

Armenia, Iran, Turkmenistan consider perspectives of trilateral cooperation



Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan received on January 9 the Ambassadors of Iran and Turkmenistan to Armenia, Seyed Kazem Sajadi and Muhammad Niaz Mashalov.

The Prime Minister said the high level of relations with Iran and Turkmenistan allows further deepening the economic ties and launching cooperation in trilateral format.

“We are interested in developing the Armenia-Iran-Turkmenistan trilateral economic cooperation. We have the capacity to increase the volume of commodity turnover between our countries and this meeting is a testament to the importance we attach to our cooperation,” he said.

The Ambassadors, in turn, reiterated the willingness of their respective countries to

expand the cooperation with Armenia and discuss the future steps in that direction.

During the meeting reference was made to the perspectives of trilateral cooperation in the energy field, the supply of energy resources and joint projects.

The parties reached an agreement to set up a joint task force to discuss concrete programs.

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PM Karen Karapetyan meets with representatives of the diplomatic corps



Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan held a meeting with the Ambassadors accredited to Armenia, the heads and representatives of international organizations.

During the meeting reference was made to the activity of the Armenian government, the

reforms agenda, the economic development programs, the measures and steps targeted at fighting corruption.

The Prime Minister stressed the importance of periodic meetings with the diplomatic corps for raising the effectiveness of

cooperation. He said the government is open to advice, criticism and offers.

Speaking about the forthcoming parliamentary elections, Karen Karapetyan said: "We expect new qualitative level from these elections. We are preparing to do the utmost to ensure the transparency of the voting."

The Prime Minister said that over the past 100 days in office the government has been trying hard to reveal the existing problems and added that a report on the work done in the due period will be presented in the near future.

Karen Karapetyan revealed plans to ease the tax administration process and shift to an electronic system with a view of improving the investment climate and reducing the corruption risks. He said the government keeps the fight against corruption in the spotlight and pledged consistent steps to cut the corruption level.

Perspectives of development of Armenia-EU ties discussed in Yerevan

Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Karen Nazaryan and MEP Frank Engel discussed the Armenia-EU relations at a meeting in Yerevan on January 9.

During the meeting reference was made to the negotiations on a new framework agreement, the ongoing dialogue and other issues. The Armenian Deputy FM briefed the guest on the current status of Armenia-EU relations and the perspectives of their development.

The parties stressed the importance of permanent support for their implementation on the legislative and executive levels.

In the context of elimination of consequences of Azerbaijan's April aggression against Artsakh and the efforts of Armenia and the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to thfurere the negotiation process, the interlocutors attached importance to raising awareness in the European Parliament and among the European community, at large.



The parties exchanged views on the latest regional and international developments.

Minsk Group Co-Chairs the only format that should continue preventive activity, Armenia's FM says

Armenia agrees with the Co-Chairs that ceasefire violations are unacceptable, Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said, commenting on the statement of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

"The Co-Chairs refer to what we have been consistently talking about. We agree with them that the ceasefire violations are

unacceptable. We agree that the agreements reached in Vienna and St. Petersburg should be unequivocally implemented. The mechanism of investigation of border incidents should be implemented as soon as possible," Edward Nalbandian said in comments to Armenpress.

"The co-chairing countries have mentioned

on many occasions which party has been turning down the implementation of the mechanism. Therefore, that party bears full responsibility for the incidents and ceasefire violations. Such mechanisms will allow, as the Co-Chairs say, to avoid reciprocal accusations. However, the fact of an Azerbaijani saboteur being neutralized at the Armenian

military posts makes it clear who's the attacker even without any mechanism," Minister Nalbandian said.

"We hope the Co-Chairs will be consistent in strongly responding to any use of force or the threat of force in the conflict zone, especially considering that ceasefire violations result in human losses. We must not allow a delayed response to be accepted by the violators of the ceasefire as tolerance towards their actions. As the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs have mentioned on many occasions,



the unconditional implementation of the 1994-1995 trilateral agreements on ceasefire is a must, the incidents that result from their

violation are unacceptable and cause a huge damage to the settlement process," Edward Nalbandian stated.

"Under the conditions, when Azerbaijan hampers the implementation of an investigation mechanism and the expansion of capacities of the team of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, the Co-Chairs remain the only format, which can and should continue its preventive activity in compliance with its mandate," the Armenian Foreign Minister stated.

Co-Chairs urge respect for agreements reached in Vienna and St. Petersburg



The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Ambassadors Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, Stephane Visconti of France, and Richard Hoagland of the United States),

released the following statement on January 10:

Baku and Yerevan continue to accuse each other of a December 29, 2016 attempted incursion on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border resulting in casualties. Armenian Armed Forces are still holding the body of an Azerbaijan serviceman killed in the fighting.

Violations of the ceasefire are unacceptable and are contrary to the acknowledged commitments of the Parties, who bear full responsibility, not to use force. The Co-Chairs urge the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to strictly observe the agreements reached during summits in Vienna and St. Petersburg

in 2016, including obligations to finalize in the shortest possible time an OSCE investigative mechanism. The Co-Chairs also urge the return, without delay, of human remains, in accord with the agreements of the Astrakhan Summit of 2010, bearing in mind the exclusively humanitarian nature of this issue. We call upon the Parties to cease mutual accusations and undertake all necessary measures to stabilize the situation on the ground.

The Co-Chairs extend their condolences to the families of the fallen soldiers and to all Armenians and Azerbaijanis for whom hopes for the New Year have been darkened with the grief of senseless loss.

OSCE PA President calls for extension of mandate of OSCE office in Armenia



The President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Austrian parliamentarian Christine Muttonen, on January 13 called for the immediate agreement on the extension of mandates of OSCE field operations, some of which are currently being held up by representatives of OSCE countries.

"Field missions have long been the crown jewel of the OSCE, both helping OSCE countries to live up to their commitments through

practical project work and representing a vital element of the Organization's outreach capacity. The excellent work being done by our professionals in the field is now effectively being held hostage by diplomats in Vienna, some of whom are vetoing this most important work of the Organization," said Muttonen.

The mandates of the OSCE's field operations in Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan all expired on 31 December 2016 without agreement on their extension. The OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk is set to expire on 31 January, currently with no agreement on extension.

"OSCE parliamentarians have repeatedly called for OSCE field missions to be given robust mandates that allow them to get on with their work and help OSCE countries. Whether it is promoting women's participation in political life, undertaking anti-corruption training for judges, or supporting professional work by parliamentary staff, OSCE missions add value to the security and good governance of the countries in which they work. I call on all diplomats to the OSCE to redouble efforts and reach agreement, enabling OSCE staff to do their jobs; continuing to block this work is simply not acceptable," said the President.

Vigen Sargsyan: CSTO chief's statement on armed incident was 'quite clear'

Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan has praised Nikolay Bordyuzha, the secretary general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) until last week, for condemning what the Armenian military has called an armed Azerbaijani incursion into Armenia.

The December 29 incident left three Armenian and at least one Azerbaijani soldier dead at an Armenian army post in the northern Tavush province bordering western Azerbaijan. Officials in Yerevan say the fact that the Azerbaijani serviceman's body was left lying in Armenian territory proves that the post was attacked by Azerbaijani troops.

Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry denied launching an incursion in the mountainous area, however. It claimed that an Armenian "reconnaissance squad" was ambushed by its forces while trying to cross into Azerbaijan.

Bordyuzha implicitly blamed Baku for the "provocative" incident "in the territory of a CSTO member state." In a December 29 statement, he also referred to Nagorno-Karabakh as a republic.

"I think that the statement by the CSTO secretary general was very clear," Sargsyan told reporters on January 8. "The secretary general is one of the most important CSTO institutions who expresses the organization's views during the period of time between [CSTO] sessions."

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry was quick to criticize Bordyuzha's reaction, calling it "subjective." It also rejected as "unacceptable" his reference to "the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic."

Bordyuzha's statement came just four days before his resignation. His deputy, Valery Semerikov, took over as acting secretary general of the Russian-led military alliance on January 2.



In accordance with the CSTO's statutes, an Armenian official was supposed to replace Bordyuzha as secretary general in late 2015. However, the presidents of the bloc's six member states -- Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan -- decided to extend Bordyuzha's tenure by one year. They again failed to agree on his permanent replacement at a summit held in Saint Petersburg late last month.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is thought to be the main reason for the delay, with some CSTO member states, notably Kazakhstan, reportedly blocking an Armenian's appointment in a show of support for Azerbaijan. Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states have repeatedly signed pro-Azerbaijani declarations on Karabakh in the past, prompting criticism from Armenia.

