

## Security a cornerstone of cooperation between Armenia and Artsakh – PM



Security is one of the cornerstones of cooperation between Artsakh and Armenia, because Artsakh and Armenia are part of a common security area, a common security environment, and here our agenda cannot be separated and differentiated, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at a joint sitting of the Security Councils of the two countries in Stepanakert.

“In this respect, we naturally attach great importance to the efficiency of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh and the moral and psychological atmosphere in the Armed Forces,” he stated.

The Prime Minister stated that the government of Armenia has recently taken enormous measures and allocated huge resource to implement essential and tangible changes in the Army, ranging from acquisition of armaments, to social guarantees for officers, ordinary personnel, and monetary compensation.

And as a result, he said, “all of us naturally expect the discipline, moral and psychological atmosphere and relations in the army to be brought to a whole new level, and I believe that this problem is truly solvable.”

“Of course, the Armed Forces are the primary guarantee of our security, but in carrying out this mission, the Army should never be left alone and the operational burden of the Army should be somewhat relieved. I believe that we should finally state that democracy is one of the important guarantees that will strengthen and reinforce the security of the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh,” PM Pashinyan stated.

The Prime Minister stated that the competitiveness of the two countries’ economies is also a most important components of our security.

“It is the economy that must provide the Armed Forces of Armenia and Artsakh with the necessary resources to carry out their functions, and today we will also discuss issues of strategic economic importance. But on the other

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<p>PM Pashinyan receives EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>p. 2</b></p>	<p>Serzh Sargsyan’s trial to start on February 25</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>p. 4</b></p>	<p>Armenia the most militarized country in Europe – GMI ranking</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>p.7</b></p>	<p>Several US Congressmen to send their office staffers to Artsakh to observe election</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>p. 5</b></p>
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## PM Pashinyan receives EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia Toivo Käär. Head of EU Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Andrea Victorin was in attendance.

Pleased with the current status of EU-Armenia relations, the Prime Minister noted that the ongoing co-operation is of intensive nature. The Premier advised that our country is in the process of holding a referendum on constitutional amendments and presented its rationale and objectives.

The interlocutors discussed issues related



to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Nikol Pashinyan assured of Armenia's commitment to achieving a peaceful settlement in the OSCE Minsk Group for-

mat. He reflected on his vision of the negotiated settlement. The Prime Minister highlighted the involvement of Artsakh's civil society in confidence building measures, which will help shape a constructive atmosphere in the negotiation process.

Taking the opportunity, the head of the Armenian government and the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia exchanged views on other issues of regional importance.

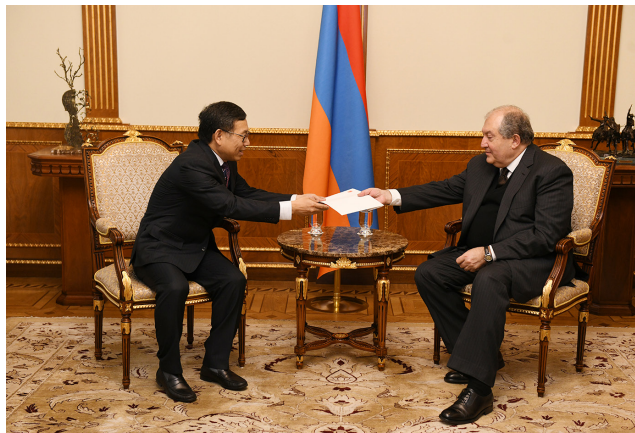
## China's Xi Jinping hails Armenia's support in fighting the coronavirus

China's President Xi Jinping has commended Armenia's efforts in helping China fight the new type of coronavirus.

President Armen Sarkissian received on February 19 the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Armenia Tian Erlong.

The President of Armenia and Ambassador of China spoke in particular about the situation created by the coronavirus infection and preventive measures.

Ambassador Tian Erlong passed to President Sarkissian a letter from the President of China Xi Jinping in which the latter



expressed his gratitude to the President of Armenia noting that support of the Armenian side in the fight against coronavirus epidemic has had its impact on the mutual trust at the highest level and friendship of

the two nations.

"I attach the utmost importance to the development of the Armenian-Chinese relations and stand ready together with you to put efforts to elevate our bilateral relations to a new level for the benefit of our two countries and peoples," the letter of the President of the People's Republic of China reads.

At the meeting, the parties hailed the existing level of the interstate relations and expressed confidence that the sides would continue to make efforts aimed at the development of the Armenian-Chinese friendship and expansion of the existing partnership.

## Tariffs for roaming services between Armenia, Artsakh to be cut further

Artsakh's President Bako Sahakyan and Armenia's Minister of High-Tech Industry Hakob Arshakyan have discussed a wide range of issues related to the development of the country's military-industrial complex.

Speaking to Artsakhpress after the meeting, Minister Arshakyan highlighted the

huge potential of Artsakh-based companies.

"Today we explored the potential of these companies and discussed how we can support them and cooperate in any way," the Minister added.

He emphasized that a number of issues related to high-tech sphere were also dis-

cussed with the President of Artsakh. In particular, reference was made to enhancing the accessibility of communication.

Arshakyan said an agreement has been reached on further cut in tariffs of mobile roaming services from July 1, 2020.

The first drop in prices came in 2019, he reminded.



## Two top military officials dismissed



The chief of Armenia's military police and another army general were dismissed on February 19 following a spate of non-combat deaths of soldiers.

President Armen Sarkissian fired Major-General Artur Baghdasaryan and Major-General Aleksan Aleksanyan in separate decrees requested by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Baghdasaryan has headed the military police since May 2017. He was promoted to the rank of army general as recently as on January 24.

For his part, Aleksanyan was the chief of an Armenian army department tasked with monitoring and maintaining military morale. He had been appointed to that post last November.

Pashinyan promised major "personnel-related decisions" after meeting with Armenia's top military and law-enforcement officials on Monday to discuss recent weeks' increase in the number of soldiers dying in non-combat circumstances.

