmaz and his son, Rifat Emrah Erence.

Yildirim's son, Erkam, also owns extensive businesses in the Netherlands, including "modest properties and expensive ships," according to Shaw and Sentek. EIC reported that the Yildirim family owns a company called Castillo Real Estate BV, based in Almere, the Netherlands, where houses a dental clinic in a building owned by the son of the Prime Minister. Next door to the dentist are the offices of Castillo Real Estate and Zealand Shipping — two of the family's

major companies.

In addition to these two buildings, Castillo owns four properties in the Netherlands: an apartment building in Schoonhoven, two houses in Utrecht, and a shoemaker's shop in The Hague. These six properties, valued over 2.16 million Euro, were all paid in cash. A seventh property in Almere was purchased personally by Erkam for Zealand Shipping's manager.

The Yildirim family's biggest assets in the Netherlands — worth \$129.8 million — were established in 2007 by Erkam under the name of Zealand Shipping until 2014, when it was bought by Holland Investments Cooperatif UA, also owned by Erkam. In addition, the Yildirim family "owns 30% of Q-Shipping BV based in Barendrecht. The partner in this venture is Abdulvahit Simsek, a Turkish businessman who shares an office with the Yildirims in Istanbul.... Q-shipping BV and its subsidiaries manage 20 ships — none of which sail under a Turkish flag," according to Shaw and Sentek.

Until a year ago, New Zealand Shipping owned 10 ships flying the Dutch flag, two of which were sold to "a Turkish conglomerate close to the Erdogan government, Kolin Group," according to Shaw and Sentek. They summarize the "Foreign Wealth of the Turkish Prime Minister's Family" as follows:

18 ships (Dutch conglomerates, fully or partly owned)

1 ship (Netherlands Antilles company)

4 Malta companies

7 properties in the Netherlands

8 ships in the Netherlands

3 ships in Malta

Total estimated assets: \$140 million.

Shaw and Sentek conclude their article by noting that "after Turkey's constitutional referendum which granted Pres. Erdogan the power to destroy the Prime Ministry in two years, Yildirim's tenure at the top is coming to an end. But in the nearly 20 years since he 'transferred his businesses' to his children, they have created a soft cushion for him to land upon when he leaves politics for good!"

First Lady Rita Sargsyan: "We've Decided to place Something Symbolizing Healthy Life and Happiness"

Artist Nur gifts a nice sculpture to children being treated at the Hematology Center



By
**Gourgen
Khazhakian**

**Chief
Correspondent**

From now on a sculpture symbolizing life, healthy and happy childhood will decorate backyard of the Hematology Center after Professor Yolyan in Yerevan. This artwork is a gift from its author **Nur** (Arman Davtyan) to the children being treated at the Center's Children's Dept.



Complete modernization of the Center's Children's Department, one could say even, its establishment has become possible thanks to the commitment and efforts of "Grant Life" Charitable Foundation and Honorary President of its Board of Trustees First Lady of Armenia **Rita Sargsyan**. During only several years more than 600 children has been getting treatment here that is a really impressive result for even a world-leading foreign clinics!

Before the opening ceremony of the sculpture, Rita Sargsyan thanked the author for a nice gift.

"We realized with the author that the Center lacks something that would become a symbol of life, and the symbol of life in this case should be healthy and happy childhood. We want this sculpture scene will become reality for every child leaving the Center," - she said.

The author thanked for the opportunity to create a childhood sculpture given to him.

"If you noticed, there is little number of children's sculptures in the world. This seemed like a challenge to me, - whether I will be able to present a child's life through sculpture, his eyes shine and tricks. I tried to introduce the child full of life and movement," - Nur told reporters.

The composition contains a boy drawing an aquarel and a couple, - girl and boy holding

a ball.

With gratitude the author mentioned the names of those who contributed to creation and placing this monument.

Director of the Hematology Center Prof. **Smbat Daghbashyan** took the occasion to thank the First Lady for her invaluable permanent aid, without which it would be difficult to imagine existence of hundreds saved lives of children. (Dr Daghbashyan added privately that Mrs Sargsyan feel uncomfortable when hearing words of praise addressed her.)

Among the guests of honor was a prominent Armenian artist **Robert Elibekyan** who

gifted to the Center his artwork - portrait of St. Mother Mary with the child Jesus.

It was absolutely impossible to listen words of gratitude by the parents of those kids who successfully passed the treatment and are **HEALTHY** now 'cause there is no bigger happiness for parents that their **SAVED** kid. **Hasmik Simonyan**, mother of Hayk Simonyan, 7 who is completing in a few days his treatment in the Center after, in his Mom's words, "three years of fighting", after thanking Director and doctors of the Center, heaping their "highest professionalism" said that Rita Sargsyan, being very busy, has been



visiting herself the kids very often, always bringing with her gifts for children, asking what is needed else for treatment... And such a brilliant gift was invitation by the First Lady of the world famous Armenian football player **Henrikh Mkhitaryan** to visit children getting treatment in this Center a few months ago. *"Could you imagine what a kid feels when seeing Mkhitaryan at his bed?"* - she said.