Vigen Sargsyan suggested that the CSTO leaders will reach a consensus on the issue at their next summit. "I am confident that everything will be alright," he said without elaborating.

Alexander Iskandaryan: OSCE Minsk Group busy with minimizing risks



There have been no changes in the activity of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and the process of settlement of the Karabakh issue, says Alexander Iskandaryan, Director of the Caucasus Institute.

"They are busy with minimizing the risks, rather than resolving the conflict," Iskandaryan told a press conference today.

According to the political scientist, the reason is the dif-

ference between the stances of the parties on the conflict settlement, which makes it impossible to propose a solution acceptable to all.

"The latest statement of the Co-Chairs fit into the logic of avoiding tension," Iskandaryan said.

According to political scientist Stepan Grigoryan, the Co-Chairs' statement can inspire Azerbaijan to resort to new provocations, because they see that their actions go unpunished.

According to Alexander Iskandaryan, there are two ways Azerbaijan can have an influence on the Karabakh conflict settlement. "The first option is lobbying and propaganda. The second means for Azerbaijan to attract the attention of Armenia and the international community is to shoot," the political scientist said. Therefore, he's concerned that the situation will still continue.

As for the perspectives of resumption of military actions, Alexander Iskandaryan says "it depends on oil prices, on whether Azerbaijan can afford it or not, because the country spent huge sums in April."

Armenia-Iran rail link in greater doubt



The Armenian government decided on January 12 to dissolve a state-owned company that was supposed to oversee the planned construction of a railway connecting Armenia to neighboring Iran.

Transport and Communications Minister Vahan Martirosyan insisted that the move does not mean the government is abandoning the extremely ambitious and expensive project. The government simply wants to save 35 million drams (\$73,000) in annual budgetary spending on the company called the Railway Construction Directorate, he said.

“Our ministry has a department on railway which can take over [the company’s] functions,” Martirosyan told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

The company employing 13 people has absorbed 185 million

drams in government funding during its five-year existence, according to the minister.

The Armenian and Iranian governments have discussed the railway project for more than a decade. Shortly after taking office in 2008, President Serzh Sargsyan announced that work on the rail link will get underway in the next few years.

However, Yerevan has so far failed to attract an estimated \$3.2 billion needed for building the 305-kilometer-long Armenian section of the railway that would mainly pass through the mountainous Syunik province.

Sargsyan and Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani signaled no progress towards the project’s implementation after their December 21 talks in Yerevan.

Martirosyan, who was appointed as transport minister in October, declined to speak of any time frames for the railway construction, admitting that its huge cost exceeding Armenia’s entire state budget remains the key obstacle. “But the project remains under government control,” he said.

Hayk Gevorgyan, an economic writer for the Yerevan daily “Haykakan Zhamanak,” suggested that the project will not be implemented anytime soon. “The cargo and passenger traffic through that railway would be too small to convince investors to invest huge sums,” he said.

Gevorgyan questioned government claims that the investments can be recouped within 22 years.

Armenian Government criticized by Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on January 12 that the Armenian authorities have failed to properly punish law-enforcement officials responsible for what the New York-based watchdog called excessive force that was used against anti-government protesters in Yerevan in July.

HRW singled out the violent dispersal late on July 29 of a demonstration held in support of armed members of a radical opposition group who seized a police base in the city’s Erebuni district.

The protesters marched to the Sari Tagh neighborhood overlooking the besieged police compound. Firing stun grenades and tear gas, riot police dispersed the crowd after protest leaders ignored their demands to leave the “dangerous” area and go back to the city center.

More than 60 people were injured and hospitalized as a result. As the crowd fled Sari Tagh at least 14 journalists, among them three RFE/RL correspondents, were ambushed and beaten up by a large group of plainclothes men wielding sticks.

In its annual World Report, HRW insisted that the use of force was “excessive and disproportionate.” “Police did not attempt less violent crowd control means, and did not make any meaningful effort to warn crowds to disperse or about their plans to use force,” it said.

“Police and unidentified people in civilian clothes acting with them, then charged towards the protesters, punching, kicking, and using wooden clubs and iron bars to beat some protesters, before detaining many of them,” adds the report.

“Six months later, we are still waiting for accountability for abuses committed by law enforcement during Yerevan’s July protests,” Giorgi Gogia, HRW’s South Caucasus director, said in a separate state-



ment. “Authorities were swift to prosecute numerous protesters, but have not credibly investigated, much less prosecuted, abusive police officials with the same rigor.”

The statement argued that while the authorities sacked the Yerevan police chief and suspended or reprimanded 17 other policemen, no law-enforcement officials have been prosecuted so far in connection with the Sari Tagh crackdown.

Late last month, President Serzh Sargsyan awarded a Medal for the Excellent Maintenance of Public Order to General Levon Yeranosyan, the controversial commander of Armenian interior troops who played a key role in the crackdown. A presidential decree noted Yeranosyan’s “significant” contributions to “law and order” in Armenia.

HRW also denounced as “arbitrary” the arrests of dozens of people linked to the July protests. It said that criminal charges levelled against some of them are “unjustified.”

Russia, Georgia reach new deal on gas supplies to Armenia

After almost one year of negotiations, the Georgian government and Russia's Gazprom monopoly have reached a new agreement on the transit through Georgia of Russian natural gas delivered to Armenia, it was announced on January 11.

Armenia imports roughly 2 billion cubic meters of Russian gas annually, meeting more than 80 percent of its demand for the energy resource. Transit fees charged by Georgia have until now taken the form of free Russian gas equivalent to 10 percent of that supply volume.

Last year, Gazprom offered to pay the authorities in Tbilisi in cash. The two sides have held a series of negotiations since then. The last round of the talks was held in Belarus's capital Minsk on Tuesday.

Georgia's Energy Minister Kakha Kaladze announced the following day that Gazprom's representatives proposed fresh financial terms for the transit. The Georgian government has accepted the proposal, he said after a cabinet meeting in Tbilisi.

Kaladze did not disclose the new, dollar-denominated cost of Gazprom's use of a Soviet-era pipeline passing through Georgia, saying only that it will be "one of the highest in Europe." He said Georgia will also be able to buy more Russian gas at a discounted price.

"Gas consumption in Georgia is rising and we will be able to buy, if necessary, [Russian] gas for \$185, rather than \$215, per thousand cubic meters," Kaladze was reported to tell journalists.

Georgia currently buys the bulk of its natural gas from Azerbaijan. Over the past year, the Georgian government has signaled its desire to ease the country's dependence on Azerbaijani gas, prompting strong



criticism from opposition groups favoring a harder line on Russia. The latter say that increased gas supplies from Russia could only give Moscow additional leverage against Georgia.

The Russian gas price for Armenia currently stands at \$150 per thousand cubic meters. It did not go down after Armenian utility regulators approved in November a sizable reduction in the domestic gas prices. The price cuts were requested by Gazprom-Armenia, the country's Russian-owned gas distribution network.

Gazprom-Armenia's chief executive, Hrant Tadevosyan, said the company hopes to make up for an anticipated loss in revenue through cost saving and greater consumption expected as a result of cheaper gas. Tadevosyan also said the Armenian gas operator will save more money if Georgia agrees to lower its transit fees. "We expect those figures to be significant," he said.

Moody's: Flare-up of aggression between Armenia and Azerbaijan to weigh on CIS economies

The stabilization of oil prices has eased the direct and indirect economic and fiscal pressures on the nine rated sovereigns in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region. Still, the region's overall credit outlook for 2017 is negative, driven by subdued economic recovery, external vulnerabilities in those countries with high foreign currency debt and the likelihood that political considerations will delay structural reforms that would bolster potential growth, Moody's Investors Service said in a report.

In 2016, Moody's took negative rating actions for five CIS sovereigns after slumping oil prices weighed on the credit profiles of major oil and gas exporters and had knock-on negative effects for the economies of many other sovereigns in the region.

"CIS governments managed the oil-price shock with increasingly orthodox policies, such as floating exchange rates and tight fiscal and monetary policies. These have mitigated the effects of the collapse in oil prices, and positioned most CIS countries for a modest economic turnaround in 2017," said Kristin Lindow, a Moody's Senior Vice President and co-author of the report. "However, the macroeconomic outlook remains weak, and downside credit risks still dominate."