The Armenian military has reported 13 such deaths since the beginning of this year. Eight of these soldiers have died in accidents and other circumstances not related to their military service.

The five other victims are believed to have committed suicide or been shot dead by other servicemen in separate incidents investigated by law-enforcement authorities. The shootings have caused outrage in Armenia and cast a renewed spotlight on the chronic problem of hazing and other abuses in the army ranks.

The chief of the army's General Staff, Lieutenant-General Artak Davtyan, on February 18 briefed lawmakers on ongoing efforts to root out the "criminal subculture" and strengthen discipline in the army ranks. Speaking after that meeting, he confirmed that "personnel changes" within the top army brass are imminent.

Davtyan also said that a number of other officers have already been demoted or discharged from the armed forces this month because of the non-combat fatalities. He expressed confidence that military investigators will identify those directly responsible for them.

Pashinyan stressed on Tuesday that the

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hand, we have to note that the security situation in our region is unfortunately getting worse and we are witnessing new tensions here than solutions, and this context will also be discussed at a joint Security Council meeting," Nikol Pashinyan added.

He noted that in the context of the geopolitical realities created in the region "we have a joint responsibility not only in terms of the security of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh, but also have a special responsibility in terms of ensuring security in our region and ensuring global security."

"I am pleased to note that the approaches of the Armenian and Artsakh authorities are similar in this respect and our mission and commitment is to ensure our national security, regional security and our contribution to global security. This is also an important issue on our agenda and one of the key areas of our cooperation where we think we are working effectively together and of course that cooperation will become more and more effective," the Prime Minister stated.

number of non-combat deaths among Armenian military personnel fell to a "historical low" last year. "Our objective is to maintain this dynamic," he wrote on Facebook.



## Opposition parties to help ‘No’ campaign for Armenian Referendum

(RFE/RL- Yerevan) - Two major opposition parties have pledged to cooperate with a group of lawyers campaigning for a “no” vote in the upcoming referendum on a government proposal to oust most members of Armenia’s Constitutional Court.

The 61 lawyers critical of the Armenian government were officially registered on Tuesday as the sole “No” side in the unfolding referendum campaign.

The official status allows them to have free airtime on state television and appoint two of the seven members of each precinct-level election commission that will be formed for the April 5 vote. They will thus need to recruit over 4,000 sympathizers ready to join those commissions, a difficult task for the mostly Yerevan-based lawyers.

Earlier this week, the No campaign ap-

pealed to Armenia’s four leading opposition parties to help fill its commission seats with their members and supporters.

All of those parties have questioned the legality of the referendum, saying that the court-related amendments drafted by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s team contradict the Armenian constitution. But none of them has decided to officially campaign against a “Yes” vote sought by Pashinyan.

According to Ruben Melikyan, a “No” campaign coordinator, the opposition Bright Armenia (LHK) and Dashnaksutyun parties have responded positively to the appeal.

“We need to be sure that we will have people capable of performing the duties of commission chair, secretary or member, and the public should be confident that

those functions are performed by people who sincerely oppose the referendum process,” Melikyan told RFE/RL’s Armenian service on February 21.

LHK and Dashnaksutyun representatives confirmed that they will allow and encourage members of their parties to join the commissions and monitor the proper conduct of the referendum.

Dashnaksutyun’s Ishkhan Saghatelian said this is not at odds with his party’s calls for a boycott of the vote. He argued that Dashnaksutyun’s objective is to scuttle the passage of the constitutional changes.

The two other opposition forces, the former ruling Republican Party and Gagik Tsarukyan’s Prosperous Armenia Party, have not yet responded to the lawyers’ appeal.

## Serzh Sargsyan’s trial to start on February 25

(RFE/RL- Yerevan) - Armenia’s former President Serzh Sargsyan will go on trial on February 25 on corruption charges which he rejects as politically motivated.

The Special Investigative Service (SIS) charged Sargsyan in early December with organizing the “embezzlement by a group of officials” of 489 million drams (just over \$1 million) in government funds allocated in 2013 for the provision of subsidized diesel fuel to farmers.

The SIS claimed that Sarkisian interfered in a government tender for the fuel supplier to ensure that it is won by a company belonging to his longtime friend, businessman Barsegh Beglaryan, rather than another fuel importer that offered a lower price. It also indicted Beglaryan, former Agriculture Minister Sergo Karapetyan, his former deputy Samvel Galstyan and another former government official.

All five suspects deny any wrongdoing. None of them has been held in pre-trial de-



tention.

Sergo Karapetyan headed the ministry during the alleged embezzlement. The high-profile criminal case is reportedly based on his incriminating testimony against Sargsyan and Beglaryan.

According to Beglaryan’s lawyer, Nikolay Hakobyan, the ex-minister stood by that testimony when he and the wealthy businessman were brought face to face and interrogated by the SIS earlier this month.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Hakobyan described as “baseless” investigators’ claims that his client “prodded” Sargsyan

to have the fuel supply contract awarded to his firm.

Sargsyan’s lawyers and the former ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) still headed by the 65-year-old ex-president strongly deny the embezzlement charges. They say that he is prosecuted in retaliation for his public criticism of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Sarkisian, who ruled Armenia from 2008-2018, accused Pashinyan’s government of jeopardizing democracy and stifling dissent in a November 20 speech at a congress of the European People’s Party held in Croatia. He had kept a low profile since resigning in April 2018 amid mass protests against his continued rule led by Pashinyan.

Pashinyan has repeatedly implicated Sargsyan, his family and political entourage in corruption both before and after coming to power in the “Velvet Revolution.”



## Several US Congressmen to send their office staffers to Artsakh to observe elections

Several US Congressmen announced that their office employees will visit the Republic of Artsakh at the invitation of Stepanakert to observe the process of upcoming elections scheduled on March 31, Voice of America reported.

“Of course, we want to have fair elections in Artsakh on March 31, so I would like to inform you that I decided to send my staffer to observe the process of the elections”, US Congresswoman Judy Chu said.

Congresswoman Jackie Speier, who has Armenian origins, stated that it’s very important that democracy continues in Artsakh.



