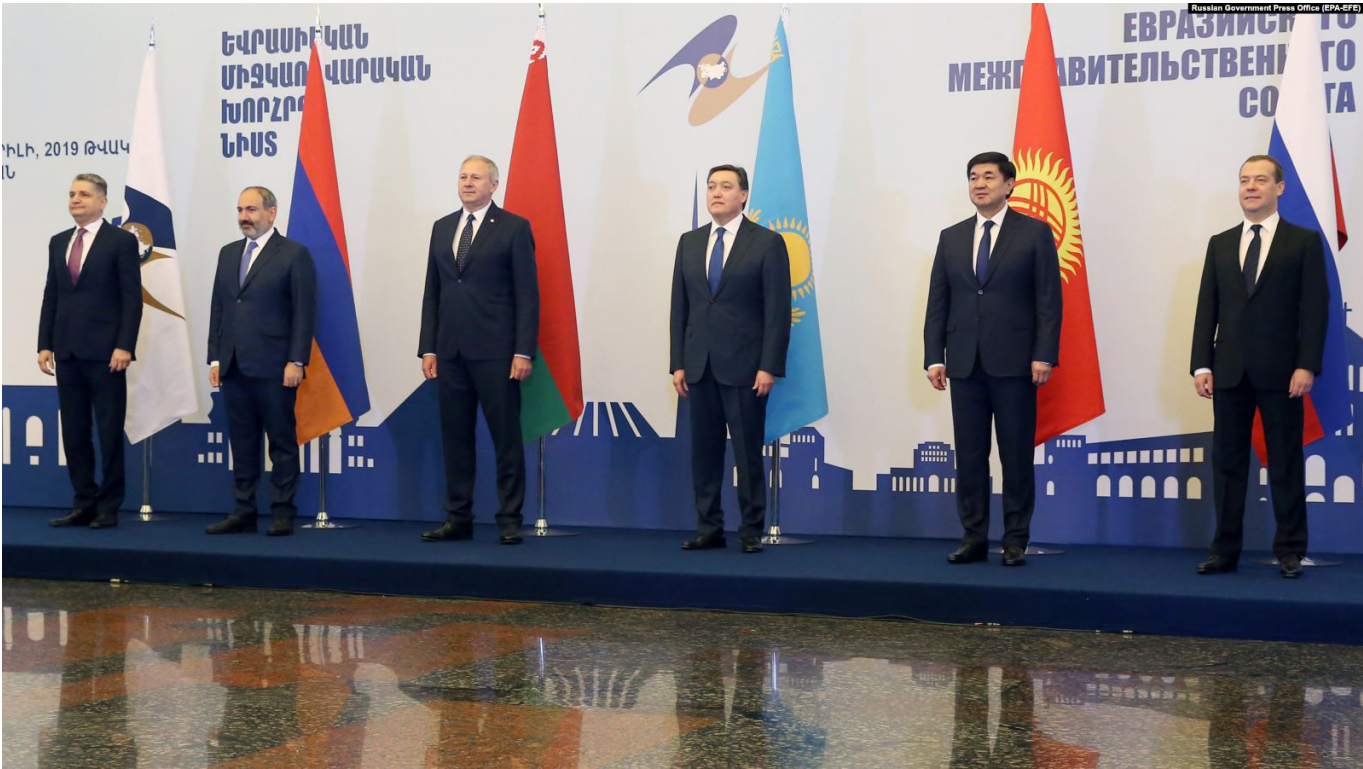


Pashinyan hails Armenia’s growing trade with Eurasian Union



ARMENIA -- Eurasian Economic Commission Chairman Tigran Sargsyan (L) and the prime ministers of Armenia, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan pose for a photograph in Yerevan, April 30, 2019.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan cited Armenia’s growing trade with Russia and other members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) on April 30 as he hosted a meeting of fellow heads of government from the Russian-led trade bloc.

Speaking at the meeting held in Yerevan, Pashinyan also renewed his calls for the creation of a common EEU market for natural gas and oil mostly extracted in Russia.

“I am happy to note that there is a growth in commercial turnover with between Armenia and the union’s [other] member states,” he said. “EEU countries’ share in Armenia’s exports reached 28.5 percent in 2018.”

“[Armenian] exports to the union’s member states rose by 20 percent while overall trade by 11 percent,” he added.

According to official Armenian statistics, Russia accounted for almost 97 percent of that trade, which totaled around \$2 billion last year. Armenia’s exports to Russia soared by almost 20 percent, to \$666.5 million. By comparison, Armenia’s trade with the European Union stood at \$1.83 billion in 2018.

Pashinyan said that further economic integration of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia requires “the creation of common oil, gas and other hydrocarbon markets.” He said the EU member states should step up their efforts to put their energy cooperation on a “non-discriminatory footing.”

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Armenian FM expresses concern over Israel's selling weapons to Azerbaijan



Armenia and Israel have great potential to develop the bilateral relations, Foreign minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan said in an interview to the Jerusalem Post, adding that the two countries have a great history and civilization.

“We have an enormous sense of national identity and pride, so we can work together in so many fields of economy, agriculture, hi-tech, tourism, direct flights, health culture, education and so on and so forth”, FM

Mnatsakanyan said.

The Armenian FM also touched upon Israel's selling weapons to Azerbaijan and noted: “It has been and remains an issue of great concern for us on several counts. Israel's arms trade is a weapon of death for our people. We have been witnessing the use of such weapons against our people. We are a security conscious nation and are highly confident in our capacity to defend ourselves, and you will understand very well what that means. At the same time, we are dedicated to developing peace and security in our region. The arms race in our region does not contribute to building peace and security”.