All CIS sovereigns should grow slightly faster in 2017 than in 2016. Moody's forecasts median growth to rise to 2.0% in 2017 from 1.0% in 2016, and a further rise to 3.0% in 2018. Somewhat higher oil prices are likely to enable policymakers in oil-exporting countries to partially roll back fiscal and monetary policy tightening, and oil

importers will benefit from a modest pickup in remittance inflows.

Moody's projects that Russia, the largest economy by far among the nine countries, will record positive, albeit modest, real GDP growth of 1.0% in 2017 after two years of recession. This upturn will lift the broader region due to trade and financial linkages. Only Belarus is expected to shrink again in 2017.

Geopolitical conflicts also will continue to weigh on the CIS economies, mainly because of the impact of Western sanctions on Russia and the conflict in eastern Ukraine but also due to the flare-up of aggression between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Of the nine CIS sovereigns rated by Moody's, only Belarus and Kazakhstan are not engaged in a military conflict or border dispute with a neighbor.

Longer-term, growth is expected to remain weak and a key constraint on sovereign ratings in the region. With aging populations (except in the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic) and low productivity growth and absent the deep structural reforms that would overcome these trends, potential growth has dropped for most CIS sovereigns.

Those governments with greater fiscal resources and more flexible policies tend to be better positioned to address external vulnerabilities. Moreover, foreign currency inflows from oil and gas exports help cushion oil exporters after currencies have depreciated. Oil importers, on the other hand, remain more exposed because they also tend to have lower foreign exchange and fiscal reserves.

Hayastan All-Armenian Fund provides technology assistance to National Library of Armenia

With support from its Argentinean-Armenian benefactor Hovsep Tahta, the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund has donated five computers and one server to the National Library of Armenia. This is the second technology-assistance project for the institution to be carried out through the support of the benefactor. In 2013, Tahta donated a large-format scanner, a server, and 15 computers to the library.

“During his visit to the library last year, as Mr. Tahta was being shown the periodicals and other publications we’ve been digitizing, he was deeply moved when he recognized a newspaper from his childhood — published in Istanbul, it was the newspaper which his father used to read at home,” said Tigran Zargaryan, director of the National Library of Armenia, and continued, “Subsequently



Mr. Tahta decided to help expand our library’s digitization capabilities.”

Zargaryan added that thanks to the scanner donated by the benefactor, to date 2 million Armenian-press pages and 6,650 Armenian books (comprising a total of 1.7 million pag-



es) have been digitized and are now accessible online.

Currently the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund is building a kindergarten in Noragyugh, a village in Artsakh’s Askeran Region, through Tahta’s sponsorship.

Coca-Cola Hellenic plans to expand activity in Armenia

Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan received a delegation led by Coca-Cola Hellenic Regional Director Keith Sanders. Stressing the importance of Coca-Cola Hellenic’s activity in Armenia, the Prime Minister expressed willingness to discuss their future plans, questions and problems of interest to the Company.

Keith Sanders said to be aware of the Armenian government’s special attitude toward the business community and added that his company attaches great importance to Coca-Cola Hellenic’s Armenia activities.

Mr. Sanders revealed plans to implement new investment projects in Armenia, saying

“there are significant opportunities for it, especially as the business community has a reliable partner in the face of the Government.”

Noting that they are ready to present Armenia as a desirable destination for foreign investors, the Regional Director of Coca-Cola Hellenic said his company’s social and educational programs would be continued ahead.

Prime Minister Karapetyan welcomed Coca-Cola Hellenic’s initiative to expand activities and noted that his government is ready to support their implementation. The interlocutors took the opportunity to touch upon the legislative initiatives aimed at improving



the business environment and discuss issues relating to antitrust policy.

Armenian airports report 10.4 percent growth in passenger flow in 2016



The Armenian airports report 10.4 percent growth in passenger flow in 2016.

The passenger flow reached 2,105,540 people in January-December 2016, which means a 12% growth as compared to 2015.

According to the data of the General Department of Civil Aviation, 1,057,387 passengers left Armenia in due period, while 1,057,387 arrived in the country.

Zvartnots International Airport reported 90.4 percent growths in the cargo shipments last year. Besides, 2.8 percent growth was registered in the number of flights and landings.

“Shirak” Airport in Armenia’s second city of Gyumri was reopened after a break of eight months. The passenger flow here reached 12,421, the cargo shipment exceeded 4.2 tones.

How to address strategic insecurity in a turbulent age

The ideal geopolitical response to the crisis of global power is a trilateral connection between the United States, China and Russia

Since the end of the last major world war some 70 years ago, international peace has been preserved by the threat of the nuclear bomb. Because of its unique and unilateral ability to devastate the world, the bomb fundamentally changed the realities of international politics. However, its impact on global stability began to fade as more countries developed similarly destructive capabilities.

American monopoly of nuclear weapons lasted less than a decade. Their fear-inspiring role diminished by the mid-1950s, but the reality of U.S. nuclear arms was still sufficiently credible to defy the Soviet imposition in the late 1940s of a ground blockade designed to compel a U.S. withdrawal from Berlin; while in the early 1960s the U.S. succeeded in inducing the withdrawal of Soviet nuclear weapons from Cuba.

However, the ultimate resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis was less a one-sided victory, and more a combination of threats and of politically face-saving compromises between the two superpowers. Not only did the U.S. have to publicly pledge never to invade Cuba, it also secretly agreed to withdraw its Jupiter missiles from Turkey.

The early phases of the Cold War by only two major powers gave them the special status of uniquely shared global responsibility.

In effect, two decades or so after the introduction of such weapons into international affairs, America had to take Soviet concerns increasingly into account, in a context in which nuclear weapons did contribute to the preservation of peace even as they signaled also their potential parity in the waging of war. In any case, the semi-exclusive possession of nuclear weapons during the early phases of the Cold War by only two major powers gave them the special status of uniquely shared global responsibility in which both understood the other and neither was inclined to produce a confrontation that could generate a mutual catastrophe.

In more recent times, global stability was jeopardized by persistent contests of will involving major powers — but again not warranting the use of nuclear weapons. As America's nuclear strategic monopoly faded, the United States sought to create advantages elsewhere, notably in the peaceful cooperation between the United States and communist China under Deng Xiaoping. By the 1980s, the two powers were informally even collaborating in making the Russian invasion of Afghanistan increasingly costly and ultimately futile, but at no point threatening to slide into a nuclear war.

Zbigniew Brzezinski

Former U.S. National Security Adviser (1977-1981)

Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of America's foremost geopolitical strategists, was U.S. national security adviser from 1977 to 1981. His latest book is Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power. The following piece is adapted from a speech Brzezinski delivered at the Nobel Peace Prize Forum in Oslo, Norway in December.



Though the American-Chinese relationship did not evolve into a comprehensive alliance, selective and sometimes secret cooperation has become one of its defining characteristics.

By the end of that decade and in the early 21st century, the basic divisions of global power were fundamentally being changed. America and Russia were still the principal rivals, but China, armed with a more modest number of its own nuclear weapons, was looming increasingly large on the Far East's horizon. Though the American-Chinese relationship did not evolve into a comprehensive alliance, selective and sometimes secret cooperation has become one of its defining characteristics.

Consequently, the three principal shareholders of global power are less inclined to resort to nuclear provocations, but caution and collaboration must prevail between the United States, China and Russia, if a fundamental conflict is to be avoided.

Russia's Post-Soviet Challenges

For Russia, the regional situation has become increasingly difficult. Former non-Russian members of the Soviet Union are now openly asserting their own national independence and refusing to participate in any structure evocative of the deceased Soviet Union. The Central Asian republics, mostly of Islamic faith, have become determined to translate their initially nominal independence into genuine statehood. That aspiration is also shared by such Slavic and Russian Orthodox states as Ukraine and Belarus, both of which are now committed to separate statehood, their own flag, armed forces and closer links to Europe.

In the meantime, China's strategic pen-

etration of Central Asia in order to gain direct commercial access to Europe is already prompting a significant reduction of Russia's economic domination of the eastern portion of the former Soviet Union.

Currently, China's relationship with Russia seems to offer Beijing a somewhat more attractive short-term alternative, though both sides have historical grievances that make each suspect the intentions of the other. This is why the ambitious Chinese initiative of OBOR (One Belt, One Road) in Central Asia has produced some uneasiness in Moscow, which has been cautiously encouraging a local slowdown in the development of China's planned commercial outreach all the way to Europe.

The scale of this contrast could provoke geopolitical problems between China and Russia in the not-too-distant future. In the longer run still for Russia, the most ominous of all may be the spreading hope among some Chinese military leaders that China will eventually regain the huge spaces of the far eastern Siberian areas acquired forcibly in the mid-1800s by tsarist Russia. The distant and basically unpopulated extremities of Asia could thus become the long-run focus of China's vision of its geopolitical restoration.

