

## Armenia interested in expansion of EAEU's foreign economic ties



*Kazakhstan -- Leaders of the Eurasian Economic Union member states meet in Nur-Sultan, May 29, 2019.*

Armenia is interested in “most effective” participation in the Eurasian Economic Union and will spare no effort to improve the mechanisms of cooperation, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at the sitting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Nur-Sultan.

He added that “as a presiding country, Armenia attaches special importance to the expansion of foreign economic ties.”

“We aim to successfully complete the negotiations with Singapore, Serbia, Egypt, Israel and India. The agreement with Iran has already been ratified by the Armenian National Assembly,” PM Pashinyan said.

He stressed that “Armenia is actively participating in and contributing to the creation and implementation of the EAEU digital agenda. Nikol Pashinyan voiced confidence that the dynamic development of the work targeted at raising the level of cooperation and creating favorable conditions for doing business would raise the cooperation to a new level.

“Formation of a common energy market will allow the member states to effectively develop cooperation on the basis of principles of equality and fair competition in the economic interests of local energy producers and consumers,” the Prime Minister continued.

The next sitting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council will take place in Yerevan on October 1.

## We are interested in developing cooperation with friendly France – PM Pashinyan receives delegation of Bouches-du-Rhône department



Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received on May 30 the delegation led by President of the Departmental Council of Bouches-du-Rhône Martine Vassal. Deputy Mayor of Marseille Didier Parakian was also present at the meeting. Bouches-du-Rhône is one of the largest departments of France, which encompasses 119 cities.

Greeting the guests, the PM noted that Armenia highlights cooperation with Bouches-du-Rhône department, which has a large Armenian community and where there are French-Armenians who are members of the departmental council.

“In Armenia France is assessed as one of the best friends of our country and people. We have strong historical links and we are interested in the development of cooperation with friendly France”, Pashinyan said.

The President of the Departmental Council of Bouches-du-Rhône thanked PM Pashinyan for the reception, noting that they are glad to visit Armenia for the 4th time. Speaking about joint projects and the cardiac hospital opened in Goris city of Armenia, Martine Vassal expressed satisfaction over the cooperation with Armenia. “We have quite close ties with Armenia and plan to deepen them. The French-Armenian community enjoys great respect and is actively involved in the development of various spheres”, she said.

The interlocutors discussed the opportuni-



ties for expanding economic relations. The PM presented the reforms aimed at fighting monopolies and creating equal and fair opportunities for competition, noting that positive economic tendencies have already

been recorded and a favorable atmosphere for investments has been created. According to Nikol Pashinyan, a number of French companies are effectively operating in Armenia, and the Armenian Government is interested in the expansion of the French business in Armenia, which will not only develop economic relations between the countries, but will also bring a new entrepreneurial culture to Armenia.

Martine Vassal promised to convey Pashinyan's message regarding business opportunities of Armenia to the business circles of Bouches-du-Rhône.

The sides touched upon France's important role in the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and condemnation of its denial.

Nikol Pashinyan noted that the decision of French President Emmanuel Macron to declare April 24 as the national day of commemoration of the Armenian Genocide has received a great response in Armenia and the Armenian people worldwide and Armenians are grateful to France for accepting and sheltering Armenians who survived the Genocide, and for creating conditions for preservation and development of identity and culture.

## Armenia deplores Azerbaijan's deliberate steps aimed at increasing tension

The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has resolutely deplored deliberate steps by Azerbaijan in the past three days to increase tension, which manifest in dissemination of false information about its own casualties, direct calls for physical threats to the leadership of Armenia, publicly voiced by representatives of the ruling party in Azerbaijan's parliament, and significant increase in ceasefire violations, which resulted today in a killing of private Sipan Melkonyan of the Defense Army of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan's recent actions take place against the background of the appeal of 30 May from the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to exercise maximum restraint to avoid escalation.