In response to the journalist's view that Armenia has good relations with Iran, which is an enemy of Israel, the foreign minister said Armenia is very insistent that building relations with one partner will not

be at the expense of another partner. “But we also expect that all our partners will do the same. We are also very sensitive to the sensitivities of our partners”, he added.

Asked whether he is surprised and disappointed about Israel's position refusing to recognize what happened to the Armenian people in 1915 as genocide, the Armenian FM responded: “It's not a matter for me to be surprised. I represent a nation that still faces the pressure of justice denied over 105 years. My people are victorious because we were supposed to be wiped off the face of the earth. The question of denied justice is about humanity. It is for Israel to decide whether to recognize [the Armenian Genocide] or not. It is not about Armenia; it is about Israel. It is our collective duty nowadays to reduce the risk of genocide and atrocities”.

Prime Minister, UAE State Minister discuss economic cooperation development prospects

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan received a delegation led by UAE State Minister, UAE-Armenia Intergovernmental Commission Co-Chairman Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh.

Greeting the guests, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of the first meeting of the UAE-Armenia Intergovernmental Commission, held this May 2 in Yerevan, which is a good platform for discussing development of UAE-Armenia relations. Nikol Pashinyan said our country keen to cooperate with the United Arab Emirates. He pointed out that the recent intensification of economic relations and the trends observed in the sphere of tourism have demonstrated the positive dynamics of bilateral cooperation.

The UAE State Minister thanked Prime Minister Pashinyan for the warm welcome and expressed satisfaction with the outcome of both his visit and the discussions held at the Commission's meeting. Noting that his country is eager to develop cooperation with Armenia through joint projects, Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh stressed that the



Commission's activities testify to this.

The interlocutors discussed ways of deepening economic cooperation in different directions. The Prime Minister noted that his government has embarked upon a large-scale reform program aimed at improving the business environment, creating equal conditions for economic development and attracting foreign investment. Nikol Pashinyan considered promising cooperation in the fields of agriculture, tourism, information technology, renewable energy, construction of reservoirs.

The head of the Armenian government noted that Armenia can become a bridge for UAE business entities to enter the markets of the Eurasian Economic Union and

third countries. Coming to the cooperation in the field of information technologies, the Premier expressed the hope that UAE companies may take an active part in the World IT Congress to be held in Yerevan in October, 2019.

Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh said his country interested in implementing joint programs in the areas mentioned by the Prime Minister. He pointed out that the UAE is ready to expand the bilateral cooperation with Armenia in the political, economic and humanitarian fields.

The Prime Minister of Armenia and the State Minister of the United Arab Emirates next touched on the steps aimed at establishing direct air communication between the two countries that will not only help boost tourism, but also step up trade turnover. The importance of holding business forums and organizing reciprocated top-level visits was stressed on both sides.

Taking the opportunity, Prime Minister Pashinyan thanked the UAE government for abiding by a balanced position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Eurasian Union ‘very important’ for Armenia



Armenia remains committed to its continued membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and broader alliance with Russia, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told his visiting Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, on Monday.

Pashinyan hosted Medvedev in his private residence ahead of a meeting in Yerevan of the prime ministers of five ex-Soviet states making up the Russian-led trade bloc.



Medvedev is the most high-ranking Russian official to visit Yerevan since last year's "velvet revolution" which toppled the former Armenian government. In his opening remarks at the informal talks with Pashinyan, he said Armenia and Russia remain "allied countries that have a special history of relations."

"Now is a very important moment in our

relations," Pashinyan said, for his part. "And I'm sure that contrary to pessimists we will succeed in raising our relations to a new level ... I think that we should actually turn pessimists into optimists. We will do everything for that."

Turning to the EEU, Pashinyan said that membership in the organization is "very important" for Armenia. "We will do everything to make the EEU and our membership in it more effective," he said.

The Armenian premier likewise stressed the bloc's significance for his country when he visited Moscow and spoke at the EEU headquarters in January.

Pashinyan criticized Armenia's accession to the EEU and even called for its withdrawal from the bloc when he was opposition to former President Serzh Sarkisian. But immediately after Sarkisian was forced to resign in April 2018 he made clear that he will not pull his country out of the EEU or the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

In an interview with the Moscow-based

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Pashinyan made a similar point when he visited the EEU's Moscow headquarters in January. He was understood to imply that Russian gas should be as cheap in Russia as it is in Armenia and other EEU members importing it.

Belarus, which is also heavily dependent on Russian gas and oil, has long been advocating this idea.

Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Rumas complained on Tuesday about hurdles to greater commerce among the EEU member states, saying that they have become more serious of late. He seemed to allude to his country's latest energy dispute with Russia.

Nevertheless, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declared at the Yerevan meeting that the EEU has proved to be a success since being set up five years ago. He noted ongoing efforts to make it a more effective organization.

newspaper "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" published last week, Pashinyan admitted that he is still distrusted by "some Russian circles." He said they are wrong to suspect that the Armenian "velvet revolution" was orchestrated by Western powers. He reiterated that there will be "no fundamental changes" in Armenia's traditional foreign policy.

Meeting with Medvedev, Pashinyan said Russian-Armenian relations have "developed steadily" since last year's regime change in Yerevan. Still, he noted the existence of some "issues" in bilateral ties.

One of those contentious issues is coup charges that were brought by the new Armenian authorities last year against former President Robert Kocharyan and Yuri Khachaturov, a retired Armenian army general who was the CSTO's secretary general at the time. Moscow denounced the charges as politically motivated. Russian President Vladimir Putin signaled his continuing support for Kocharyan after the latter was again arrested in December.

Kocharyan, Khachaturov and two other retired generals are expected to go on trial soon.