Its aspirations can only be realized if Russia evolves ultimately into a leading player in Europe as China comes to dominate the East.

In any case, Russia is faced with an increasingly complex relationship with both China and the U.S., which inevitably constrains its long-range ambitions. Its aspirations can only be realized if Russia — disabused of the idea of continental supremacy — evolves ultimately into a leading player in Europe itself.

The U.S. Must Not Treat China as an Enemy

At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that America's policy towards China has become more ambiguous and lacking in a shared strategic vision that was so characteristic a decade or two ago of the increasingly cordial relationship between Washington and Beijing.

The U.S. must be wary of the great danger that China and Russia could form a strategic alliance, generated in part by their own internal, political, and ideological momentum, and in part by the poorly thought out policies of the United States. The U.S. should not act towards China as if it were already an enemy; significantly, it should not favor India as America's principal ally in Asia. This would almost guarantee a closer connection between China and Russia. Nothing is more dangerous to the U.S. than such a close connection.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. role in the politically awakened Eurasia is becoming increasingly defensive. The U.S. is residually present in the region — in the U.S.-controlled Pacific islands — thereby demonstrating America's stake in Eurasian security. The U.S. is openly committed to defend both Japan and South Korea. But that commitment depends on strategic caution as well as determination.

The United States has to be ready to defend west-central Europe as well. It has to be ready to react militarily despite, and perhaps even because of, international doubts regarding America's determination and willingness to act, if need be, on its own.

The U.S. should not favor India as America's principal ally in Asia. This would almost guarantee a closer connection between China and Russia.

Thus in Europe, it is therefore essential that America conveys unambiguously to the Kremlin that it will not be passive, that it is not planning major political or military counter threats in order to ostracize Russia but that Russia must know that there would be a massive blockade of Russia's maritime access to the West if Russian forces were used to occupy the capital of Latvia or to storm Tallinn, the capital of now independent Estonia. A blockade by the West that impacts the Baltic Basin ports of St. Petersburg and the Black Sea Basin port of Novorossiysk through the Dardanelles would affect nearly two-thirds of all Russian maritime trade.

A strong U.S. reaction would drastically limit Russia's ability to engage in profitable international trade, and it would provide the needed time for the injection of much larger American and some west

European forces, assisted also in Central Europe by the aroused local allies of the United States. With China probably neutral, Russia's leadership would be thus confronted with an unpalatable local choice: an economically debilitating isolation or a highly visible pullback.

In the meantime, an appealing longer-range program for China's rise could thus involve the gradual infiltration and settlement by Chinese laborers of the huge but empty northeast Eurasia. The current officially-demarcated Chinese-Russian boundaries are already being overwhelmed by a steady influx of manpower while Asia's empty northeast (incorporated into the tsarist empire in the mid-1850s) has not experienced serious attempts to promote major Russian settlements.

Looming Instability in Northeast Asia

All of that cumulatively suggests that during the next several decades, current northeast Asian territorial arrangements may become geopolitically unstable, occasionally even explosive, and eventually precipitating also a more enduring redefinition of the critical lines of division on the huge Eurasian continent. Obviously America will be only a distant observer, though probably prudently expanding its bilateral ties with both Japan and South Korea.

More immediately, the security problem posed by North Korea will also require enhanced security cooperation between the United States, China and — hopefully — a more Europe-oriented Russia. Both China and Russia would be likely to have a more positive impact on whatever political change may be taking place in North Korea than overt and separate American efforts.

Both China and Russia would be likely to have a more positive impact on whatever political change may be taking place in North Korea than overt and separate American efforts.

A prolonged period of relative stability and the absence of a major war could gradually have a cumulative political impact on North Korean domestic evolution, pointing perhaps to some broader accommodation based on guarantees from North Korea's immediate and more powerful neighbors. (China, U.S., Japan and maybe Russia, obviously all come to mind.)

The U.S., China and Russia Should Join to Stabilize the Mideast

Last but by no means least, the ongoing civil wars in the Middle East, fueled by

religious hatreds; potential nuclear conflicts possibly unleashed by the extremists in Iran; not to mention geopolitical ambitions of an enflamed nationalistic wave in Turkey — perhaps backed by the Russian military — each contain the possibility of a major regional eruption.

The ideal geopolitical response is a trilateral connection between the United States, China and then Russia, with Russia in that context having no choice but to accept the reality and the necessity of a better relationship both with China and the United States.

As regional uncertainties intensify, with potentially destructive consequences for all three of the major nuclear powers, it is time to think of what might have been and still could be. In that context, China needs to rethink how it can afford to evade responsibility for what happens in its neighborhood. Could that threaten Chinese interests and push China in an excessively tight military link with Russia, which then could generate the threat of a joint stand against the United States?

Or will Russia's global standing be more respected if the result is a world in which the three most militarily powerful states (America, China, Russia) cooperate more closely on issues pertaining to the Middle East in the immediate, and in the longer range in the Eastern Pacific regions in which Chinese ambitions for the moment are dormant but could easily be awakened?

Climate Change Will Impact Geopolitics

All of the above is likely to be complicated by the increasing probability that severe weather problems on a global scale will intensify political problems. Global warming is already beginning to impact more ominously, signaling prospects of extensive meltdowns and the resulting threats to some existing habitations. Cumulatively, that could generate greater public anxiety than strategic insecurity is now a fact of life on a scale heretofore not experienced by the now increasingly vulnerable humanity.

Global warming is already beginning to impact more ominously.

Regional cooperation will thus require shared wisdom and political will to work together despite historic conflicts and the continued presence of nuclear weaponry, always potentially devastating but even after seventy years still unlikely to result in a one-sided political victory.

Zbigniew Brzezinski acknowledges the helpful contributions made by Corynne Fish and Paul Wasserman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

01/03/2017

Cem Özdemir to deliver keynote addresses at Hrant Dink commemorations in Canada

Armenian Weekly – The co-leader of Germany’s Green Party Cem Özdemir—a German Member of Parliament of Turkish origin and one of the initiators of the Armenian Genocide resolution that was approved by Germany’s Parliament (Bundestag) on June 2, 2016—will be the keynote speaker at events in Toronto and Montreal, commemorating the 10th anniversary of Turkish-Armenian editor, journalist, and columnist Hrant Dink’s assassination.

Several community organizations in Toronto have come together for the past 10 years to remember the former editor-in-chief of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper Agos and to honor his legacy.

Speaking to the Armenian Weekly, chair of the organizing committee Raffi Bedrosyan said that the commemorations are not merely a remembrance, but rather a way for the community to continue Dink’s pursuit for justice. “Remembering Hrant Dink on the anniversary of his assassination is not simply commemorating a slain Armenian journalist. By remembering, we continue his journey toward reconciliation and justice regarding the Armenian Genocide. We also help realize his vision of dialogue between Armenian and Turkish people—a dialogue that is based on truth and a common body of knowledge,” Bedrosyan said.

Many influential figures have attended commemorations in Toronto honoring Dink



over the years, including Turkish-German scholar Taner Akçam; lawyer, writer, and human rights activist Fethiye Çetin; and prominent Turkish journalist and writer Hasan Cemal. “These people all share Hrant’s vision and break taboos in Turkey. They stand against the denial of the truth about the Armenian Genocide,” Bedrosyan explained.

Dink was assassinated outside of his Istanbul office on Jan. 19, 2007. He had written and spoken about the Armenian Genocide extensively, and was well known for his efforts for reconciliation between Turks and Armenians, as well as advocating for human and minority rights in Turkey. At the time of his murder, Dink was under prosecution for violating Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code and “denigrating Turkishness.” His assassination sparked huge national protests and outrage both in Turkey and internation-

ally.

This year’s keynote Cem Özdemir was a leading force behind the German Parliament’s June 2016 resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide and acknowledging German responsibility in not preventing the genocide committed by Ottoman Turkey—Germany’s WWI ally. Born in Bad Urach, West Germany, Özdemir is ethnically Turkish—his family emigrated from Turkey to Germany as “guest workers.”

Before introducing Özdemir to audiences, Bedrosyan will present Wolfgang Gust’s book *Armenian Genocide: Evidence from German Archives*. “He and his German parliamentary colleagues were greatly influenced by the German historian’s book, which was financed by the Zoryan Institute of Toronto,” Bedrosyan said.