James Johnson, senior advisor to Congressman Frank Pallone, is going to depart for Artsakh to conduct monitoring during elections. “I examined and saw that the previous elections in Artsakh have been free, fair and transparent with all criteria.

We hope these elections will also be free”, he said.

In his turn Congressman Frank Pallone stated that it’s very important to show to the whole world that democracy is established in Artsakh. “We want to highlight that democracy works in Artsakh and is in accordance with all the standards of free society”.

Despite the position of several Congressmen, the US Department of State has not recognized the previous elections held in Artsakh.

Presidential and parliamentary elections will be held in Artsakh on March 31.

## We cannot have Turkey’s laws on France – Macron



French President Emmanuel Macron has announced measures to end a programme that allowed foreign countries to send imams and teachers to France in a bid to crack down on what he called the risk of “separatism,” France24 reports.

During a visit to the eastern French city of Mulhouse, Macron said the government sought to combat “foreign interference” in

how Islam is practiced and the way its religious institutions are organized.

“A problem arises when, in the name of religion, some want to separate themselves from the Republic and therefore not respect its laws,” he said.

‘We cannot have Turkey’s laws on France’ The scrapping of the programme granting countries the right to send imams and teachers to France would instead be replaced by bilateral agreements to ensure French state has control over the courses and their content starting in September. France had agreements with a number of countries, including Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, said Macron. But the only country with which France did not

reach a bilateral agreement was Turkey. “Turkey today can make the choice to follow that path with us or not, but I won’t let any foreign country feed a cultural, religious or identity-related separatism on our Republic’s ground,” he said. “We cannot have Turkey’s laws on France’s ground. No way,” Macron added.

Turkey runs a vast network of mosques inside the country and abroad under the powerful Diyanet, or Directorate of Religious Affairs. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Diyanet budget has dramatically increased amid criticism that the body was being used by Ankara as a foreign policy tool and an attempt to extend Turkey’s soft power.

## Armenian Embassy in Iran temporarily suspends consular services

The Armenian Embassy in Iran is temporarily suspending its consular section’s work (citizens’ registration and reception) starting February 23, the embassy said in a statement amid the novel coronavirus (covid-19) outbreak in Iran.

“The embassy apologizes for the inconvenience,” it said Sunday morning.

The embassy did not mention for how long the consular section will remain closed but noted that it will issue updates.

Earlier on February 22, Armenia [warned](#) its nationals against all but essential travel to Iran.



## Armenia removed from EU “grey list” of foreign tax havens



Armenia has been removed from the EU “grey” list of foreign tax havens.

The country was earlier placed on a “grey list” that gives authorities time to introduce legislation to address tax deficiencies identified by Brussels.

The Council of the European Union has adopted [revised conclusions](#) on the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax

purposes.

Sixteen jurisdictions (Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cabo Verde, Cook Islands, Curaçao, Marshall Islands, Montenegro, Nauru, Niue, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Vietnam) managed to implement all the necessary reforms to comply with EU tax good governance prin-

ciples ahead of the agreed deadline and are therefore removed from the “grey list.”

In addition to the 8 jurisdictions that were already listed, the EU has decided to include the following jurisdictions in its blacklist of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions: Cayman Islands, Palau, Panama and Seychelles.

These jurisdictions did not implement the tax reforms to which they had committed by the agreed deadline.

Blacklisted countries face difficulties accessing EU funding programmes, while European companies doing business in those jurisdictions have to take additional compliance measures.

The list, which the EU started in 2017 to put pressure on countries to crack down on tax havens and unfair competition, included 15 countries in 2018 but has shrunk.

## Armenian Tax Audits ‘far more effective in 2019’

Armenia’s State Revenue Committee (SRC) said on February 19 that it more than doubled last year the total amount of additional taxes collected as a result of tax audits.

The head of the government agency, Davit Ananyan, stressed that it achieved the sharp increase despite reducing the number of the audits of company accounts by 12.5 percent.

“In 1,020 audits conducted in 2019, we mandated the payment of 83 billion drams (\$174 million) in additional sums,” the Armenpress news agency quoted Ananyan as telling journalists.

By contrast, he said, the SRC conducted



in 2018 1,166 audits but raised only about 36 billion drams as a result.

The SRC’s overall tax receipts rose by 16 percent, to just over 1.5 trillion drams (\$3.2 billion), last year. Government officials say this sizable increase was made possible by SRC’s continued efforts to improve tax administration and combat tax evasion. Faster

economic growth recorded in Armenia also contributed to it.

During such audits companies inspected by the SRC are allowed to adjust their revenues and avoid penalties. They will risk criminal proceedings if tax inspectors suspect them of deliberately underreporting their earnings.

One of Ananyan’s deputies, Eduard Hovannisyan, said in December that the SRC is now conducting 330 criminal investigations into suspected instances of serious tax fraud.

The Armenian government’s tax revenues are projected to reach almost 1.7 trillion drams (US\$3.6 billion) this year.



## Armenia the most militarized country in Europe – GMI ranking

Country	\$	👤	🌐	GMI Score	Rank
Israel	6.5	5.9	3.5	<b>891.7</b>	<b>1</b>
Singapore	6.4	5.8	3.2	<b>860.5</b>	<b>2</b>
Armenia	6.5	5.9	3	<b>853.6</b>	<b>3</b>
Cyprus	6.1	5.7	3.2	<b>828.2</b>	<b>4</b>
Korea, Republic	6.3	5.7	2.9	<b>821.3</b>	<b>5</b>
Russia	6.5	5.1	3.2	<b>818.5</b>	<b>6</b>
Greece	6.2	5.4	3.2	<b>818.3</b>	<b>7</b>
Jordan	6.5	5.1	3	<b>807.4</b>	<b>8</b>
Belarus	6	5.6	2.9	<b>799.1</b>	<b>9</b>
Azerbaijan	6.4	5.2	2.8	<b>799.1</b>	<b>10</b>

Armenia is ranked the first in Europe and third worldwide in the Global Militarisation Index (GMI) 2019 presented by Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).