Healthcare minister denies testifying against indicted State Oversight Service chief



Minister of Healthcare Arsen Torosyan has denied testifying against temporarily suspended State Oversight Service Director Davit Sanasaryan in the ongoing criminal investigation into the

latter's alleged abuse of power.

"I haven't testified against anyone, and overall testimonies aren't given in favor or against someone," he told reporters when asked to confirm or deny the rumors.

"I simply gave information. I've said this thousands of times, anything that I know will be accessible to law enforcement agencies", Torosyan said.

Sanasaryan is charged with abuse of power since April 18th by the National Security Service. His duties as Head of the State Oversight Service are suspended. Sanasaryan is banned from leaving the country.

He vehemently denies wrongdoing.

The criminal investigation concerns alleged meddling by Sanasaryan into state procurement of medical devices.

Dashnaktsutyun slams Armenian Government



The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) on Tuesday strongly criticized the current authorities' track record but said it has no plans yet to try to unseat them.

In a statement adopted at a congress held in Yerevan, the opposition party's organization in Armenia claimed that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his government have failed to achieve "tangible results in any area of public life." It accused them of lacking "strategic development programs," pursuing an "unpredictable foreign policy," breaching judicial independence, and systematically discrediting "traditional national, spiritual and cultural values."

"We often justify the failings and inactivity of the current authorities by comparing them with the former ones," said Ishkhan Saghatelian, the newly elected head of Dashnaktsutyun's governing body in Armenia.

"Our people gave these authorities a strong vote of confidence and have great expectations but they are not living up to those expectations," he told a news conference.

Saghatelian made clear at the same time that his party does not have a "regime change agenda" yet. He dismissed a newspaper report which claimed that Dashnaktsutyun plans to launch an anti-government protest movement before the end of this year.

Dashnaktsutyun was part of Armenia's former government ousted during last spring's "velvet revolution." It received two ministerial posts in Pashinyan's first cabinet formed in May. Pashinyan sacked his Dashnaktsutyun-affiliated ministers and other government officials in October, accusing their party of secretly collaborating with former President Serzh Sarkisian's Republican Party (HHK).

Dashnaktsutyun has since been increasingly critical of Pashinyan's government. The center-left nationalist party, which remains influential in the Armenian Diaspora, failed to win any seats in the Armenian parliament in snap general elections held in December.

Saghatelian, who served as a regional governor from June-October 2018, said Dashnaktsutyun is now open to cooperation with any political force, including the HHK, which shares its concerns and views. "We don't have a black list," he said.

Tsarukyan Risks Losing Parliament Seat

(Yerevan – RFE/RL) - Gagik Tsarukyan, a wealthy businessman leading Armenia's largest parliamentary opposition force, might be expelled from the National Assembly as a result of an inquiry ordered by prosecutors on April 30.

In a "crime report" submitted to the Office of the Prosecutor-General on Monday, a small and reputedly pro-government party said Tsarukyan may be combining his membership in the National Assembly with entrepreneurial activity in breach of the Armenian constitution. The party called the Citizen's Decision asked law-enforcement authorities to launch a criminal investigation and determine whether this is the case.

"We have sent that report to the Special Investigative Service (SIS)," said Prosecutor-General Artur Davtyan. "The SIS was instructed to ... take verification measures as a result of which the investigative body will have to make a legal evaluation."

"We need to look into that report in great detail and answer all questions," Davtyan told reporters.

In a separate letter to parliament speaker Ararat Mirzoyan, the Citizen's Decision called for the creation of an ad hoc parliamentary commission that would also look into the issue and, if necessary, ask the Constitutional Court to strip Tsarukyan of his parliament seat. Mirzoyan and other senior lawmakers representing Prime Min-



ister Nikol Pashinyan's My Step bloc discussed the petition behind the closed doors earlier this week.

The developments came amid mounting tensions between the ruling bloc and Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK), which has the second largest group in the parliament. Some Tsarukyan-owned businesses were raided by tax officials shortly after the BHK leader criticized the government's economic policies in early April.

Senior representatives of the two political forces traded fresh accusations on the parliament floor on April 18 as the National Assembly debated a government proposal to impose tariffs on cement imported to Armenia. The tycoon and his allies said the proposed measure is not far-reaching enough to protect domestic cement manufacturers. The largest of them, the Ararat Tsement plant, is owned by Tsarukyan.

During the heated debates some My Step deputies accused Tsarukyan of mixing politics with business. The latter rejected the accusations, comparing himself to U.S. President Donald Trump and Italy's former

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

The constitution bars Armenian parliamentarians from engaging in business. The BHK maintains that its wealthy leader meets this requirement because he only owns dozens of businesses and does not manage them on a day-to-day basis.

"This is a ludicrous initiative which is doomed to fail," Vahe Enfiadjyan, a senior BHK lawmaker, told RFE/RL's Armenian service, commenting on the Citizen's Decision move.

Enfiadjyan warned of a "very tough" BHK response to any attempt to oust Tsarukyan from the parliament but did not elaborate. He did not deny a newspaper report which said that all 25 other BHK deputies will resign from the 132-member parliament if their leader is stripped of his seat.

Tsarukyan himself reacted cautiously to the probe ordered by the prosecutors. "Since there was a complaint, they have to look into it," he said, refusing to comment further.

Tsarukyan's party supported Pashinyan-led mass protests that toppled the country's former government one year ago. It helped Pashinyan become prime minister and joined his first cabinet formed in May 2018. The premier fired his ministers affiliated with BHK in October, accusing the BHK of secretly collaborating with the former ruling Republican Party.

Half of EU has ratified Armenia CEPA with latest approval from Sweden



Sweden's Parliament, the Riksdag, has ratified the Armenia-European Union Comprehensive and Enhanced Partner-

ship Agreement (CEPA), the legislature of the country reported on its official website.