In his keynote addresses, Özdemir will explain Hrant’s role in his decision to get involved in the Armenian Genocide resolution, and his journey as one of the most prominent human rights advocates in Europe.

“These commemorations and—more critically—the German Armenian Genocide recognition resolution, demonstrate that the genocide issue is not a historical issue of the past; not just something that happened a hundred years ago. It is, indeed, a current issue, deeply affecting relations between different peoples and different states, sometimes with serious consequences,” Bedrosyan said.

Garo Paylan suspended from Turkish Parliament after Armenian Genocide comments

Garo Paylan, an Armenian member of the Turkish parliament representing the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) on Saturday was suspended from parliament on for three days after speaking about the Armenian Genocide during the legislature debate of a new Turkish constitution.

In his speech, which angered the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) members, Paylan said that from 1913 to 1923 the Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks and Jews registered in the country, were “exiled from these lands or subjected to tortures as a result of



large massacres and genocide”.

“At one time we comprised 40% of

the population,” Paylan said despite an uproar by AKP members. “Today we are one among 1000. Something happened to us, and I call it genocide whatever you call it. The Armenian people know very well what happened to them. I know very well what happened to my father, grandfather. Let’s face [history] together,” he added.

According to Anadolu news agency, AKP member Metin Külünk demanded that Paylan “correct the word genocide.” The legislative session ended, with parliament members condemning Paylan’s statements.

Youth Orchestra News

Cartoon Non-Stop: meeting the expectations of young audience!

On December 26, at the New Year's Eve, the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia presented the concert program Cartoon Non-Stop. Earlier, it was decided that the Orchestra would cross the finish line of 2017 on December 19 by the concert dedicated to the creative days of Stas Namin. But taking into consideration the numerous letters of children the Orchestra decided to meet the expectations of young audience and present the favorite project once again!

The Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia Sergey Smbatyan noted that the public likes project very much. "The fact that the orchestra has received more than 500 requests is the evidence of the project's success. And we decided to sum up the year by organizing a musical celebration for our children. With the classical music we give children the world that they truly love", – said Sergey Smbatyan.



During the evening, the orchestra presented the most favorite cartoon soundtracks. All the performances of the Orchestra were accompanied by shots from the cartoons and the impressive light and sound effects.

The surprises began even before the concert. Fairytale characters, the Santa Claus and Snow Maiden welcomed the audience at the foyer of the Al. Spendiaryan Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet.

The State Youth Orchestra of Armenia tours to China

On December 28 the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia left for a tour in China.

The Youth Orchestra received an invitation from the Beijing Culture and Entertainment Corporation. The orchestra gave

two concerts on December 31 and on January 2 in Haikou (China). The Armenian musicians presented arias from well-known Italian operas (Verdi, Puccini), as well as pieces by Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Bizet and Chinese composers.

Enjoying a Jazz Quintet of Gifted Armenian Youngsters in a Freezing Evening at Ulikhanyan Club ...



Gourgen Khazhakian

Chief Correspondent

In the freezing evening of Sunday 8 January yours truly was walking across Isahakyan street of Yerevan...

When getting the corner, I heard music that I liked...

So in five minutes I found myself sitting in the Ulikhanyan Club among youngsters that we the Yerevan (alas, not numerous already), call "gene bank".

That night a jazz quintet of the same youngsters were performing: Aram Tsaturyan (guitar), Arman Asatryan (piano), Davit Geodakyan (double bass), Daniel Melqonyan (trumpet), Herbert Arustamyan (drums) whose age ranging 17-23.

As Aram Tsaturyan, 17 who studied guitar playing in no school/conservatory but getting private lessons that gave him a chance to pass successfully exams to enter Vienna Conservatory (!) told your author, they play mostly classical jazz – Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Thelonius Monk, Joe Pass and other "giants".

(Notably, Aram&Friends united in "Compass" Rock Band were the third prize winners at the Junior Eurovision Contest' 12 in Amster-

dam with "Sweety Baby" song).

However, they plan to include in repertoire Armenian folk pieces.

These young musicians have a special way of playing: each of them has his solo, and then passing to another band member.

...Listening Aram, yours truly thought about Pat Metheny, and was amazed by play of trumpeter Daniel Melqonyan that reminded myself famous Eddy Rosner when playing Victor Young's "Beautiful Love".

17 year old Daniel, an offspring of a musicians family (with harp player mother, bassist father and saxophonist brother) completes this year his course in Yerevan P.I. Tchaikovsky Specialized Music School.



The Army News, January 2017

Compiled by Gourgen Khazhakian

The Ministry of Defence “hotline” launched

The “hotline” service has commenced operations at the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia. Hereafter, every day, from 09:00 to 18:00, citizens can present their issues concerning the armed forces, by calling 1-28.

From now on, citizens have the opportunity to send communications and contact information necessary for a return call, through free-of-charge phone calls to 1-28, after working hours.

The Minister of Defence and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia has observed the recruitment process

In order to directly examine the winter recruitment process and the level of preparedness of agencies and subdivisions involved in it, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Vigen Sargsyan and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia Lieutenant - General Movses Hakobyan visited the Republic's Central Recruitment Station on the first day of the draft, the January 8th.

Vigen Sargsyan and Movses Hakobyan were present at the recruit reception point, medical examination room, and the lottery room, spoke with new recruits and their parents, and wished the new defenders a peaceful service.

The Minister of Defense and the Chief of Staff followed along with the lottery process which determines place of service, and gave appropriate recommendations and assignments to persons in charge for organizing the draft to pay closer attention to the health of new recruits and properly carry out the draft.



The results of the month of human rights in armed forces were summarized

The results of the month of human rights in armed forces were summarized at the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia on January 10th.

During the event, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Vigen Sargsyan stressed the importance of defending human rights in the Armed Forces, and emphasized the fact that one of the most important functions of the defense administration is civilian, democratic supervision of the armed forces. In this regard, the Minister of Defense specially highlighted the cooperation between the defense administration and the office of the Human Rights Defender, pointing out that the cooperation is fruitful. Vigen Sargsyan expressed the importance of the work carried out by the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the formation of the Research Council on questions concerning the rights of military servicemen, adjacent to the Office of the Human Rights Defender.

“The field of human rights defense has two qualities. First, it is the transformation of an environment of systematic violations, with goal of preventing repetitive violations. Second, it is our determination to

receive information on a case-by-case basis and consistently see that these issues are resolved, by working closely with civil society and the Office of the Human Rights Defender. The Ministry of Defense is particularly interested in whether citizens feel like they are properly protected or not, since that is a necessary condition for it to be able to defend the country,” said Vigen Sargsyan.

Highlighting the importance of the role played by the Research Council, Defender of Human Rights Arman Tatoyan emphasized the fact that this field is a very particular one, and requires work based on professional principles.

During the meeting, the chief of the Center for Human Rights and Integrity Building, Lt.-Colonel Alik Avetisyan presented the work taking place in the Armed Forces human rights defense, and the results of cooperation with international organizations and civil society.

A working session has taken place

A working session led by Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Vigen Sargsyan took place at the administrative complex of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia on the January 9th, with participation of Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia, Lieutenant-General Movses Hakobyan, Deputies of the Chief of the Staff of the Armed Forces, department chiefs, and other high-ranking military officials.

Representatives of commanding staffs of the army corps also participated in the working consultation via video-call.

Works aimed at enhancing alertness and discipline, combat and mobilization preparedness, and combat readiness of troops during the New Year, Christmas and post-holiday time-span were summarized during the video

conference. Events organized for the proper conduct of the winter military draft, current shortcomings and relevant solutions were also discussed.

Preliminary outlining of future plans was made, and participants in the discussion were given relevant assignments.

Vigen Sargsyan and Levon Mkrtchyan visited the “Little Mher” educational center

On January 10th, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Vigen Sargsyan and Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia Levon Mkrtchyan visited the “Little Mher” educational center where they met with the students of the center, their parents and the teaching staff.

The Ministers presented a nuanced view of the program aimed at merging the “Little Mher” educational center with the Monte Melkonyan Military College of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, noting that it is a part of the effort for fundamental reform of military education. Vigen Sargsyan and Levon Mkrtchyan resolved the worries of students and their parents concerning the difficulties of the merger, ensuring them that the educational process will only improve as result, thus positively effecting educational efficiency and the knowledge of the students. Highlighting the fact that the students are free to determine their future place of study, the Ministers expressed assurances that the results of the merger will become evident in the near future.