But the main excitement yours truly as well as many guests felt a bit later when a young lady who was cured here in the Hematology center approached with her own daughter... (See a pic at the bottom). It was also very touching to listen children who were cured at the Center performing songs written by Rita Sargsyan (lyrics by Avet Barseghyan).

Speaking to a crowd of cameras/reporters, the First Lady expressed her sorry for the fact that financial support to the "Grant Life" Fund has been decreasing within the last few years:

"If frankly, three-four years ago we raised about 500 thousand USD for this Center. A year later it was 300, 000USD, and this year the amount of donations does not not exceed 100,000...But I hope that our society will learn gradually this culture as well..."

**Photos by Armenpress
(Gevorg Perkupekryan)**



**With this, The Highlights starts its new heading –
“The Armenian Treasures” in which we will tell our readers,
especially non-Armenian ones, about unaccountable
historical-cultural monuments of Armenia (including
Nagorno-Karabakh, Republic of Artsakh at present).
Come and see them!**

Gandzasar Monastery: “A Pearl of Architectural Art”



By
**Gourgen
Khazhakian**

**Chief
Correspondent**

...One of the strongest emotions in his life your author has felt when for the first time saw rising getting out a cell at the Gandzasar Monastery...

Everything here speaks of the high ascetic spirit of the ancient Armenians. They say that there is the head of John The Baptist hidden here. I do not know whether it is true or not, but here you can see the tombs of the high clergy which are arranged so that all the visitors can walk on them - because they (those resting in peace) wanted to atone their sins even after death with such a humbleness.

in Azerbaijan”

**August 9, 2016, xTimewind,
San Francisco, California**

Gandzasar monastery is a 10th to 13th century Armenian monastery situated in the Mardakert district of Artsakh Republic (Armenia). The monastery holds relics believed to belong to St. John the Baptist and his father St Zechariah. Gandzasar is now the seat



...5.42 a.m., you find yourself right under the eigs of the toll and ancient St. John The Baptist Cathedral, that masterpiece of Armenian and world architecture, you go just few steps to the right, and...you see a miracle – the Sun is appearing slow from beyond the mountains...But this is not the last miracle you could see there – get the left, behind the cells, stand at the edge of a canyon, and you’ll enjoy an incomparable beauty out of hail – Mrav Ridge...Its peaks are snow-covered even in hot summer.

We strongly believe that a few reviews from *Tripadvisor* will add significantly your author’s emotions:

“The air filled with sounding silence”

Sep 4, 2015, Krivitch, Moscow, Russia

Fantastic place. Feeling that the God is speaking to you. Meaningful silence. Gandzasar will remain in the heart forever.

“Beautiful monastery in the mountains”

Aug 5, 2016, CharlesM382, Paris, France

Magnificent XIII century monastery located on a rocky outcrop about forty km from Stepanakert. The church - St. Jean Baptiste Cathedral...The garden is on the right side of the church, and there are very old cross-stones there... A must-see place is an exhibition of manuscripts in the building on the left side of the church and filled with the most richly illuminated books dating from the thirteenth century. You can also see a showcase dedicated to Napoléon Bonaparte with his autograph. This exhibition was created very recently. Finally, at the back of the church, you have a beautiful view of the valley that can make beautiful pictures of the landscape. In short, you must see it”.

“Gandzasar is Armenian and it’s not

of the Archbishop of Artsakh.

Recently a branch of Yerevan Matenadaran has been located here and holds most of Artsakh manuscripts.

About 70km from Stepanakert. The road is ok for any sedan.

Once you are there, don’t miss the well known loin-mountain located below. You need to drive left (while straight takes you to Monastery) to get there. Keep your eye on road marks...

Plan half day for your trip. Also check out the map, you may combine your trip to Dativank (another ancient Monastery) as well.

And Gandzasar is Armenian and it’s not in Azerbaijan (as Tripadvisor says)”

... As the last user said, the Gandzasar Monastery is located in the Mardakert District of the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh at present) Republic, and is 1-1.5 hours drive from the Republic’s capital City of Stepa-

continued on page 12

Gandzasar Monastery: "A Pearl of Architectural Art"

from page 11

nakert. It stands atop of Mount Gandzasar (hence the name), a large green hill that rises above the historical village of Vank.