In this year's Global Militarisation Index ranking, the ten countries that provided the military with markedly large amounts of re-

sources in relation

are Israel, Singapore, Armenia, Cyprus, South Korea, Russia, Greece, Jordan, Belarus and Azerbaijan. These countries allocate particularly high levels of resources to the military in comparison to other areas of society. Every year, BICC's Global Militarisation Index (GMI) presents the relative weight and importance of a country's military apparatus in relation to its society as a whole. The GMI 2019 covers 154 states and is based on the latest available figures (in

most cases data for 2018).

The index project is financially supported by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The report compares, for example, a country's military expenditure with its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its health expenditure. It contrasts the total number of military and paramilitary forces in a country with the number of physicians. Finally, it studies the number of heavy weapons available to a country's armed forces. These and other indicators are used to determine a country's ranking, which in turn makes it possible to measure the respective level of militarization in comparison to other countries.

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Other news reports said Iran had recently evacuated 60 Iranian students from Wuhan, the Chinese city at the epicenter of the epidemic. The coronavirus, which originated in China's Hubei province, causes pneumonia-like symptoms. China has now seen 2,118 deaths and recorded nearly 75,000 infections. On Thursday, Japan said two of its passengers who contracted the coronavirus on board quarantined cruise ship Diamond Princess had died. The man and the woman were in their 80s.

## Armenia tightens border control as Iran reports coronavirus deaths

Armenia is tightening control at Meghri checkpoint after Iran confirms the first coronavirus deaths, the Ministry of Health reports.

The Ministry says it keeps in touch with the Armenian Embassy in Iran and the country's Health Ministry.

Iran said Thursday that three more people have been infected with the new virus that originated in central China, following an announcement the day before that two people had died of the illness caused by the virus in the Iranian city of Qom.

All schools and universities, including religious Shiite seminaries, were shut down in the holy city of Qom, according to the official IRNA news agency.



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## After 105 Years, Syria Finally Recognizes the Armenian Genocide



By Harut Sassounian

The Syrian people were the first to be aware of the Armenian Genocide, as tens of thousands of Armenians were deported by Ottoman Turkey to the killing fields of the Syrian Desert at the beginning of the 20th Century. A large number of Armenian orphans were adopted by local Arabs who raised them as their own. The surviving Armenians in Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Zor, Damascus, and elsewhere were welcome by the local population. Armenians settled in their new homeland, rebuilt their lives, reestablished their cultural structures – including churches, schools, and societies – and gradually prospered.

I was born in Aleppo, Syria, as some of my grandparents' family had survived the Genocide. I had a happy childhood and had not experienced any prejudice or discrimination, despite the religious differences. Syria had its own dispute with the Republic of Turkey, such as the annexation of Iskenderun (Alexandretta) to Turkey in 1939, after an illegitimate referendum. Nevertheless, the Syrian government, in an Islamic solidarity with Turkey and unwilling to antagonize its more powerful Northern neighbor, had declined to raise the issue of the Armenian Genocide.

I recall that, during the deliberations of the United Nations' Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1985, a Syrian human rights member told me that even though he was aware of the Armenian Genocide, he could not vote to adopt the report that recognized it, as he would be dismissed from his job. Under the circumstances, I asked him to be absent from the hall during the voting. He did, and

the UN report was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

In the years prior to the 2011 civil war in Syria, the relationship between Syria and Turkey had improved to the point that the presidents of the two countries met often and vacationed together. The Syrian government even banned the sale of books on the Armenian Genocide in Syrian bookstores. During those honeymoon years, I was informed that during the visit of Catholicos Aram I to Damascus, President Bashar al-Assad had told him that Armenians should forget about the Armenian Genocide, open the border, and establish friendly relations with Turkey.

When I visited Damascus in 2009, an Armenian friend with access to the Presidential Palace tried to arrange a meeting for me with President Assad. I wanted to warn Assad that his honeymoon with the Turkish President could come to an abrupt end and Erdogan, as an untrustworthy ally, could betray him. Of course, I had no idea that, two years after my visit to Syria, there would be a massive invasion of Syria by radical Islamic terrorists armed and supported by Turkey. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to meet Assad. His Chief of Staff refused to arrange the meeting, telling my Armenian friend that he could not allow such a meeting given my many critical writings of Turkey. He said that Turkey would cut off its friendly relations with Syria if Erdogan found out that the president had met with me!

Edmon Marukyan, head of the Bright Armenia opposition party in the Armenian Parliament, told reporters last week that when he met President Assad in Damascus during his trip to Syria in 2014, Assad said, "I was being told in Armenia that I shouldn't trust Erdogan so much, I didn't listen to you." Assad made an official trip to Armenia in June 2009. However, violating Armenian protocol, he refused to visit the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan to pay homage to the Genocide victims out of concern for Turkish criticism.

Assad told Agence France Presse in January 2014 that the brutal attacks on Syria re-

minded him of "the massacres perpetrated by the Ottomans against the Armenians, when they killed a million and a half Armenians, and half a million Orthodox Syrians in Syria and in Turkish territory."

The unanimous decision by the Syrian Parliament on February 13 is the first official recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Syria. The text of the parliament's resolution also referred to the genocide of Assyrians and Syrians. Some have expressed their unhappiness that the Syrian government finally recognized the Armenian Genocide only when it suited its own political interests. While that is true, Armenians have to be realistic. No country is going to adopt a decision that is contrary to its national interests. It is true that the Syrian Parliament's decision is mostly due to the recent Turkish invasion of Northern Syria. However, the decision is not wrong. It is the right thing to do. It is never the wrong time to do the right thing. The wrong was not recognizing the Armenian Genocide for all those years. Thus Syria became the second Arab country, after Lebanon, to have recognized the Armenian Genocide. We hope other Arab countries, such as Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan will follow suit.

Two immediate benefits of the Syrian Parliament's recognition of the Armenian Genocide are:

The mass media once again reminded the world's public opinion about the dastardly act of the Armenian Genocide committed by Ottoman Turkey, putting one more nail on the coffin of Turkish denial.