The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in turn reported that Armenia's Ambassador to Sweden Alexander Arzumanyan

was invited to the debates.

Lawmakers from six factions of the Swedish Parliament delivered remarks, ap-

proving the agreement.

After the debates the chair of the foreign relations committee invited the Armenian Ambassador to a brief meeting.

The Swedish Parliament ratified the Armenia-EU CEPA unanimously, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

Other countries that have already ratified the Armenia-EU agreement are Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, United Kingdom, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Germany, Hungary, Finland and Armenia itself. As of now, the other 14 EU member states are yet to make the ratification, after which the deal will come into force in its entirety.

Yerevan wants Eurasian Union to extend trade concession

The government will ask the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to continue to waive its hefty tariffs for used cars imported to Armenia in increasingly large numbers, Economic Development Minister Tigran Khachatryan said on May 3.

Armenia had to replace its traditionally liberal trade regime with more protectionist policies pursued by the EEU member states when it joined the Russian-led trade bloc in 2015. It was allowed to temporarily exempt around 800 types of goods, including key foodstuffs and fuel, from higher customs duties set by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Import duties collected from these products are due to be raised to the EEU levels by 2020, meaning that they would become more expensive in Armenia. The tariff increase will be particularly sharp for second-hand cars imported from beyond the EEU.



Armenian car imports have grown rapidly in the last few years amid strong demand from not only local residents but also buyers from Russian and Kazakhstan, where such vehicles are more expensive because of the higher EEU tariffs.

This growth seems to be accelerating further in anticipation of the expiry in January 2020 of the trade preference enjoyed by Armenia. The Armenpress news agency quoted the chief of the Armenian cus-

toms service, Shushanik Nersisyan, as saying that 9,481 cars were imported the country in April this year, sharply up from 4,324 cars in April 2018.

Khachatryan said the Armenia government hopes to secure a full or partial extension of the tariff waiver. "There has been no official application [to the EEU] yet," he told a news conference. "But it's a process that has to be launched and discussions regarding it are now in progress."

The minister cautioned that getting the other EEU member states to agree to such an extension will not be easy. "If the [planned] renegotiation was only about Armenia's internal market, its outcome would probably be more predictable," he said. "But as we know, this situation where customs duties on imported cars are lower here than in any other EEU member state leads people to register cars here and sell them there."

"That is now visible," Khachatryan went on. "In some cities of those states the number of cars with Armenian license plates is now so large that their citizens are wondering why these [import] taxes are collected in Armenia but not in their countries. Why? Because those duties are lower in Armenia. Now, as you can imagine, we have to argue during negotiations why this should remain the case."

Fraunhofer Institute sees potential for cooperation with Armenia



President Armen Sarkissian hosted on May 3 the delegation of the German Fraunhofer Institute for Production Systems and Design Technology (Fraunhofer IPK) headed by the member of the Executive Board of the Institute, Director for European Policy and Business Development Jens-Günter Neugebauer.

The agreement on visiting Armenia was reached last November when President

Sarkissian in the framework of his official visit to Germany visited the Fraunhofer Institute and along with other issues discussed also the possibilities of expanding the cooperation.

Noting that he was impressed with everything he had seen at the Fraunhofer, President Sarkissian said, "The Institute's entire concept is very interesting and progressive. It can be successfully implemented in Armenia and give a start to a stimulating cooperation."

Fraunhofer's Director for European Policy and Business Development Jens-Günter Neugebauer said they see great potential for cooperation with Armenia in implementing programs in the areas such as preservation of the cultural heritage through digitalization, renewable energy, introduc-

tion of artificial intelligence in the sphere of production, and others.

"I hope that all your meetings in Armenia will conclude with practical steps and projects which we can implement jointly," President Sarkissian said and noted that when it comes to new technologies and artificial intelligence, Armenia and Germany could become good partners. The Fraunhofer Institute specializes in the area of providing innovative technological solutions for the entire spectrum of production processes, has over 70 scientific and research centers and is active in a number of countries. It cooperates with the Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in the digitalization of ancient and medieval manuscripts and in the framework of virtual restoration program.

The future of High Tech in Armenia presented at Netflix headquarters

The Armenian National Committee of America's Silicon Valley Chapter organized a panel presentation titled "The Future of High Tech in Armenia" at the Kabuki Theater inside Netflix's headquarters. With over 300 community members and supporters in attendance, the theater was full to a capacity crowd, Asbarez reports.

The panel discussion was meant to be an open dialogue in the Armenian Community of the Silicon Valley. The panel was moderated by Aline Der Alexanian Barsoumian. Aline, who is currently the Assistant Director of Development at the American University of Armenia, is a longtime ANCA activist and community leader. After introducing herself, she shared with the audience how the committee came to organize the event.

"Armenia has been a high-tech hub since before the fall of the Iron Curtain. The idea for this event came to our committee naturally. We live in the Silicon Valley and Armenia is in the midst of a high-tech revolution. We aim to bridge the 2 worlds on this platform this evening," said Aline.

Today, Armenia has attracted some of the biggest tech giants in the world, and is also home to some amazing innovation and startups. There are so many factors contrib-



uting to the growth of the IT sector in Armenia, including a highly skilled and educated workforce, and some government initiatives that are expediting this renewed growth.

The purpose of this event was to bridge the 2 worlds: Silicon Valley and Yerevan and discuss what role education, law, and entrepreneurship play in securing a better future in Armenia in the High-Tech sphere.

The panelists had a lively discussion and their feedback primarily focused on 4 areas: Armenia's education system, Armenia's competitive advantages, key areas to focus business development, and Silicon Valley's role in Armenia's technology revolution.