**Embassy of India
Yerevan**

JOB VACANCY

Embassy of India in Yerevan, Armenia invites application from the interested candidates for filling up the post of “**COMMERCIAL ASSISTANT**”.

Eligibility

Minimum Education: Graduate with fluency in English, Armenian and Russian (both written and spoken). Preference will be given to Economics/Business/Commercial/International Trade background. Knowledge of Georgian language is desirable.

He/he should possess excellent computer and communication skills and good administrative/organizational/management abilities.

Age: 21-35 Years

Work Experience: Preference will be given to candidate(s) having adequate experience in trade/commerce/economic matters.

Responsibilities: The person will be responsible for handling various trade/commercial matters, compilation of statistics and data, responding to trade/commercial queries, liaison with local authorities/bodies on regular basis on various commercial, trade and economic matter. The person will also be required to perform additional duties assigned to him/her from time to time.

Interested applicants may address their application/Curriculum Vitae to:

**Head of Chancery
Embassy of India,
50/2, Dzorapi Street, Yerevan, Armenia**

By E-mail their resume to the following emails

hoc.yerevan@mea.gov.in and
admn.yerevan@mea.gov.in

Last date: January 31, 2017

VivaCell-MTS: War Hero's Family Celebrates New Year in New Home

New Year Gift to 42 families from VivaCell-MTS and Fuller Center for Housing Armenia

The 2016 housing project financed by VivaCell-MTS and implemented by Fuller Center for Housing Armenia in 25 communities of 10 regions of Armenia, ended. In the frames of the project 42 families have finished the construction of their half-built houses or have renovated their homes.

VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph C. Yirikian and Fuller Center for Housing Armenia President Ashot Yeghiazaryan visited the beneficiary families living in Armavir region sharing with them the happiness of housewarming. The first stop was in Shenik village.

The Yeghoyan family of four had lived in a wooden container for 21 years. For more than 20 years, the family had not been able to finish the construction of their half-built house. During the Artsakh war of 1990s, the father of the family, Mher, became a prisoner of war, then escaped and was seriously wounded on the way back and became disabled. He also lost his younger brother at the war. After returning from war, Mher got married, and for years had to overcome the difficulties of living in a metal container together with his wife and children.

"I have seen many difficulties in my life and I do not believe in miracles. You know, for many years I was sure that one can rely only on himself: no one will ever extend a hand of support. Today I am happy I was wrong. I am happy I have regained the trust in mankind. As if we have started a new bright life after the construction of our home," said the father of the family Mher.

"To achieve success, each of us has to sum up in our minds the course of each

day, what we have done and what we haven't within its sequence. At the beginning of each year we do the same measuring our achievements against much stricter criteria. And to be honest we need to evaluate not just us, but the success we have had with choosing a program or a partner, as much as our compatriots' response. We have been cooperating with "Fuller Housing Center" for five years now always striving along

years, we have managed to open the doors to the happiness of 135 families. I am glad to announce that our partnership continues," said VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager Ralph Yirikian.

The partners also visited the Gevorgyan family in Margara village. In last spring, the partnering teams did floor concreting works in their house.

"My husband was born and raised in a soil house. His father started the construction of the house, but was not able to finish it. We have been trying to do our best to raise our four children in decent conditions, but all our efforts were in vain: we, too, did not manage to finish the construction of the half-built house. Now, with your help, our long-cherished dream has come true. Thank you," said the mother of the family, Azganoush.

"For each of us our home is our castle. Only a safe roof above the head gives one self-confidence and courage. Sharing with these families the happiness of housewarming is an indescribable feeling. These families met the New Year in new homes with re-

newed hope and faith," said Fuller Center for Housing Armenia President Ashot Yeghiazaryan.

In 2016, VivaCell-MTS has invested about AMD 105 million for the implementation of the housing project. 21 families have finished the construction of their half-built houses; another 21 have renovated the houses. In the frames of the five-year partnership, 135 families have been supported through the housing project in ten regions of Armenia. Altogether, more than AMD 333 million has been invested.



awakening hope and faith in people to also shape a system of values that is based on the sense of responsibility. Within those five

Armenian Assembly urges Senate panel to stop turning a blind eye to Azerbaijan's caviar diplomacy

The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) has called on the Senate Judiciary Committee to obtain the Attorney General nominee Senator Jeff Sessions' (R-AL) commitment to enforce the letter and spirit of laws already on the books to end Azerbaijan's caviar diplomacy tactics.

In a letter to United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary Chairman Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Ranking Member Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) on the upcoming nomination of Sen. Sessions for Attorney General, Assembly Board of Trustees Co-Chairs Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian identified several issues of concern, particularly as related "to the undue influence of foreign governments on America's democratic institutions and the need to fully enforce the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) and ensure compliance of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)." Assembly members and Armenian Americans are also pursuing this issue in their home states, considering the increasing commitment of President-Elect Donald J. Trump with the "drain the swamp" campaign.

"When it comes to the integrity of America's constitutional system, the rule of law and our governance process, we must ensure that the law is duly enforced and that any attempt by foreign governments and their agents are roundly condemned and promptly prosecuted," Assembly Co-Chairs added. "Both Turkey and Azerbaijan have circumvented our laws and bought influence without repercussion for many years now. That has to stop."

The Assembly stressed their concern about

President Ilham Aliyev constantly buying foreign influence, citing many instances in the letter. For example, in a Bloomberg News article published last week entitled "Azeri Oil Money Got a Pass From This Ethics Committee," the columnist writes about the illegally funded congressional trips to Baku discovered by the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE), which included expensive gifts given to U.S. legislators. Barsamian and Krikorian noted in the letter that such reported activities "constitute a flagrant disregard for the law and strike at the core of our constitutional government through blatant foreign influence peddling."

The Assembly previously urged the Department of Justice to investigate these foreign trips illegally funded by Azerbaijan. "We respectfully request a full and thorough investigation by the Department of Justice into these groups and the full application of the law. The reported activities constitute plainly illegal behavior and strikes at the core of our Constitutional government through blatant foreign influence peddling," the Assembly said in its letter to then Attorney General Loretta Lynch. A recent publication has tied Turkey to hacking of the Armenian National Institute website, and requests to the FBI since 2000 to follow up have not been effective in stopping that pattern of behavior.

The Justice Department has brought some cases involving Azerbaijan through the FCPA, but the Assembly points out that much more is needed. The Assembly Co-Chairs said, "We prefer not to think that Azerbaijan's retention of the Podesta Group at hundreds of thousands of dollars per year

to lobby for Azerbaijan is preventing such investigations." The Bloomberg News columnist noted: "It's hard to tell whether it's this creativity and generosity or any real U.S. strategic interest that makes the U.S. overlook the country's brutal dictatorship. A combination of both is likely: Without the 'caviar diplomacy,' Azerbaijan might be considered too small to defy declared U.S. values and principles for its sake."

Last month, the European Stability Initiative (ESI) denounced Azerbaijan's lobbying tactics and reported that expensive watches, jewelry, computers, and large sums of money, among other gifts, were provided to several politicians from a number of countries in Europe. ESI stated that "the ease with which democratic institutions and safeguards can be undermined has emerged as a fundamental threat to European democracy."

"The Aliyev regime is also engaged in this type of foreign influence buying to distract from its efforts to continue violating its ceasefire agreements with the Republics of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh – to avoid democracy and human rights issues there by eliminating the Christian Armenians," Assembly Co-Chairs said. "Azerbaijan's activities in the United States come at a time when the Aliyev regime continues to deprive its citizens of basic human rights and freedoms," they continued.

In the past year, additional news came to light indicating Azerbaijan's violations to international human rights standards, which were reported by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the U.S. Helsinki Commission.



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**Aries:**

Mars, the god of war and your avatar in the zodiac, begins this year in the laid back sign of Pisces. The pace is slow until it moves into your personal sign on Jan. 28. At that point you will sense a

new surge of power and self-confidence. You will have a strong urge to escape whatever contains you on Feb 23—27. Bow to the authorities between the end of May and mid-July. They are bigger than you are. Give special interest to health issues during Sep and Oct. Use caution Oct 11 through the 19th as accidents are possible. Love life reverses or decelerates early March through April, but returns to an improved normal in May. Avoid making big decisions while Mercury is retrograding in your sign between April 20 and May 14th. Starting in September, you will have benefits connected to insurance, stocks, partner's resources, taxes, and/or estate matters. You likely will make an important decision about partnership(s) in Nov. or Dec.