The Turkish government issued a statement denying the Armenian Genocide and condemning the Syrian government which further publicized the Turkish genocide of the Armenians.

Armenians around the world welcomed Syria's recognition of the Armenian Genocide, further squeezing the noose around Turkish denialism. As the saying goes, "Better late than Never!"



## Second organization joins appeal to award Garo Paylan with the Nobel Peace Prize



The International Independent Legal and Scientific Center of Evaluation and Expertise for Reparations and Restitutions (Full name of the Center: The International Independent Legal and Scientific Center for Accounting, Analysis, Inventory, Auditing, Qualimetric Assessment and Judicial Expertise of Material and Intangible Losses due to the Armenian Genocide for Reparations and Restitution) has announce support for the appeal of the HAMSHENIAN International women's union of Hamshen Armenians on submitting Garo Paylan as a Nobel Peace Prize nominator for 2020.

The organization has turned to the Nobel Committee asking awarding Turkish Armenian MP (elected from the pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party), who devoted his whole life to protecting the violated rights of Turkish national and religious minorities and the region, with the Nobel Peace Prize.

"Garo Paylan deserves the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to protecting the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, human values and rights, ensuring the rule of law, preventing genocide and

promoting peace and security in the region," Head of the Center Martik Gasparyan said in a statement.

According to him, Mr. Paylan is an ardent advocate of the most fundamental international legal instruments in the region, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

He is a vivid bearer of democratic and humanistic values, a fighter for peace and security in the most explosive region of the world – the Middle East.

"From the rostrum of the Turkish Parliament, Garo Paylan speaks loudly to the entire region, condemning Turkey's aggressive policy and military intervention in neighboring sovereign states, especially full-scale military operations in Iraq and Syria. Paylan is one of the few who openly opposes the tyranny of Recep Erdogan, taking responsibility for the protection of humanist values, democratic institutions, national and religious minorities," Martik Gasparyan said.

He noted that Paylan's open struggle for peace in the region and the world is a symbol of a free, peaceful future for the region.

"The seeds of peace, tolerance and mutual understanding between people of different nationalities and religions sown by Paylan give positive results in Turkish society. He is launching activity under conditions of a real threat to the life of the deputy from pro-government nationalist and extremist forces," the head of the center continued.

"We are convinced that the positive decision of the Nobel Committee to award Garo Paylan the Nobel Peace Prize will allow the Middle East to show that modern civilization knows the heroes of our time and is ready to support them in their struggle for a brighter future for new generations.

The Center and its representatives appeal to all humanitarian, scientific international organizations, representatives of the scientific and creative world and academic circles separately and together in order to present Garo Paylan for the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize and give their vote in favor of Garo Paylan as a great humanist of the modern world of civilization," Martik Gasparyan continued.

The Center assures that the Nobel prize of Mr. Paylan will make a significant contribution to the establishment of Peace in the hottest spot on our planet, in the Middle East and will serve the cause of peace and harmony between peoples, solve today's challenges and stop the threats of the modern civilization to preserve the cultural heritage of all peoples of the world.

The aim of our Center is to conduct an inventory, accounting, analysis, audit, qualitative assessment and judicial examination of material and non-material losses and losses arising from the Armenian Genocide for reparation and restitution.

## Prayer for Wuhan: Armenian artists create canvas in a sign of solidarity with the people of China



In an expression of solidarity with the people of Wuhan, prominent Armenian artists jointly created and donated a beautiful “Canvas of Prayer for Unity” to the Embassy of China with a strong message of confidence that the coronavirus will be stopped and defeated.

The event was organized jointly by the Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts, the Armenian State Pedagogical University named after Khachatur Abovyan and the Writers’ Union.

In an address to the participants, Foreign

Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan welcomed the organization of the event, which aims at “expressing our support and encouragement to friendly China and the Chinese people in



the fight against the new type of coronavirus, this time through culture.”

“The interconnections between our peoples through various branches of culture and through various events have been continuous and upward. They have contributed to the expansion of mutual recognition and friend-



ship between our peoples. And now, in these difficult times, the Armenian people stand in solidarity with the friendly people of China,” the Foreign Minister added.



## Remembering Guren Margaryan: 16 years after the brutal murder



Armenian Officer Guren Margaryan was murdered in Hungary on this day sixteen years ago.

On 19th February 2004, with an axe in hand, the then-Azerbaijani army captain brutally

delivered 16 blows to the sleeping body of Armenian Army Lieutenant Guren Margaryan, when both officers were attending a NATO Partnership for Peace program in Hungary.

On 13th April 2006, a Hungarian court sentenced him to life in prison without the right of appeal for 30 years.

On 31st August 2012, after serving a mere eight years of his life sentence, a deal between Azerbaijan and Hungary saw Safarov extradited to Azerbaijan, where upon arrival he was greeted by President Ilham Aliyev who had assured the Hungarian Government and the world that Safarov would serve the remainder of his sentence.

But instead, the axe murderer was immediately pardoned and gifted a full military parade, before being promoted to the rank of Major and despicably rewarded an apartment. Ironically, all of this with eight years of back pay.

Following Safarov’s pardon, Armenia severed diplomatic relations with Hungary.

The case brought by the relatives of Guren Margaryan is pending in the European Court of Human Rights.



## Capital of the Ancient Armenia Artashat: a Major International Trade and Culture Center

**By Gourgen James Khazhakian,  
Chief Correspondent**

Artashat (Artaxata – lat.) was the capital of ancient Armenia in II BC–IV AD c.c.



The City was founded by King **Artashes I** in 180s B.C. in the Ararat Valley, in the vicinity of 12 large and small hills of the peninsula formed at the junction of the Yerashk and Metsamor rivers old beds and them (10 km southwest of present-day Artashat town, Ararat Province of Armenia). According to Greek and Roman historians, the famous Carthaginian commander **Hannibal** who had taken refuge in the royal court of Artashes I for a while, had chosen and planned the site of Artashat. **Strabo, Plutarch, Appian, Tacitus** and others testify of being a large and beautiful city of Aratashat, having strong walls. In 58 AD Roman commander **Corbulo** captured, and in 59 burnt and destroyed Artashat. The City was rebuilt in 66, for which Roman Emperor **Nero** provided material resources and craftsmen to the Armenian King Trdat I after handing over him the crown in Rome in 66, having a hope (as the time told – in vain) that the City will be named Neronia.