Dr. Mary Papazian, a seasoned leader with nearly 30 years of experience as a university professor, academic and administrative leader, who is also avidly involved in

educational initiatives in Armenia, highlighted the need for more pedagogical higher learning institutions in Armenia.

She also highlighted Armenia's strong background in foundational sciences and stressed the importance of focusing more on applied learning. Papazian explained that the pipeline of talent in Armenia needs to be made larger by improving the educational system and by fostering a closer partnership and collaboration between industry and universities.

Further, the panel observed that there is a higher proportion of women in tech in Armenia than in the Silicon Valley, but still more work to do. "It is very exciting to be a female in technology today. And Armenia is light years ahead in that aspect where more than 40% of its workforce in Tech related jobs are female" mentioned Nina.

The panel discussion concluded by a thoughtful question from the moderator to all the panelists. She asked the panelists to highlight how the diaspora can feel empowered to be a part of this High-Tech revolution in Armenia. All of the panelists had encouraging and hopeful messages to the audience. Nina said, "It is possible to make an impact sitting 7,000 miles away."

Armenian FM considers IT sector a foreign policy priority

Armenia's minister of foreign affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and minister of transport, communication and information technologies Hakob Arshakyan met with the representatives of nearly 60 high technological companies of Armenian origin.

The meeting participants discussed topics relating to the export of high technology production to international markets, development of effective cooperation tools at the international platform, clarification of goals and sectors and the legal procedures for entering an international market.

FM Mnatsakanyan said the field of high technologies; the smart development sys-



tem is one of the most important foreign policy priorities for them. "We have many opportunities to form platforms where our private sector can operate and use them to develop their capacities", he said.

Minister Hakob Arshakyan stated that the construction of the engineering city will

launch in 2019.

"The engineering city will enable to collect whole energy and abilities in one place and use all these. The companies will have an opportunity for close cooperation with each other and will be able to use the opportunities provided by the government", Hakob Arshakyan said, adding that various countries are already solving large-scale problems with one another as a result of technological cooperation.

The minister noted that works must be done for attracting foreign markets because competitiveness is higher there. the participation of businessmen.

Nikol Pashinyan: “Never again will Armenia fall into despair; the citizens of the Republic of Armenia will bring prosperity to Motherland through their genie, hard work and talent”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on May 4 attended an investment business forum, referred to as My Step for Ararat Marz. The Premier next called at the EXPO exhibition of local products, which was attended by representatives of small, medium and major businesses, investors, foreign entrepreneurs, representatives of financial institutions.

Greeting the participants of the forum, Nikol Pashinyan said: “Dear guests, members of the government, MPs, journalists,

The ongoing and forthcoming economic changes in the Republic of Armenia are an absolute priority for us. I wish to emphasize that the most important prerequisite for economic change is the underlying ideology.

Today at the opening ceremony of the investment forum, I consider it necessary to once again talk about the philosophy and ideas, which in practice should be the basis of the economic revolution. We call this idea a personal effort, a change of the individual. It is important to understand that this is a direct continuation of the political changes that have occurred in our country.

What is the basic meaning of political change, what was the situation before and after this revolution? Before the revolution the philosophy, ideology was as follows: what could a citizen of the Republic of Armenia do? The answer to this question is known to all of us: in fact, a citizen of the Republic of Armenia could do nothing, or even if something could be done, it should be done with the permission of patrons. But who could do something in that system? The representatives of the political elite, who were demigods, who could decide destinies that were not limited to anything, yes, they had the status of demigods in the Republic of Armenia.

What has changed after the revolution and



what can a citizen of the Republic of Armenia do now? The answer is as follows: The citizen of the Republic of Armenia can do everything; the citizens' possibilities are not limited by the condition that we are talking about creative, legal changes and actions. Our citizens enjoy full freedom in tapping their abilities.

This philosophical change today has turned the Republic of Armenia into one of the leading democratic countries in the world; this philosophical change is a turning point and will turn Armenia into one of the most economically developed countries in the world.

Today, not a single citizen of the Republic of Armenia faces any restrictions. However, many inertial processes emanating from the past interfere: sometimes people do not want to believe what they see and hear, people sometimes still need to be directed or oriented, and most people who want to make economic investments want to coordinate everything with the country's leadership. Of course, we are ready for meetings but, nevertheless, it is necessary to understand that there are twenty-four hours in days, and seven days in a week. This is the inertia that hinders us today. Dear businessmen, all you can see and hear is our reality.

The Government's chief task is to ensure that no one would ever need the govern-

ment's intervention in its economic activity. Our mission is to ensure that people in their daily lives need as little as possible of such intervention on the part of government agencies. The main task of the government is not to lead people, not to hinder people, not to shape the will of people, but to encourage people and to develop their creative abilities and skills.

Today there are dozens of such examples, for example, we took part in the Yerevan Wine Festival, which increased three, four times in three years. What did the government do? Just gave people the opportunity to realize their creative abilities. This is a phenomenon that changes the image and economic opportunities of the country.

The message of the government to citizens is as follows: you are strong and you are capable, you can develop and implement your creative skills. The main task of the government is to encourage all your initiatives, and we are working every day on this task.

On May 8, I will hold a press conference and will present in all detail the changes that have occurred in the Republic of Armenia during the past one year. It is important to note that much has changed in the Republic of Armenia, the most important thing has changed: the Republic of Armenia will never again be in despair, will not lose hope will not be the same as before.