**Taurus:**

Venus, your avatar in the zodiac, begins the year in romantic and artistic Pisces. Near the end of January she moves into a sign that causes you to feel cautious and hesitant about all her interests. "Something" just doesn't feel quite right

in a relationship and by March, you will be certain that you need to depart a situation so you can give it more thought. Near the middle of April the cause of your reticence becomes clear. You likely will give that thing or person a wide berth until the beginning of June, when you feel more sure of yourself. In Oct. Jupiter moves into your 7th house of partnerships/clientele. Jupiter is known to make improvements in whatever sector he travels. It is likely you will make one or more decisions about partnerships near the beginning of Oct. A new relationship at that time will have a rocky start, but things become much smoother in Nov. In Dec. you will be especially conscious of expenditures and debts. You may prefer to set aside extravagance for the 2017 Holiday Season and that is appropriate for you. Ignore the internal critic who chastises you for living a leaner season.

**Gemini:**

You begin this year with Mercury, your ruling planet, in retrograde motion. So you will enjoy a pause in activity while you continue to ponder your life and your investments. Mercury turns direct

on Jan. 8, giving you the sense that you can move forward again. The week following March 19 will be intense. Life slows to a crawl between Mar 24th and May 3rd while you wait for people in your life to make decisions. Between May 16 and June 6 you may prefer to be solitary and quiet. Your attention shifts once again near the summer solstice to things financial. Use caution with tools and machinery from June 28 to July 4. On July 23 your ruling planet moves into shadow territory. Between July 23 and Sep 20 you are focused on home, property and family. Repairs are necessary, perhaps even in relationships. The last Mercury retrograde for you is in the sign of partnership(s), whether marital or business. You may feel the need to review old issues together. The Other may have circumstances that cause you to slow down and wait for him/her to make a decision. Between Jan and Sep Jupiter, the planet of expansion is traveling in your house of fun, play, gambling, lovers, and children. In Oct. it moves to the territory of work and routine. Both of these areas will be improved through the year.

**Cancer:**

We cannot look at Cancer without giving thought to this year's eclipses, which affect the Moon Children most of all. The Full Moon eclipse on Feb. 10 shines a spotlight on your financial affairs. If

there are errors in calculation, they will be discovered, or perhaps a new resource becomes available. Later in Feb., the New Moon eclipse occurs in the house of your travel plans, education, church affiliations, publication and legal affairs. This suggests the beginning of new ideas or plans in one of these areas. On Aug. 7 there will be a Full Moon eclipse in your solar 8th house of investments, shared resources, inheritance, debt and money owed to you. It is likely that you will be taking a close look at one or more of those issues. Then the New Moon Eclipse occurs in your 2nd solar house of financial resources. The revelations of the Aug. 7 eclipse may send you back to study and refine your spending habits. Jupiter, the planet of expansion and improvements, spends the first 9 months of 2016 in your house of living quarters, family matters and property. There will be improvements in these areas. If help is needed, it will come to you. In October, Jupiter moves its spotlight to your solar 5th, bringing a note of creativity, fun and play into your life. It will remain in that territory for a year. Those who want to have children likely will be given that gift. Saturn continues in the house of work and health. It demands that you focus attention on each of these through the end of the year.

**Leo:**

You begin the year in a work mode. Now is the time to start a diet or exercise routine. It calls for reorganization of your schedule but you will probably choose to do it anyway. The month of Feb. constellates around dealing with

debt, investments, and finances (or other material things) that you share with others. An unusual total eclipse of the Moon occurs in your sign on Feb. 10. This is a time of revelation, whether personal or public. The time of late March-early April may bring art, beauty, or a new love into your life. Give yourself time for reflection and solitude beginning with the Summer Solstice until near your birthday in August. The month of August is intense with a new Moon eclipse in your sign on Aug. 21st. That symbolizes the dawning of a new thought, plan, or idea. For the month between Aug. 22 and Sep 22 your attention is likely to be focused on organizing your finances and putting accounts in order. Between the end of Oct. and mid-Nov. you will be attending to home and family matters. Jupiter, the planet of expansion and general good fortune, is in your solar third house of communications, siblings, and short distance travel. In Oct. it begins a year long trek through your house of home, family and property.

**Virgo:**

Mercury, your avatar among the planets, has been retrograding since mid-December. So you have experienced a slower holiday season than many. You may be reflecting upon your relationship to a lover or a child. After Jan. 8 life begins to resume normal speed. The week following March 19 is likely to be intense, with concerns over taxes, debts, or money that comes from joint resources. That could be related to partner's income, pensions, or insurance payoffs. Between March 23 and May 5 it is best not to initiate new legal, educational or publishing matters. Wait out that time to see if those issues will resolve themselves. If they are not resolved, work on those with gusto between May 16 and June 6. Use caution with tools and machinery from June 28 to July 4. On July 25th Mercury enters your own sign of Virgo

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and remains there essentially through Sep 29. It will go through an entire retrograde cycle during this period. Be prepared to accept that time as indecisive, especially with long term planning. The last Mercury retrograde period begins in mid-Nov. and continues through the end of the year. That will be a time of attention to home, property, and family. Jupiter has expanded your financial resources since Sep of 2016 and this will continue until Oct. 2017. It is possible that you have entered a contract or purchased an investment that will be completed in the fall of 2017.



Libra:

Jupiter, the original Zeus, is firmly in your sign until Oct. He tends to lighten any load, and soften burdens. He is a carrier of good fortune as well. You may already be involved in a new relationship and it is likely to continue. Venus, the original goddess of love, romance and the arts, is your planetary avatar. She begins the year in your work/daily routine area, bringing positive experiences to that area. During Feb. through May she goes through a retrograde cycle. During those months you or your partner may be in a questioning period. This is meant to give both of you some time to evaluate how to make the relationship better. Some may even separate for a time to reflect before coming together later in June. In Oct/ your income or other resources will show signs of improvement. You may also begin a new relationship which is mutually beneficial. If not a new relationship, it will be a fresh beginning. The wrinkles will be worked out by Nov. Save money for upcoming repairs to your aging home or vehicle in 2018.



Scorpio:

Mars, the Warrior god, is one of your ruling planets and it begins the year in your 5th house of romance, children and creativity. Near Jan. 11 you likely will have a bright idea in one of these areas. Health matters become important between Jan 27 and Mar. 9. Matters of partnership are prominent Mar 9 through April 20. You have challenges between April 21 and May 30. You want to tell your troubles to others, but it is a bad idea to do so. The Powers That Be are stronger than you until mid-August. Then you may get a lucky break and be in the right place at the right time late Aug, and early Sep. In Sep and Oct you likely will be offering yourself as a caretaker for another. Beginning Oct. 10 for one year Jupiter enters your sign, lightening your load and relieving your anxieties. From Oct. 22 through the end of Nov. your best results will occur by waiting. On Dec. 9, your ruling planet enters your sign and you will have a burst of energy and self-confidence.



Sagittarius:

You have one more year of serious work on your new identity. Saturn has been in your sign for 1.5 years. That is a long time, but you are re-creating yourself and that requires effort and energy, and multiple beginnings. It is not the type of thing that can be managed briefly. One piece of the puzzle began with a challenging launch in August, 2016. During Jan. 2017 it comes to a turning point. You likely will decide to pour more effort into the project or let it go entirely in favor of some other, easier approach toward your goal. If you choose to remain with it, you will see results by the end of May. That is another turning point, requiring you to pour on the effort once again. It requires considerable tenacity to keep it afloat and many would not do it. You have considerable support through friends and allies. There will likely be a surprising event early in March with an extra boost of help. You will discover a high tech program or gadget in May that will ease the burden of your journey. And

by the end of 2017 you will see the new identity emerging. Mercury will retrograde in your sign during Nov-Dec and require you to add the finishing touches. This project may be among those hardest in your lifetime, but it is well worth it to become your own person.



Capricorn:

During December of 2016, Mercury was retrograding in your sign. That phenomenon often represents a feeling of difficulty concluding anything. During January there will be a slow move toward better motion and accomplishments. Saturn, your ruling planet, continues for one more year in your 12th house, suggesting that you may still be in the quiet zone. Two years out of every 24 is a time for a metaphorical sabbatical. Your ambitions may not yet be rewarded at this time. During this period (2016-2017) attempts to achieve recognition are thwarted. Rest now and don't abuse yourself because you can't "get ahead". In Nov and Dec of 2017 you will experience a crack in the shadows which will grow to a fresh start in the winter of 2018. Be patient and you will feel better at that time. Meanwhile, take this time to reflect upon what mountain you want to climb next.