In Armenian "Gandzasar" means "Treasure Mountain", that is to say "gandz" stands for "treasure" and "sar" for "mountain" which could point to old copper and silver mines found in the nearby area. But saying "treasure" we should rather mean the Monastery itself with its really great architectural, historical and spiritual value.



Besides, it is believed that Gandzasar's Cathedral holds a very important and key Christian relic, head of St. Hovhannes Mkrtych (St. John the Baptist) brought here from Palestine. So Gandzasar Monastery has always been an important and popular place of pilgrimage not only in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) but from all over the world.

...In this connection your author desires tell the following story.

...It was unprecedented hot summer '2014 when, seating with then-the abbot Fr. **Grigor Markosyan**, alas of the blessed memory (1956-2016), a man whose name is inseparable from the Gandzasar itself, Liberation War, City of Yerevan and many other things, in his office, yours truly was forced to open a window. Suddenly we see a human head inside the window that asks us in terrible English... Mere one word is clear: "...baptist". I'm astounded, but in the next second Fr. Grigor says: "He means the head of St. John the Baptist". "Yes, yes, I wanna see it", - says happily a foreigner who proved to be a travel agent from Spain. Well, sometimes SOME legends are accepted like a reality...

As we spoke about legends, one must note that there are some other legends and "miracles" connected with this place.

During the heavy bombardment by Azerbaijani army in the times of the Karabakh Liberation War (1992-1994), luckily or miraculously, the shells flying right on the cupola of the Monastery suddenly changed their direction and exploded away from the territory of the monastery. (So almost everybody who visits Gandzasar is convinced that it is impossible to leave this place and stay an atheist). Nevertheless, one rocket launched from an Azeri warplane (driven by a Ukrainian mercenary)

get the cupola, but thanks God, did not explode. And similar shell you can find in the wall behind the Monastery cells.

The construction of Gandzasar's Cathedral of St. John the Baptist began in 1216, under the patronage of the Armenian Prince of Khachen, **Hasan-Jalal Dawla**, and it was completed in 1238 and consecrated on

July 22, 1240. Prince Hasan Jalal relates to one of the most ancient aristocratic families in world history—the Arranshahiks—who ruled eastern Armenian lands since early medieval times, if not much before.

In the 14th century, a regional Catholicosate emerged in Artsakh (Karabakh). Gandzasar Monastery became the Holy See of Gandzasar. In the 16th century it became subordinate to the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate (Armenia, Holy See of Catholicos of All Armenians). Many of its Catholicos were members of the Hasan-Jalal Dawla dynasty.

The complex is protected by high walls. Within the complex is the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (*Surb Hovhannes Mkrtych Yekeghetsi* in Armenian), built between 1216 and 1238. The drum of its dome has exquisite bas-reliefs that depict the Crucifixion, Adam and Eve, and two ministers

holding a model of the church above their heads as an offer to the God.

Some prominent art historians consider the Monastery as a masterpiece of Armenian architecture. **Anatoly L. Yakobson**, a prominent Soviet medieval art historian, described Gandzasar as a "pearl of architectural art.... This is a unique monument of medieval architecture and monumental sculpture, which by right ought to be regarded as an encyclopedia of 13th-century Armenian art." And Professor **Charles Diehl** (1859-1944) of the Sorbonne University, the renowned French art historian and specialist on Byzantium, placed Gandzasar in a group of five most important examples of Armenian monumental art which belong to the world's architectural masterpieces.

Gandzasar Monastery represents the so-called "Gandzasar Style" of medieval Armenian architecture.

The exclusively rich decorative pattern of the interior and exterior renders a particular uniqueness to Gandzasar's Cathedral. After the Akhtamar Cathedral of St. Cross on the Lake Van (in Turkey at present), Gandzasar contains the largest amount of sculpted decor compared to other architectural ensembles of Armenia. As it was mentioned above, the most famous of Gandzasar's bas-reliefs that decorate its domes and walls are Adam and Eve, Jesus Christ, a group of stylized animals (Lions, Eagles



and Bulls—symbols of the Vakh tangian Princes to whom Hasan Jalal belonged), and two Churchwardens holding on their hands miniature models of the cathedral.

Overall, up to 150 Armenian stone-borne texts are found on the walls of the Cathedral, including a wall-large inscription made by the order of Asan-Jalal himself.

Gandzasar's cathedral church shares many architectural forms with the main churches of two other Armenian monasteries also built in the mid-13th century: **Hovhannavank** Monastery and **Harichavank** Monastery. And some late medieval Armenian churches were evidently inspired by Gandzasar's characteristic dome. One of them is the renowned Cathedral of the **St. Stephanos** Monastery built in the 17th century; it is located at the meeting point of the borders of Armenia and Nakhichevan (ancient Armenian province voluntarily transferred by J. Stalin to Azerbaijan in 1920s).