The citizen of the Republic of Armenia is omnipotent. the citizens of the Republic of Armenia will bring prosperity to Motherland through their genie, hard work and talent”

The aim of the forum is to attract entrepreneurs from Armenia and the Diaspora in the process of developing the economy and

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communities of the region. The investment programs for the development of agriculture, industry, tourism and a number of other areas that may become ambitious business proposals for investors are presented. The forum also features industry discussions.

The business forum in Ararat Marz was initiated by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development and regional municipalities in the framework of regional business forums held by the National Center for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses. In 2019, 7 more forums dedicated to the development of the regions and communities will be held in different regions of Armenia.

A Cabinet meeting was held on May 2, chaired by Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, the PM's Office told Noyan Tapan.

In order to regulate the problems identified in the procurement process, the Government amended one of its previous decisions. According to the rationale, the applicable regulations cannot sufficiently ensure the effectiveness of procurement processes and the attractiveness of participation in procedures, including small and start-up businesses.

The participants in the procurement process are presented with formal conditions; as part of the implementation of the agreements, the participants have the opportunity to demonstrate inappropriate behavior, putting at risk the full implementation of programs. The proposed changes will contribute to improving the efficiency of processes and the level of attractiveness of procedures, without loading formal conditions at the stage of evaluation of applications, minimizing potential risks that may arise during the execution of contracts, as well as eliminating the possibility of customers making subjective decisions and evaluating commission.

According to the Government's decision, Manukyan Brandy Factory LLC has been granted a VAT deferment facility for a

Government takes steps to improve procurement procedures



period of three years under their ongoing investment program. Note that Manukyan Brandy Factory LLC was founded in 2013. The Company plans to create and launch a fully automated international standards-compliant factory for the production of brandy, wine and fruit vodka in the Balahovit village of Kotayk region of Armenia with a total investment of 2.8 billion drams.

The production phase is expected to start in 2020. The amount to be deferred for the purchase of equipment will be 273.4 million drams. Over the next three years, the Company will create 37 new jobs with an average salary of 260 thousand drams.

The meeting approved the proposal to sign a 13,400,000 euro-worth loan agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, referred to as Second Additional Financing for Lifeline Road Network Improvement Project. The goal of the project is to provide access to markets and services for rural communities by improving the network of lifeline roads (three projects have been selected with a total length of 450 km) and strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technologies in order to manage a road network of vital importance.

The Government authorized the Service

for Protection of Historical Environment and Historical-Cultural Museum-Reserves under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia to spend 6,000.0 thousand drams with a view to hosting an electronic music festival at the site of Garni cultural-historical museum-reserve. Due to be held on May 6, 2019, the festival will be broadcast live by Cercle (French media organization). The event can be viewed by millions of people around the globe.

Nikol Pashinyan stressed the importance of holding similar events in our country: "The electronic music fans say this is a major event of global coverage, which will attract great attention to Armenia. It turns out that there is a big army of electronic music fans in our country. They are convinced that numerous foreign tourists will come to attend festival."

The Cabinet approved a number of government-drafted legislative initiatives and proposals submitted by National Assembly factions and members. In particular, the amendment to the law On State Duty will allow local companies to use scrap metal as a raw material, ensuring competitive prices for their end-products. As an extra incentive for local producers, it envisages restrictions on scrap metal exports from Armenia, which will help develop the local capacities through the use of marketing tools.

Ecotourism, paintball, jeep tours, song and dance: Artsakh invites to attend Zhingyalov Hats festival



For already the second year the Zhingyalov hats festival is being held in Haterk village of Artsakh gathering tourists from



various countries.

On that day the world's largest Zhingyalov hats [a type of flatbread stuffed with finely diced herbs and green vegetables], more than 3 meters long, will be baked with the goal to be registered in the Guinness World Records.

"In order to attract a lot of visitors we plan to present unprecedented and attractive offers. For instance, some part of the cost of

the transport which will serve the guests will be compensated by the sponsors and the prices will be quite affordable", organizer of the festival Samvel Mirzakhanyan said.

The festival is organized by the Ecotourism in Artsakh initiative group with the support of Artsakh's ministry of culture, youth affairs and tourism and the administration of the Martekart region.

"We plan to contribute to the development of ecotourism in Artsakh, ensure great flow of tourists, raise awareness on the community and take the community on the path of proportional development by using the ecotourism potential. A number of leisure and cultural events will be held during the festival", he said, adding that these events include paintball, jeep tours and visits to beautiful sites in Artsakh.

The festival will be accompanied with live music, singers from Armenia and Artsakh will perform.

"There will be more than 100 pavilions,



and the Zhingyalov hats will be baked in nearly 90 of these pavilions. The visitors will have an opportunity to watch the whole process of making the bread. Other national dishes will also be made", Mirzakhanyan said.

In response to ARMENPRESS question how many guests are expected to attend the festival and especially from which countries, the organizer said they plan to host 12-15.000 visitors both from Armenia and different European countries.

"Last year the scales of the event were smaller, there were nearly 3500 visitors



and the number of pavilions was just 15. But this year their number reaches over 100. We expect that President of Artsakh Bako Sahakyan, as well as President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian will attend the festival", he said, adding that there will be tourists mainly from Russia, Czech Republic, France, US and Canada.

He informed that representatives of various international organizations, as well as ministers are invited to attend the festival.

The festival will open on May 11, at 12:00.

Gerald Papasian Speaks Out on the Orbelian Controversy

Below The Highlights readers could find an article on the recent row on General and Artistic Director of the Al. Spendiarian Natl Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre Maestro Constantine Orbelian in US-based *The Armenian Mirror Spectator* published on 25 April

PARIS — The controversy about the dismissal of three-time Grammy award nominee conductor Constantine Orbelian as managing or executive director of the Alexander Spendiaryan National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet continues to grow. This week noted director, musicologist and actor **Gerald Papasian** gave an interview presenting his views on the topic. Papasian has a unique perspective, one of both an insider and outsider, and knows Orbelian personally, as he has worked with him professionally.