Since 1970, excavations have yielded rich and varied materials, revealing the City's multilaterally developed culture. It turned out that the hills of Artashat were inhabited as early as in the Eneolithic period. This is evidenced by the discovery of traces of settlements of V-IV millennia B.C. at two hills and rich Eneolithic artifacts excavated in their area.



In 1980s-1990s excavations in the southern part of the capital Artashat revealed also well-preserved material remains of the Urartian period.

The remains of the preserved structure were so impressive and perfect that some experts even suggested that the opened monument might be a Menuakhinili, built on the banks of the Arax, at the territory of Lukhiuni land, and conquered by the King Menua. .

In its flowering period, after the restoration of the City by Trdat I in the I-II centuries, Artashat, with its cemeteries, occupied about 500 hectares. It can be assumed that at that time the City had a population of about 150,000. One of the most important elements of the City structure is the defense system. According to Strabo and Cornelius Tacitus, Artashat had long walls. Excavations have opened and researched a 4500-5000 m long part of the wall. The total length of the Artashat walls has exceeded 10,000 meters in time.

The maps of the excavated districts show their regular nature. Being on one line of residential complexes divided by the streets indicates that the districts of the City were undoubtedly built in accordance with a previously developed unified plan as a single integrated complex of defense system.



Artashat had a large utility network. The City received potable water from the northern side through large clay pipes (with dimensions 55x45 cm). This water supply system that was opened in the fields of the village of Pokr Vedi (1987), was prepared in the 1st century AD, when Trdat rebuilt the City. With narrow clay pipes (diameter 10 cm) the water was distributed in the upper city districts. The water supply was also provided by wells. The abundance of water has made it possible to create an extensive network of baths. Artashat was a major center of international trade, and its role grew especially in the I-II centuries due to the expansion



of trade relations between Rome and the East. Artashat's extensive links' evidence are more than 8,000 stamps found in one of its archives used to validate commercial transactions, letters, and other documents. The stamps of Artashat represent many countries of the ancient world, from India to Rome and from the Black Sea north coast to Egypt. Coins of Armenia and nine neighboring countries (Seleucid, Persian, Pontic, Roman, etc.) were found.

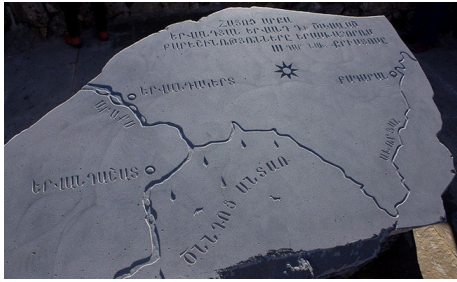
The Artashat mint cut the coins of Artashesian kings and Artashat City. A large number of imported pottery, glass vessels, jewelry, household items and articles were found in Artashat. The revival of trade has contributed to the development of craftsmanship. Sources mention about 50 trades. In Artashat they practiced almost all trades: workshops were opened producing tools, ceramics, glassware, well-designed and sculpted construction stones and metal vessels, jewelry, weapons and more. Metalworking, blacksmithing, armor,



copper, toreutics, jewelry, silverware, jewelry, woodworking, leatherwork, sculpture, etc. were developed. Artashat had favorable conditions for trade, crafts and agriculture. The City was surrounded by fertile and irrigated land where there were small towns and villages. The transit trade route stretching from the Far East to the Mediterranean was passing through the City, through which Chinese silk and other goods were transported. Artashat was also proclaimed as a transit warehouse, a convenience store and a trade exchange center. The international significance



## Capital of the Ancient Armenia Artashat...



of Artashat was recognized also later - by Emperor Justinian's charter. There were treasure and customs houses in Artashat, several bridges, the earliest and most famous of which was the "Taperakan" or the "Artashat Bridge" on the Araks River. Artashat was the center of Armenian Hellenistic culture. According to (Armenian legendary historian) **Movses Khorenatsi**, during the reign of Artashes I there were temples of Anahit-Artemis, Tir-Apollo in Artashat, with their copper golden-plated statues. In Artashat temples, streets, squares, wealthy houses had locally made



gold, golden-plated and stone statues as well as marble Greek statues brought from Asia Minor.

The small clay statues found in Artashat depict Armenian pagan deities, musicians (harpists, singers), theatrical masks, and more.

However, Artashat was already just a rural town in the second half of the 5th century, and is remembered as a village in the

next century. The main reason for the City's decline was the change of the Arax River course, which caused swamps to spread around the City that stink.

Therefore, during the reign of King **Khosrov II** (331-339), the court moved from Artashat to Dvin. The invasions of Persian King **Shapuh II** (364-369) and the changes in the socio-economic life of Armenia also played a certain role in the fall of Artashat.



## The Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator Recently – Non-Stop Support to the Nation

**The eco-village network continues to develop: the streets of Arpi village are now illuminated**



The development strategy adopted by two partner organizations brings in positive results.

With joint efforts of Viva-MTS and the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife & Cultural Assets (FPWC), another 4 streets, with 2300m in length, were illuminated in Arpi village of Vayots Dzor region. As many as 60 energy-efficient lamps were installed.

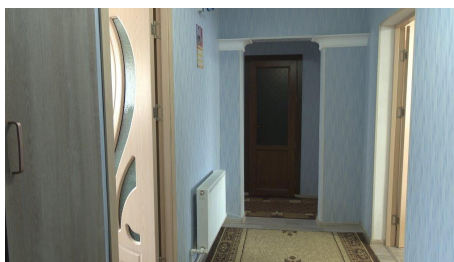
The outcomes of the project are well-defined and have long-term impact. The project will provide financial savings for the community budget, lead to infrastructure development and help mitigate human-

wildlife conflict of the village.