Hasan Jalal's successors, who assumed the surname Hasan-Jalalian in memory of their prominent ancestor, branched out into two lines. The clerical line hereditarily controlled top positions of the Holy See of Gandzasar, while the original, princely one, continued administering the Province of Khachen as princes and meliks (dukes).

Gandzasar shared the turbulent history of the Armenian people. In a colophon, from 1417, the superior of the Monastery deplores the situation whereby the princes of Khachen are "*in the hands of lawless people*" and "*the House of Armenia is thus weakened.*"

The Monastery was sacked several times, most notably—by Mongol hordes, in the 13th century. In the late 13th century, Gandzasar was looted by the gangs of the Turkic chieftain Ibrahim-Khalil Javanshir—a tribal lord from the family of the self-proclaimed "Khans of Karabakh." By usurping Artsakh's Castle of Shushi for over 50 years (until driven out and assassinated by Russians and Armenians, in 1805), Ibrahim—and his father Panah-Ali before him—had been terrorizing Gandzasar's clergy. In 1786, this policy culminated in capturing, torturing and killing Gandzasar's Catholicos **Hovhannes Gandzasaretsi** and his brothers by Ibrahim's henchmen.

Most recently Gandzasar was attacked in 1992, in the course of Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian aggression and Nagorno Karabakh's heroic self-defense. But despite the challenges before them, Armenians—whether throughout the Middle Ages or in the twentieth century—always organized extraordinary measures to defend Gandzasar and shield it from damage.

(It is symbolic that it was near Gandzasar Monastery where the first large regiments of Azerbaijani Army were rounded up and destroyed by Nagorno Karabakh self-defense units).

(In partnership with the Monastery of Tatev of neighboring province of Syunik (today's Republic of Armenia), Gandzasar Monastery is also known as a center of Armenian independence movement of the 18th century initiated by the Armenian dukes (meliks) of Artsakh. In was in Gandzasar where the representatives of Armenian nobility prepared and signed the famous appeal for assistance addressed to the Russian monarch **Peter I the Great**.

Liturgies, baptism, weddings are being held by the Monastery clergy.

Gandzasar Monastery: Tourist Information How to Get to Gandzasar

Already looking forward to visit Gandzasar monastery in Mardakert? Then we can offer several options for traveling to Nagorno-Karabakh and enjoying its historical-architectural monuments, such as the Gandzasar Monastery and many others.

- Firstly, you can take a taxi that will drive from Armenia via the Berdzor (Lachin)

Corridor or through the Karvajar (fmr Kelbajar) pass that will cost you around 100USD.

- Secondly, you can go there by buses (marshrutka) that run from Yerevan central bus station and cost about 4500AMD.

- Some tour agencies can also provide guided tours to Nagorno-Karabakh, but prepare to pay 100–150USD. If you are planning to visit the place with your friends, then the right option will be renting a minivan.

Where to Stay During Your Visit to Gandzasar?

There are some quite good hotels to stay during your visit in Karabakh that are just a few kilometers away from Gandzasar monastery.

Hotel **Tsovin Qar** (Sea Stone) is on the right bank of the Khachen River and is surrounded by picturesque woods. Some rooms have balconies that are overlooking these forests.

During your stay, you will feel the spirit of wild nature and the flavor of national cuisine of Nagorno-Karabakh. The hotel has an open-air restaurant, a cozy little restaurant, and a tavern where you can enjoy peaceful rural evenings.

Not far away from this hotel there is another good option called **Eclectica**. Among residents it is also known as Titanic due to its unique architecture in the form of a ship and with original interior. The hotel has 18 rooms, a bar in marine style, a restaurant, cafes, riding hall for horses, table tennis, etc.

Photos by the author



From 1923 to 1992 when Nagorno-Karabakh was within Soviet Azerbaijan, Gandzasar Monastery was in terrible state. But after liberation of this ancient Armenian land thanks to generosity of Moscow-based Armenian businessman and philanthropist, a Vank village native **Levon G. Hayrapetyan** the whole complex was cleaned, renovated and reconstructed and turned to a fully-functioning Monastery.

A traditional domain of the Catholicos (Archpriest) of the Eastern Territory of Armenia, Gandzasar Monastery is the center of Nagorno-Karabakh's religious life and present-day seat of the Archbishop of Artsakh of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The 13th Aram Khachaturian International Competition Is On: Vocal



By
**Gourgen
Khazhakian**

**Chief
Correspondent**

Traditionally on 6 June, Aram Khachaturian's birthday, the International Competition named after him starts. This year, for the first time, it is held in "Vokal" specialization.