The Egyptian-born Papasian studied acting and directing in a five-year master's program in Soviet Armenia, including a stint as intern assistant directing at the National Opera of Armenia. Later he produced a number of operas in the United States, France, Great Britain, and Armenia. Today he is involved in the work of the National Opera, having directed the opera buffa "Garine" by Dikran Tchouhadjian there last year.

Orbelian was appointed as artistic director of the Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet in 2016 and given the additional position of executive or managing director in February 2017. He was given a three-year contract which, according to Orbelian, expires on August 3, 2020.

Papasian declared that though on the surface the situation appeared to be just a clash of individuals, Orbelian versus Armenia's Acting Minister of Culture Nazeni Gharibyan, larger issues are involved. One factor is financial. The government apparently is trying to save money by cutting expenditures in every domain, including the cultural one. Gharibyan earlier tried to shut down some drama theaters in Armenia and asked the Opera and Ballet Theater to cut some 25 positions (which it did). Orbelian is indirectly also accused of contributing to the debt of the opera.

A second issue is that Orbelian does not speak Armenian, which is supposedly unacceptable constitutionally for a state opera director. A third matter is that he travels abroad constantly.

The fourth aspect is organizational. In the Soviet period, Papasian explained, the managerial or administrative director was often given greater powers to control the artistic director, and often would be a sort of politician, as member of the Communist Party. He could hire or fire the artistic director. In certain instances, the same person held both offices (e.g. Gohar Gasparian's husband Tigran Levonyan, Hovhannes Chekijian and Edgar Hovhannisyan, all at the Opera).

The Soviet-era laws or rules have been changed in countries like Russia and Georgia but remain on the books in Armenia. When Orbelian was invited to come to Armenia from the United States to the opera, it was understood that he would be given full authority to control the executive and artistic dimensions of the opera without interference.

Organizational Background

Papasian explained that the organizational issues that Orbelian is now facing first emerged in the case of the Hamazgayin Sos Sargsyan Theater, founded in 1991 and

turned into a state theater in 2003. The actors of that company opposed filmmaker **Vigen Chaldhranyan**, who was appointed to the two positions of managing director and artist director simultaneously by Minister of Culture Armen Amiryann.

This appointment, Papasian said, was "Soviet-style," meaning forced by the ministry without taking into consideration the company's needs. After two years of unsuccessful efforts at working together, the frustrated actors asked Chaldhranyan to resign, but he refused. The matter went to the level of the ministry, by now run by Gharibyan. The

latter ruled that the same person cannot be both managing director and artistic director and gave Chaldhranyan the choice of which office to hold, unlike what was to happen in Orbelian's case.

Astutely, Chaldhranyan chose to remain as managing director because of the greater power of this office in Armenia, and brought in a friend of his as artistic director. However, his efforts failed because the theater company went on strike and Chaldhranyan was forced to resign completely.

After this, Gharibyan was planning to close down or merge six or seven other theaters but when the news was leaked, a controversy emerged, Papasian said, and she had to stop.

Tension with Orbelian

Pressure initially was brought to bear on Orbelian after Gharibyan's predecessor, **Lilit Makunts**, came to office. She famously wrote posts on the Ministry of Culture's Facebook page in the fall of 2018 noting that the staff and executive personnel of the Opera are banned from discussing politics and holding meetings at the building. The post, so soon after the bloodless Velvet Revolution, surprised many and

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drew much unfavorable attention.

With the government's decision to dismantle the Ministry of Culture, Makunts left her post as minister and soon became a member of parliament. Deputy Minister Gharibyan was left temporarily as acting minister. Gharibyan's next move was to dismiss Orbelian from his position as executive director. He remains artistic director, but Papasian said "this means very little." As artistic director, he will not have the right or capacity to make any deals with outside operas. He can only take care of the opera house itself, under the orders of a new managing director.

Papasian suggested that if there is no other choice than to continue the current system, at least Orbelian should hold the managing director position and hire an artistic director of his choice, thus remaining in control of the situation to exercise his unique talents. Papasian emphasized that "a personality like Orbelian with all his international celebrity and fame, and international ties all the way to the Metropolitan Opera, to mention one out of hundreds, is very important to Armenia as publicity. He has to be the executive or managing director to be able to talk with the Metropolitan people and make agreements. As such, he had brought in a lot of celebrities in the last two years to Armenia and put Armenian's opera house on the international map. That is the most important thing for us today." He noted that Orbelian has introduced more premieres in Armenia in two years than has been done in the past 17 years.

Papasian pointed out that financially, Orbelian has spent money out of his own pocket for his travels and for the Opera, unlike his predecessors. The Opera has a 92-million-dram debt which was inherited from the past, not created by Orbelian, Papasian said, adding, "Most probably, his predecessors have stolen everything all day long, all the time over the last 20 years."

As far as language goes, there are many other examples throughout the world of famous directors of operas who did not speak the national language. A Japanese director of the Bastille Opera House of Paris spoke with his artists in English, for example. Papasian said, "Directors are not supposed to learn the country's language like ambassa-



dors. Orbelian does speak Russian and everybody understands him, so there is no problem. He speaks 'music' rather than Armenian, and that should be enough."

Orbelian's travels should not be considered a negative, but a positive, Papasian said. It is normal for someone of his stature to travel and keep relations with the outside world. Instead he could have capable deputy directors, Papasian suggested, or another method of facilitating his work. He must have had contracts in place for the next five years throughout the world when he was offered the Armenian position.