Aquarius:

In August of 2016 you may have taken on a major responsibility at your work or in the community around you. At the time you did not know the depth of the challenge or you might have bypassed it. However, you are not a quitter so if you adopt a responsibility you generally will see it through to its end. This project likely has one more year to the finish line, so you must pace yourself. A Full Moon eclipse on Feb. 10th brings a time of illumination over any marital or partnership situations. Then the answering eclipse of August 7 helps you resolve your personal issues in those same relationship(s). You will see the situation more clearly and will be better able to discuss it after that. There is likely a surprising twist or shift near Mar. 2 that alters your plans with regard to transportation, the law, communications, education and publishing. A wish may be fulfilled. During 2018 you will move into a situation that is more solitary and allows you greater quietude than you have had in a long time.



Pisces:

Mars, the Warrior god, is your companion for all of January. You may use it to take initiatives beyond your normal reticent self. It is also a great starter signal for a new exercise routine. Jupiter, one of your ruling planets, spends much of this year in the sign of Libra. This brings partnership(s) of all kinds to the fore. It suggests the sharing of resources with others for whom you care. The Full Moon Eclipse in your sign occurs on Feb. 10, symbolizing revelations, whether public or private. Your work and health will be the subject. Financial surprises may happen in March and Sep. That may or may not be favorable. Income continues to be up and down. Don't allow anyone to sell you something too good to be true. Don't mix water and electricity, especially between Aug. and Oct. Note that there will be a new moon eclipse in your sign on Feb. 26. This signifies the beginning of new creativity for those in Pisces. It begins in the unconscious and may not surface until a few months go by. Saturn continues for another year in your 10th house of life direction. If you love your work, there will be more of it. If you are weary with it, then you may decide to do something else by the end of 2017.

Catholicos Aram I's visit to Syria a source of inspiration for Aleppo Armenians

The visit of His Holiness Aram I, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, to Syria was a source of great inspiration for Aleppo Armenians. The Catholicos' call for reconstruction of Aleppo became a guarantee of restoration and survival for the community.

Avo Avoshyan, lecturer at the Yerevan State University's Chair of Diaspora Studies, says "it's hard to estimate the percentage of Armenians that have stayed in Aleppo."

According to him, there could still be 6-8 thousand Armenians living there despite the cruel five-year war. He's confident the visit of the Catholicos will inspire Aleppo Armenians to return.

Administrator of the "Aleppo Armenians Facebook page Sossy Mishoyan-Dabbaghian considers that those, who have settled in Armenia or the West, will hardly return to Syria, but believes that the families that have moved to safer places in Syria are likely to return to their homes in Aleppo.

Both hope the support for Aleppo Armenians will be maintained and the community will be reorganized.

His Holiness Aram I visited Syria earlier this month. The Catholicos had a meeting with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and representatives of the Armenian community.

His Holiness Aram I celebrated the Christmas Liturgy at the Holy Mother of God Church, assisted on the altar by Archbishop Shahan Sarkissian, the Diocesan Bishop, and Bishop Norayr Ashegian, a



member of the brotherhood accompanying the Catholicos.

Catholicos Aram I focussed his sermon on the biblical verse, "Do not be afraid, for God goes with us," assuring the community of the solidarity of Armenians everywhere. He said that in their history, Armenians have overcome persecutions through their faith in Jesus Christ. He then invited the community to pray that the Good News of the Prince of Peace will renew them in their faith, inspire new hope and fill their lives with the love of God.

Armenian Assembly highlights policy issues for Secretary of State nomination

As the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met to consider President-Elect Donald Trump's Secretary of State Nominee Mr. Rex Tillerson, former ExxonMobil CEO, the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) highlighted key policy issues in a letter sent to Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN) and Ranking Member Ben Cardin (D-MD).

"We need a Secretary of State committed to strengthening the permanent bonds between Armenia and the United States, two countries that share common values and beliefs, and who will see in Armenia, which remains an island of stability, a vital ally in the region," Assembly Co-Chairs Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian said in their letter to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "United States-Armenia relations have been consistently characterized by friendship and reciprocity and an active Armenian American community strongly supports further expanding the United States partnership with the Republic of Armenia," they added.

Assembly Co-Chairs highlighted several areas of concern, including Azerbaijan's flagrant violations of the 1994/5 cease-fire agreement with respect to the Nagorno

Karabakh conflict, intentionally escalating the violence as pressure for Armenian concessions and launching a 4-day war last April.

"Such behavior makes it clear that Azerbaijan cannot be trusted to honor its commitments and must be held accountable for its egregious human rights violations," the Co-Chairs said in the letter. "All Americans should be deeply troubled by...reports of Azerbaijan's ISIS-inspired mutilations of civilians and beheadings of soldiers."

"Now is the time to strengthen the OSCE process and ensure vigorous U.S. engagement to bring about a lasting and durable settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict that is agreeable to all parties, and based upon America's founding commitment to the principles of democracy, rule of law, and self-determination," they continued.

Barsamian and Krikorian also noted the Assembly's concerns with respect to Turkey's more than 20-year blockade of Armenia and its ongoing campaign of genocide denial. "Within Turkey, its treatment of minority communities, repression of basic freedoms, ties to ISIS, and its ongoing failure to return confiscated Armenian

churches as well as its continued denial of the Armenian Genocide remain troubling trends," Co-Chairs Barsamian and Krikorian stated.

In his opening statement, Secretary of State Nominee Tillerson said that "Our approach to human rights begins by acknowledging that American leadership requires moral clarity. We do not face an 'either or' choice on defending global human rights. Our values are our interests when it comes to human rights and humanitarian assistance...But our leadership demands action specifically focused on improving the conditions of people the world over, utilizing both aid and economic sanctions as instruments of foreign policy when appropriate."

Both Azerbaijan and Turkey have a history of human rights abuses, especially in recent reports by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the U.S. Helsinki Commission. America and its next Secretary of State need to uphold America's core values and protect fundamental freedoms and human rights.

As the confirmation process continues, the Assembly will continue to advance key priorities and look for ways to further expand U.S.-Armenia relations.

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La La Land sweeps Golden Globe Awards

Hollywood musical *La La Land* has broken the record for the most Golden Globe Awards, winning seven prizes, the BBC reports.

It won in every category in which it was nominated – including best musical or comedy film and acting trophies for Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling.

It also won the awards for best director, screenplay, score and song.

The Globes are seen as pointers to the Oscars. *Moonlight* was named best drama film, while Casey Affleck and Isabelle Huppert won other acting prizes.

Affleck was named best actor in a film drama for his role in *Manchester By The Sea* and French star Isabelle Huppert was the surprise winner of the award for best film drama actress.

Her performance in thriller *Elle* – which was also named best foreign language film – beat contenders including Natalie Portman, who had been considered the favourite for playing Jackie Kennedy in *Jackie*.

Viola Davis was named best supporting film actress for playing a woman in 1950s Pittsburgh in *Fences* – a role she first played on Broadway six years ago.



In a surprise result, British actor Aaron Taylor-Johnson was named best supporting actor for his role in *Nocturnal Animals* – a prize that had been widely expected to go to Mahershala Ali for *Moonlight*.

Zootopia was named best animated feature film at Sunday's ceremony, which was hosted by Jimmy Fallon.

Exhibition at the Museum for Islamic Art in Jerusalem to present the story of an Armenian composer

The Museum for Islamic Art is hosting Dor Guez's solo exhibition in Jerusalem. The project's title, *The Sick Man of Europe*, quotes a term coined in the 19th century to describe the disintegrating Ottoman Empire, according to e-flux.com.

Using this term, Guez examines the culture and history of some of the nation states that have emerged from the Ottoman debris. He appropriates this metaphor by reconstructing "the sick man" as a historic figure. Each section of the project recounts the story of an individual who embodies a subject fallen victim to military conditions.

The exhibition is centered on a film in which Guez presents the story of Hagop, an Armenian composer whose family was expelled from Kütahya during World War I. Guez accompanies Hagop on his first visit to sacred sites in contemporary Armenia. Along the way we hear an archival conversation between Komitas and Suni, two renowned early Armenian composers. The two compare composing to a journey, and point out a connection between the art of composition and Armenian topography.

The exhibition also includes a series of photograms featuring ground plans of Armenian churches, ceramic objects from Kütahya



that Guez traced and extracted from the museum's collection, and showcases containing prints reproduced from glass slides, documenting the Ottoman army during WWI, among them, a slide showing Enver Pasha, one of the principal perpetrators of the Armenian genocide.

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