At a press conference dedicated to this event and held at the Aram Khachaturian House Museum the Minister of Culture of Armenia **Armen Amiryany** reminded the Composer's words said long time ago: the Armenian composers should make music the world will love and get interested what a nation it is that creates such composers, where that land is located, where such stunning musical pieces are made.

And I think this contest after Aram Khachaturian is the best tool for realization of the great composer's this idea, said Minister Amiryany. With this regard, he recalled a remarkable story: In the second half of the passed century, when in the United States the great composer met another great person - writer Ernest Hemingway, the latter proudly showed him collection of the LPs containing works by Khachaturian.

Armen Amiryany also expressed confidence that the young people participating today in the Competition, becoming the world known in foreseeable future, will remember with pride their participation in this Competition.

Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Khachaturian International Competition who is also the RA President's Adviser on the International Humanitarian and Cultural Cooperation **Armen Smbatyan** told reporters that the number of those wishing to participate in the Competition this year exceeded a hundred, and 43 singers from different countries, - the US, France, Germany, Mexico, Cyprus, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Artsakh and the like were chosen. In his words, the Jury has very honored members; its Chairman is the Honored Artist of the Russian Federation, famous conductor, the artistic director of A. Spendiaryan National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet **Constantine Orbelian**. Members are a world known Canadian soprano **Isabel Bayrakdarian** (Plácido Domingo's prestigious First Prize in "Operalia" competition, "Juno" award winner), **John Fisher** (conductor, opera director, vocal teacher and music producer, Administration Deputy Director at

the "Metropolitan" Theater), **Mark Hildrew** ("Askonas Holt", Senior Member of Management), **George Parodi** (conductor at Manhattan Music school, Music Director of the School's Opera Theater), **Richard Rodzinski** (musicologist, Founder of the "Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs" International Competition, **Andrejs Zhagars** ("Baltic Music Festival," Artistic Director), **Edward Topchyan**, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra.

When asked why it was decided to hold this year's competition in "Vocal" nomination, Mr Smbatyan said. "There are many vocal competitions in the world, so there is nothing extraordinary in our choice... You know, new very good voices emerged in Armenia in recent years... World Federation of International Music Competitions (WFIMC), (a member of which is Khachaturian Com-

petition's turning into the Eurovision contest." He noted that the Khachaturian Competition has significance in the world that is good for popularization of both Khachaturian and our country, stressing that he is happy to be part of the Jury 'cause he loves opera music.

"This Contest is always important because it reveals a wonderfully talented young people who dedicate their lives to something that is the best in the world, - the music. I am glad that this year the competition is held in the "Vocal" nomination. I am sure that everyone will enjoy performances," **Constantine Orbelian** stressed.

"This Contest is unique by the fact that its foreign participants who have never spoken Armenian, are to perform works by Komitas," **Isabel Bayrakdarian** noted.

The Competition will be ended with traditional Gala concert on the June 14th. It is being held under the Patronage of the First Lady **Rita Sargsyan**. The organizers are "Aram Khachaturian-Competition" Cultural Foundation, Ministry of Culture of Armenia and Yerevan State Conservatory. The main Partner is the CIS Interstate Foundation for Humanitarian Cooperation, and Supporter is "Ardshinbank".

In the evening of 6 June at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall opening ceremony of the bust of the Great Composer was held. The creation of the bust supported benefactor **Armen Sadghyan**. The author of the bust is Honored Artist of Armenia **Mikayel Soghoyan**.

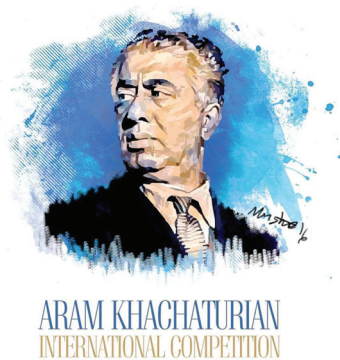
Then the Competition's opening concert was held at the Opera Theater. State Youth Orchestra of Armenia and the CIS Youth Orchestra, the Chorus of Opera Theater, **Isabel Bayrakdarian**, "Bolshoy" Theater soloists, others performed. The repertoire included works by Aram Khachaturian, **Jules Massenet**, **Joakino Rossini**, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**.

By the moment we have the list of the contestants who passed the 2nd round and will perform

during the 3rd (final) round:

10. **Liliana Natalie Buickians** (USA/Soprano), 11. **Azamat Zhetyrguzov** (Kazakhstan/Baritone), 14. **Tigran Ohanyan** (Armenia/Tenor), 15. **Eka Horstka** (Kateryna Horstka) (Ukraine/Armenia/Soprano), 23. **Marianna Martirosyan** (Artsakh/Soprano), 24. **Julietta Aleksanyan** (Armenia/Soprano), 31. **Meri Movsisyan** (Armenia/Soprano), 36. **Gagik Vardanyan** (Armenia/Baritone).