The last two months of summer were quite busy and tensed for the locals of Arpi village. The villagers had to replace each other every night on duty in order to alarm and protect their peers and children whenever bears entered the village as wild animals "targeted" the darkest section of the village.

Due to the project, the dark spots of the village are now illuminated and will prevent possible encounters with wild animals in the future.

The modern illuminating system was launched with the participation of Viva-MTS General Manager Ralph Yirikian, Director of FPWC Ruben Khachatryan, the



Head of Areni community Husik Sahakyan, the Head of Arpi village Gagik Hovsepyan, and residents of the community.

*"Everything that we do in the frame of this project has a vital importance. We try to change the mindset that allows for a ruthless exploitation of natural resources. This is crucial for the generations to come. People appreciate the most obvious impact of the project once it is implemented in its first stage: they see brightly illumination streets. The environmental, social, and economic efficiency the project offers becomes tangible after some while, especially where its second stage gets implemented. This adds to the opportunity to stay outside safely in late evening hours. Those kinds of things help change people's mindset and look for alternative perspectives of development,"* Viva-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** said.

The eco-village network project was launched in Arpi village in 2018. With the first stage of the project, the main streets of the village were provided with outdoor lighting. The lighting system had 51 LED lamps illuminating 2 km of road. Thus, as a result of the two-stage project and with the joint efforts of the partners and active participation of Areni local administration, as many as 111 LED lights were installed in the village of Arpi and 4300 meter of road illuminated.



## The Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator...



Viva-MTS and FPWC think that the newest technologies play a vital role in nature protection, community development and energy-efficacy of communities.

The installation of energy-efficient outdoor lighting system in remote settlements rich in biodiversity is one of the progressive steps towards creating the eco-village network in Armenia. Through such projects, remote villages of Armenia are integrated into a development process based on four components of environmental, economic, cultural and social sustainability.

The eco-friendly and energy efficient LED lights consume 80% less electricity and serve about 50 times longer. The streets of the village will be illuminated until 01:00 am. During holidays, the outdoor lighting will be provided throughout the night.

### Renovating the house was the dream of the Hero son

One of the apartments in Gyumri's Mush district is more like a house-museum. Nearly from all the walls of the living room is "smiling" **Meruzhan**, a senior lieutenant killed in an unequal battle against an armed enemy during the days of the April war. He dreamed of making the house into a home. He wanted to rebuild the parents' apartment, received after the earthquake, without any excessive luxury, with modest solutions, and to get married. Meruzhan's parents, who never speak about Meruzhan in the past tense, fulfilled their son's dream.

*"We had guests from many places... It was not pleasant to enter the Hero's apartment and see poor conditions. It made us to renovate our apartment. It was the dream of my son to live in a decent home. He would have been the owner of the house; he wanted everything to be good. He told that even to his fiancée. Alas, only we were able to make his dream come true",* said Meruzhan's father **Arthur**.

After the earthquake, the **Stepanyans** lived in a metal container for three years, then moved to the newly-purchased apartment. The family that went through many difficulties has not been able to repair it for a long time. Only after more than three decades, the problem has been solved. Meruzhan's parents, Arthur and Nuneh, have

tried to do as their son would like.

The Stepanyans' grandchildren are already growing up in the renovated house; the youngest of them was born a month after Meruzhan's death. The sister named her child after her fallen brother. His presence started to change the family's life.

*"Much has changed since the birth of small Meruzh. The name Meruzh was again heard in the house. Before my grandson was born, when we still didn't know the name of the baby was going to be Meruzhan, I saw a dream. Meruzhan came and said, 'Mom, don't worry, I'll come back. I will definitely come...' Little Meruzh gave us so much strength that we were able to put up a Christmas tree this year. For 3 years, we have lived through his memories of the New Year. He was the one who deco-*



*rated the Christmas tree. This year we left the Christmas tree to our grandchildren, Meruzhan and Samvel to decorate. They decorated very well, then they took it down. This year, the new apartment seems to have changed a bit... the kids have changed our lives a lot; we are making progress,"* said the mother of the Hero, **Nuneh**.

Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia supported the realization of the dream of the hero from Gyumri.

*"Such programs are very important because there are many needy people who are not physically or financially able to make their dreams come true,"* said Arthur.

### A family gets a home of their own 32 years after the earthquake

The heads and teams of Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia continue visits to beneficiary families. This time the partners left for Gyumri to visit one of the families assisted through the 2019 housing program; the family, living in a metal container house, has now finished the construction of their semi-built house. The teams had already visited the family last fall for a volunteering initiative to participate in the construction of the house. Six months later, everyone is back together, this time to celebrate a housewarming.

The **Tadevosyan** family living in Gyumri had to live in a metal container for years after the 1988 earthquake. 32 years later the hard memories are left behind.

*"After so many years, finally, my family feels this happiness. Having a home of our own is a big and awaited event in our life. After the earthquake, we had to live in a metal container. And now we have a home of our own with all necessities. Our happiness can't be put into words. We are grateful beyond words,"* said **Kristina**.

Owing to the housing project, 5 houses were built, renovated or purchased in 2019; in the course of years overall 12 houses



have been built as a result of the partnership in Shirak region.

Viva-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia consider all aspects of the positive impact of the project important. Heads of partner organizations reported that families who already live in decent home strive to get rid of not only the memories of the metal containers, but also by physically dismantling those structures.

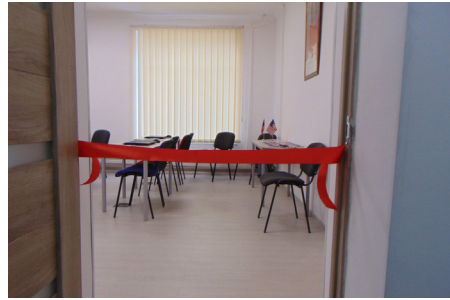
*"When a family who has spent years in a metal container house, gets up on its feet to open a new page of life, it means that it has the power to dream, and that is a good sign. And when that family seeks to remove the iron shelter from the view, we can say that we have all succeeded. I am glad to state that we have been particularly successful recently. Gyumri should not remain a city of metal container houses whether in memory or in terms of architecture,"* Viva-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** said.