A fifth factor must be considered in addition to the abovementioned broader issues, and that is the personal one. Papasian surmised that there is a minority group connected with the Opera House which wants to expel Orbelian to control the opera itself. What role it played in creating the initial pressure on Orbelian is unclear, but Papasian says that it at present is supporting the ministry's actions. Orbelian himself has noted that Gharibyan had a candidate in mind to replace him. The minority group is introducing additional political undertones in connection with Orbelian having been appointed during the prior regime.

Generally, Papasian said, "No big name director in the world accepts having a boss. There are many examples of important artistic personalities who are both executive and artistic director in the West." Orbelian in particular, Papasian declared, "is a brilliant concert master and a brilliant musician. He is very well known all over the

world. Consequently, letters have poured in from noted artists ranging from China to the Metropolitan Opera in New York in support of him, and this is not good for our image. In Armenia, the entire theatrical community, with all the other theaters' directors, is standing with Orbelian." The latter also fear that if this situation continues, a dictatorial environment will be created in the arts, and, Papasian said, they are right.

The Way Out

"In short," Papasian concluded, "it is obvious to everyone that all the above mentioned 'faults' Orbelian is being accused of, i.e. the Armenian language issue, the maestro's travels, etc., are unfounded and mere pretexts to get control of the opera house. I'm sure this will be obvious for Pashinyan as well. Already, based on the support of the entire opera house staff and all Armenian theater directors, the decision to hire a replacement for managing director has been postponed by Pashinyan. That's a first positive step. In the future, perhaps someone may be appointed who would be more apt to conduct cultural affairs for the government, or a seasoned adviser be selected for the minister of culture. There are intellectuals in Armenia, very intelligent and wise and learned, who know international rules and are talking about it. Some of them are saying the right things about how things are done in America, France, Britain and Japan, and the funny thing is that I, who have lived and worked outside, say that they are absolutely right, as if they've lived there themselves."

Perhaps there is also a silver lining to the present controversy, Papasian added, as it calls attention to the rigid rules and regulations inherited from Soviet times. Either these rules should be changed, he said, or flexibility and exceptions should be allowed in the case of important artists. Furthermore, after the Velvet Revolution, people opposing government decisions are at least capable now to openly protest and voice their opinion. This would have been unheard of during the previous regime, or would have been forcibly repressed. The blessing in disguise would be if this incident finally triggers the much-needed change of laws for culture in Armenia.

Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator News: 2019 Housing Project Launched...



The budget for the current year is approved and the project is set. VivaCell-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia announced about continuing the partnership and the plans for 2019. Yet again, the regions are the target of the program. The willingness of the partners to build houses and to ease the social burden of the families living in metal containers is firm.

The news of being included in the program came as a surprise to one of the stakeholder families. The decision of supporting families was made based on the assessment performed following visits to regions and a video footage prepared in the beginning of the year.

The **Hasoyan** family lives in Mr-gastan village, Armavir region, in an 18 sq meter metal container. The father of the family twice traveled abroad for a seasonal work to pay off the debt for the metal container and the piece of land. He has also built a greenhouse as

suffers health problems, together with his wife and their children, lives in a small room serving as a bedroom, a living room and a bathroom within a day. His wife, Zarineh sets a fixed timeline for the day to manage all the housework.

"It was hard to make a decision to



leave the house of my husband's parents and move to the metal container, but we had to: there were 12 of us living under the same roof. At the beginning, we had nothing; we were taking water from our neighbors. Now with the help of our relatives the problem of the water is solved; but we still sleep, eat and bathe in the same room. Despite the lack of resources and basic conditions, I try not to conceal my concerns and to care for my family needs. And I have to do it with a smile on my face, so as my children do not fall in despair," said Zarineh.

A house will be built for Hasoyan family owing to the partnership of VivaCell-MTS and the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia in the current year.



"We kick start the housing program of 2019. I am glad to state that this is a continuous process. Every single family's success is our victory. I have once compared these families with trees cracking stones without breaking. Standing by their side in the right time oftentimes brings important and big changes in their lives. And I am proud for the years-long partnership with the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia," VivaCell-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** said.

"The continuity of the program means fulfilling long-cherished hopes for many families. Many families have found their happiness owing to our partnership with VivaCell-MTS. Improving the living conditions of the families is a guarantee for a better quality of their lives. I am grateful for this cooperation," said Fuller Center for Housing Armenia President **Ashot Yeghiazaryan**.

The procedures of the partnership are clear: the families are selected by the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia based on criteria, such as the social situation, under-aged children in the family, number of people in the family, and others. VivaCell-MTS provides financial assistance, and frequently volunteers in the construction works.



an alternative source of income for the family in future. However, the dream of a home had remained unfulfilled. It's been some 8 years now that Suren, who



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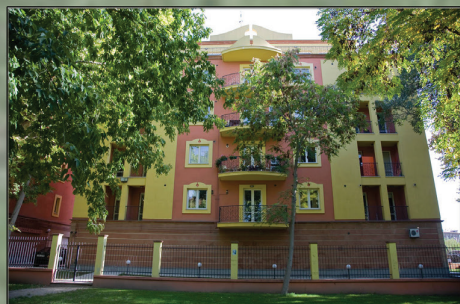
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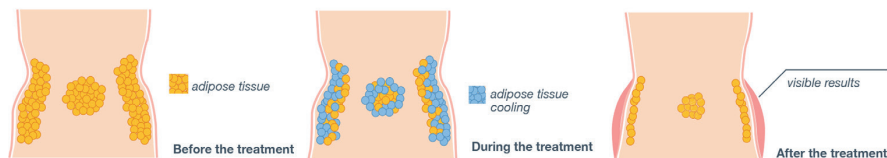
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