The final round will take place on June 12 and 13, at 19:00, at A. Spendiaryan National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet.



petition) accepted our decision. At first they did not agree because Aram Khachaturian Competition was linked mostly with instrumental art, but we were able to convince them..."

"There are requirements for the participants: besides performing Khachaturian, they should perform also works by Komitas. Prestigious international jury will judge the participants, hopefully, taking into account the audience's preference," said **Armen Smbatyan**. **Edward Topchyan** joked. "Taking into account attendees preference is possible,

Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator: As Usual, Supporting the Nation...

The 14th "Golden Apricot" Yerevan International Film Festival announced

One of the most remarkable events of the year, the "Golden Apricot" Yerevan IFF will complement the cultural life of the capital of Armenia from 9th to 16th of July, 2017.

The representatives of the "Golden Apricot" Yerevan IFF, the RA Ministry of Culture and General Partner of the festival VivaCell-MTS announced the start of the 14th edition of the Festival.

The press conference on 5 June started with the presentation of the official poster. The apricot-shaped geometric figure symbolizes the 14th edition of the festival. The speakers at the press conference, the Minister of Culture of Armenia **Armen Amiryan**, VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph Yirikian**, "Golden Apricot" IFF Founding Director **Harutyun Khachatryan**, Programs Director **Mikayel Stamboltsyan** and Artistic Director **Susanna Harutyunyan** reflected on the importance of the long-term cooperation, and presented some of this year's programs. In particular, they announced the names of international jury members of the main competition programs, as well as the titles of the opening and the closing films.



The opening of the festival will be marked by the screening of Hamo Beknazaryan's "Khaspush", 1927; and will be accompanied by Vahagn Hayrapetyan and his band, which will perform the music specially written for the occasion. This year celebrates the 90th anniversary of movie. The film is about the revolt of Khaspushes, socially deprived peasants and townspeople of Persia, and the first Armenian historical-revolutionary film.

The closing ceremony will host Joe Berlinger's "Intent to Destroy", which was shot this year. The premiere of the film telling about the Armenian Genocide was first screened at the Tribeca Film Festival. The director of the film has met with historians and scholars to shed light on the Armenian Genocide and the continuing denial by the Turkish government.

This year the "Golden Apricot" received about 1100 film submissions from 96 countries. More than hundred films were included in the competition and non-competition programs.

"There are events, which leave an invaluable mark on the public life: they shape minds, create opportunities to bolster the country's reputation, and to educate generation. I won't be mistaken if I say the 'Golden Apricot' Film Festival is one of those events in Armenia. It shapes a system of values, uses the language of the art to

raise problems, and to sow seeds of beauty and vigor. It has been the visit card of Armenia for 14 years in a row. I am proud of our cooperation and of the festival's achievements for all these years," said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph Yirikian.

This year again the non-competition programs of the "Golden Apricot" – the "Yerevan Premieres", "Retrospectives", and "Tributes" – will give the spectators and movie lovers with masterpieces of the world cinema.

VivaCell-MTS hosts young people from Iran and Georgia

Exchange of experience is one of the guarantees of development. It is particularly so, when the exchange is between the future professionals of various countries. This time VivaCell-MTS Open Doors event hosted young people from Iran and Georgia, which had arrived in Armenia in the frame of the program organized by "Leadership School". Through live interaction, active and promising young people familiarized with the developments in the spheres of entrepreneurship and newest technologies in Armenia.



The guests had an orientation visit to the main operational centers of VivaCell-MTS, including the Call Center, and learned about the work specifics of the Technical Department and the service centers. The tour in the Company was accompanied by an exchange with VivaCell-MTS General Manager Ralph Yirikian and a Q/A. The young people interested in the innovative trends in business also got acquainted with the internal functions of the Company, work procedures, and the main technological developments.

"Young people's interest in the basics of responsible business management is welcomed. Their readiness to act with confidence and to bring their ideas into life is particularly valuable. I am glad that our country's experience in new technologies and communication can be useful for its neighbors, too," VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph Yirikian** said.

The "Leadership School" Foundation has organized exchange of experience for young entrepreneurs and students arriving from Iran and Georgia, as part of its regional development programs. While in Armenia the most active and promising young people have learned about the development trends of the country, the renowned personalities of the sphere, as well the operating organizations.

Congressional letter rallies against proposed cuts to Armenia



Since the White House released its budget recommendations for FY18 on May 23, the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) joined with Members of Congress to express concern about the 67 percent reduction in foreign aid to Armenia.