*"Families living in metal containers are in the center of our attention. Since the earthquake, this family has lived in a metal container. The childhood of three children in this family passed inside the walls of the metal container. Together with Viva-MTS we stretched a helping hand to the Tadevosyan family. Now that they have finished the construction of their home, I am sure the new home will bring joy and good memories,"* said Fuller Center for Housing Armenia President **Ashot Yeghiazaryan**.

## New American library and training center opens in Tavush

Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Lia Miller, alongside the Governor of Tavush Province, Hayk Chobanyan, and Country Director of Project Harmony International Armenia Office, Mariam Martirosyan, officially opened the American Library and Training Center – a new learning hub in Ijevan supported by the U.S. Embassy and housed at the Ijevan Branch of Yerevan State University.

The American Library and Training Center is the largest component of the Tavush Outreach Project implemented by Project Harmony International using U.S. government funds. The purpose of the Tav-



ush Outreach Project (TOP) is to deliver concentrated U.S. government outreach by offering English language and other instruction to Tavush youth and young adults, through providing diverse capacity building programs, and by offering resources to increase understanding of U.S. society.

The American Library and Training Center will offer diverse training programs for local community members to develop skills that are vital for practicing democratic values and active citizenship. The training programs will include but are not limited to English language skills, media literacy, project design and management, leadership skills, and communications skills.

The American Library and Training Center is equipped with relevant technical equipment and a diverse collection of American books and materials. The outreach program will also include film screenings, book clubs, and guest speakers.

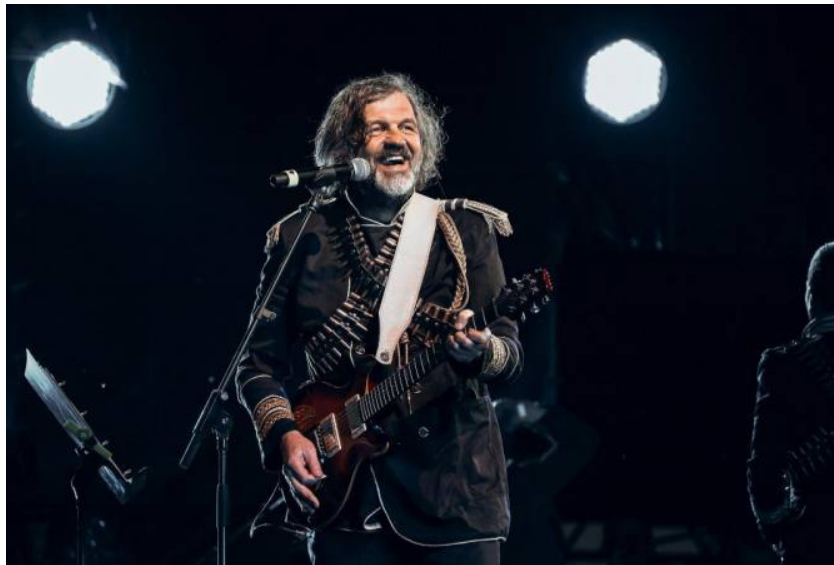
## Emir Kusturica, The No Smoking Orchestra to perform at 1st Lavash Day festival in Armenian village

YEREVAN, FEBRUARY 21, ARMENPRESS. The village of Tsaghkunk in the province of Gegharkunik is getting geared up to host the first Lavash Day on August 1, a festival dedicated to the famous Armenian flatbread.

In 2014, “Lavash, the preparation, meaning and appearance of traditional bread as an expression of culture in Armenia” was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Visitors during the festival will have the chance to see how cooks prepare the flatbread, and then taste it. Moreover, visitors can also have some hands-on participation in making lavash snacks.

A special gastro zone will feature a number of restaurants from Yerevan and elsewhere in the region who will offer Armenian culinary delights, and a wide range



of dishes made from lavash.

The organizer, Dar Foundation, said the visitors of the event can also visit the locals to taste the healthy village food.

The festival will also feature a special agro-product zone, where eco food will be presented. Another special section will be a fair-exhibition of the homemade foods, canned products, jams and other goods.

Organizers vow some really fun and entertaining time for visitors with the

competitions “Most Good-Looking Lavash” and “Fastest Lavash Eating”.

The Dar Foundation revealed a surprise for the event: this year’s guest country is Serbia, and it will represent its national cuisine at the festival and present the preparation of the famous pogaca bread.

A concert program featuring DJs and different bands is also planned, with a very special surprise performance by Emir Kusturica and The No Smoking Orchestra.

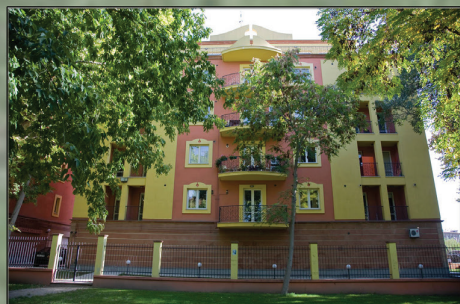
And of course, what party without drinks.....the very best of Armenian wines and brandy will be available, with a special presentation of vodka distillation. Parties for children are also expected.

Organizers plan to hold the Lavash Day festival annually, and each year a guest country will be invited to represent their national bread and cuisine.



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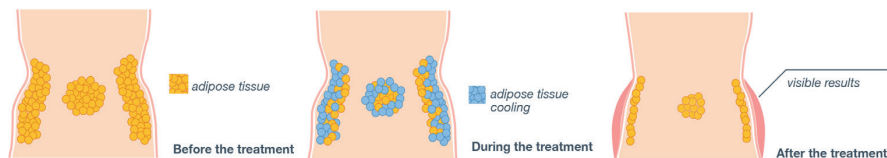
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