Spearheaded by Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (D-CA), 27 Members of Congress sent a letter to House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY) and Ranking Member Nita Lowey

(D-NY) sharing those concerns. The Assembly encouraged its members to contact their Representatives to oppose cuts in aid to Armenia, which dropped from \$20.4 million in FY16 to \$6.8 million proposed for FY18.

“As Members who care deeply about strengthening the bilateral relationship between the United States and the Republic of Armenia, we urge you to reject the harmful cuts to U.S. foreign aid to Armenia included in the President’s Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) budget,” the Representatives stated in the

letter.

“At a time of tremendous global uncertainty, the U.S. should continue to foster the progress of its allies, not retreat from its responsibilities as the world’s leading democracy. As the U.S. and Armenia commemorate the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations, we urge the committee to reject the harmful cuts to U.S. aid to Armenia proposed by the President’s FY18 budget,” they continued.

Last week, the Assembly submitted testimony to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs for Fiscal Year 2018 highlighting key priorities.

The Assembly’s testimony calls for: \$40 million in U.S. economic aid to Armenia; \$8 million to Artsakh; full enforcement of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act; \$20 million to implement the Royce-Engel initiative to advance peace; assistance to protect and safeguard Christian minorities at risk in the Middle East escaping to Armenia, such as inclusion in the Near East Foundation’s programs in the region; \$11 million in U.S. military assistance to Armenia; and assistance to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia. The Assembly also strongly supports a second U.S.-Armenia Millennium Challenge compact.

Petition urges European Union to provide aid to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh



On June 7, AGBU Europe launched an appeal calling on the European Union and European aid organizations to engage with the population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

“Nagorno-Karabakh (NKR) is a landlocked mountainous territory in the South Caucasus, home to 150,000 people. It is one of the several unrecognized states that emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the Republic of Azerbaijan claims sovereignty over NKR. It is one of the most

impoverished areas in the periphery,” reads the text of the petition on Change.org.

“The inhabitants of this small unrecognized state have been under continuous threat of war and isolation for more than 20 years, which has caused considerable hardship. A blockade continues to impact the daily life of the people, who also suffer from the highest mine-related casualty rate in the world,” it says.

The EU does not provide direct aid to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, in contrast to other territories under dispute, such as Northern Cyprus, Abkhazia or Transnistria, which have received substantial benefits from EU engagement and aid.

“We call on all those who believe in Europe to sign onto this appeal. We stand ready to work with European institutions as well as with international NGOs to find ways to respond to the needs of the civilian population in Nagorno-Karabakh,” says Nadia Gortzounian, President of AGBU Europe.

Despite the isolation and economic hardship, Nagorno-Karabakh focuses on the development of democracy. It is making considerable efforts to improve institutions and strengthen civil society.

AGBU Europe has published a video and information package aimed at explaining the case for EU engagement in NKR.

Jazzman Armen “Chico” Tutunjyan passed away aged 73

Jazzman Armen Tutunjyan passed away today aged 73. Better known as Chico, he led the “Chico and friends” jazz band.

Tutunjyan also practiced teaching. He trained dozens of drummers over 35 years.

The jazzman shared his knowledge in “Rhythm and Movement” – the first-of-its-kind tutorial written in Armenian lan-

guage published at the end of 2010.

“Basically, there are three things I do – I play, teach and popularize jazz,” Armen Tutunjyan once said.

“I played it once, I play it still and I will always play the jazz I fell in love with a pure, unsophisticated jazz long ago. That’s my musical creed,” he used to say.

Armen Tutunjyan’s death is a great loss for Armenian jazz.



Mark Grigoryan appointed Executive Director of Public Radio of Armenia

Mark Grigoryan has been appointed Executive Director of Public Radio of Armenia. He previously worked as Adviser to Executive Director.

Born in Yerevan on May 3, 1958, Mark Grigoryan graduated from the Yerevan State University in 1980 and started work at the Yerevan Research Institute of Automatic Control Systems.

Mark Grigoryan holds PhD in Philology and taught at Pushkin school, the Yerevan State University and the Anania Shirakatsi University before starting his career as journalist.

In 1993 he became the deputy edi-



tor-in-chief and then editor-in-chief of the Russian language “Свобода” (Freedom) newspaper. Between 1995 and 1996 he

worked at the Armenian International Magazine (AIM). He cooperated with a number of local and foreign publications.

Mark Grigoryan moved to London in 2002 after an assassination attempt. In the UK he shortly worked at the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and then at the BBC.

After returning to Armenia in 2014, he worked at the PanArmenian Media Group, hosted programs on Armenia TV and ATV.

Mark Grigoryan has authored 16 books, as well as a number of scientific and research articles. He’s also one of the co-founders of the Caucasus Institute in Yerevan.

A gift from Armenian people: The bust of Yousuf Karsh unveiled in Ottawa

Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia in Canada, His Excellency Armen Yeghanyan officially unveils the bust of world renowned Armenian-Canadian photographer, Yousuf Karsh in Ottawa on June 9, the Armenian Embassy in Canada reports.

The bust that is a gift from the Armenian people to the Canadian people stands as a lasting symbol of the strong friendship between Canada and Armenia.



Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

This is a time in which your partner is on your side and things are flowing well between you. It is a good period for coming to agreement on circumstances that have been issues

in the past. You may be especially enjoying music or the arts together. Intimacy brings you closer together now.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

Venus entered your sign yesterday and will travel “with you” through July 4, 2017. The subject of relationship will be very important as you move forward through this time. If you have issues with a partner, this is the time to lay them out on the table

so the two of you can look at how better to deal with them. Negotiate but do not accuse or bring in secondary issues.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

Mercury, your planetary ruler, entered your sign yesterday. Mercury travels rapidly through Gemini between June 6 and June 21, 2017. During this time there likely will be greater emphasis on communica-

tions, errands, and other short distance travels. Your mind will be quick and your attitude persuasive.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Mars, the warrior, entered your sign last week and will be traveling with you for six more weeks. This energy is best used to handle physically heavy projects or take initiatives that you might not otherwise

tackle. You must take charge of the energy and focus it productively so it won't run you ragged.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

This is a time of focus on your health and the routine maintenance of life's routines. (Yawn) Fire signs rarely want to handle details in any form. However, the message is clearly there. You must attend to these areas or eventually pay a price

for not doing so.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

Your attention turns toward your life direction now. For many this is reflected by the career path. You may be researching needed information or talking with others about where you are headed. Your work is

noticed and you may be the recipient of compliments and support by the end of this week.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

Venus, your ruling planet, enters the eighth sector and will remain there until July 4, 2017. This suggests favorable influences and opportunities related to debt payments, gifts, or other financial resources that come through other people. It includes investments, debts owed to you, and insurance payoffs. Relationships take on a more intense role.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

Mars, one of your ruling planets, entered your ninth house last week 7 weeks. You will notice a shift into a new direction. It will likely be related to contacting people at a distance, preparing to travel, seeking professional advice, or focused on education. This position of Mars leans us toward a heavy accelerator foot. Attend to driving within the speed limit.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Give special attention to the lead paragraph because Jupiter is your planetary ruler. Now that it is turning direct in your partnership house, making decisions concerning relationships will be much easier. The next few months may bring a beneficial business partnership, more clientele, or a marriage.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

You occasionally confuse what you think with who you are. There are those who will disagree with you this week. Just don't let it become a battle to the death. Your identity is not at stake in this situation. You may not like what is happening, but you can choose a better time later to argue the point.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

This is a week in which you will tend to be thinking obsessively. It is an opportunity to learn how to better control your mind. Shift your attention to something less dramatic, such as whatever is happening this moment, rather than worrying over what might happen in the future.



Pisces (February 18–March 19)

You may feel as though you came from another planet this week. Communications may be misunderstood, snarled, or lost altogether. Compensate for this problem by concentrating on speaking the truth as you know it, and listening very carefully to what the other tells you. Then reflect what you heard, just to be sure.

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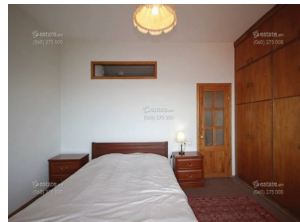
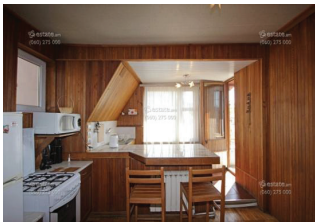
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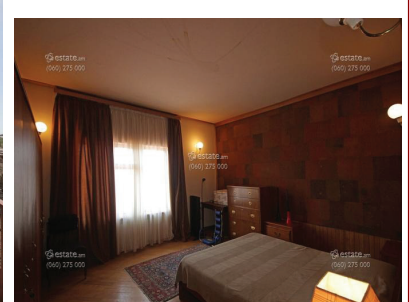
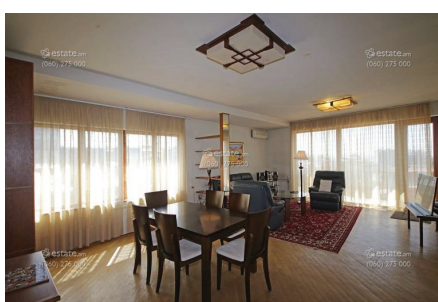
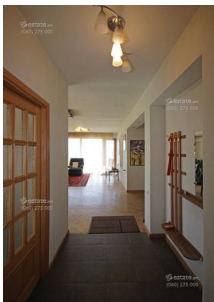
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