“These latest developments defy the efforts of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to take constructive efforts towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict, to establish a conducive environment to this end, and represent a serious

setback for all the efforts taken over the past months. Azerbaijan violates its own commitments undertaken in the latest Joint Statements in Milano (December, 2018), in Vienna (March, 2019) and in Moscow (April, 2019)”, the Foreign Ministry said.

According to the statement, “the deplorable actions of Azerbaijan, if not urgently addressed, may represent a serious obstacle to next steps in the settlement process. They also question the credibility of Azerbaijan and their capacity to remain faithful to commitments, as agreed in Dushanbe in September 2018 and reaffirmed in Vienna in March 2019, to observe and strengthen the ceasefire. Armenia strongly urges Azerbaijan to demonstrate genuine political will expressed in concrete and effective measures to observe the ceasefire. Azerbaijan will bear full responsibility for the risks of further escalation.”

“Azerbaijan's latest confrontational and dangerous actions prompt their past violence, atrocities and attempts to aggression and stand proof of the existential physical

security risks to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh,” the Foreign Ministry said.

“Armenia reiterates that there is no alternative to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, for which strict observance of the ceasefire is an essential condition. Under no circumstances the security of Nagorno-Karabakh and its people will be compromised,” it added.

“The latest incident underlines the urgency to finalize in the shortest possible time an OSCE investigative mechanism of ceasefire violations and to expand the Office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office, in accordance with the commitment taken by Azerbaijan in Vienna and St. Petersburg in 2016,” the statement continued.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its profound and most sincere condolences to the family and friends of private Sipan Melkonyan of the Defense Army of Nagorno-Karabakh.



## Armenian opposition ‘kept in dark’ about judicial vetting bill



(Yerevan- RFE/RL) - The two opposition parties represented in the Armenian parliament deplored on Thursday a lack of transparency in government efforts to enact legislation for a mandatory “vetting” of the country’s judges demanded by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Pashinyan moved to purge the judiciary after a Yerevan court controversially ordered former President Robert Kocharyan released from custody on May 18 pending the outcome of his high-profile trial. The premier said on May 20 that Armenian judges lack public trust and must therefore be vetted based on their “political ties, origin, property status and activities.”

The parliamentary leader of Pashinyan’s My Step alliance, Lilit Makunts, declared on Wednesday that pro-government law-

makers are already finalizing a bill on such vetting. She called on the opposition Prosperous Armenia (BHK) and Bright Armenia (LHK) parties to submit “proposals as to what they want that vetting bill to contain.”

Both parties dismissed the offer as disingenuous, saying that they are hearing about the bill for the first time and are completely uninformed about its essence. They said that they should have been involved in the drafting process from the outset.

“You should create a [multi-party] group and work in that format, instead of saying that ‘we are working on something and if you have concerns or proposals share them with us,’” LHK leader Edmon Marukyan told Makunts on the parliament floor. “What should we submit proposals on? How do we know what you’ve written?”

Another LHK parliamentarian, Taron Simonyan, echoed that criticism. “The authorities should present us with their views, [reform] toolkit and [legislative] package before we can put forward our views about it,” he told RFE/RL’s Armenian service.

Simonian warned against the creation of a new “judicial system beneficial for the

political authorities.”

A senior BHK figure, deputy parliament speaker Vahe Enfiadjyan, similarly said that any opposition input will be “meaningless” as long as the pro-government majority keeps the key points of the vetting bill confidential.

“I don’t find it expedient to release substantive details [of the bill] at the moment,” insisted Makunts. She said the bill will be publicized within a month.

The opposition criticism came as a high-level delegation of the Council of Europe arrived in Yerevan for two-day consultations with Armenian leaders, including Pashinian and parliament speaker Ararat Mirzoyan, regarding the judicial reform. The Strasbourg-based organization said last week that officials from various Council of Europe structures will “offer advice and assistance with the necessary reforms” during the visit.

In a May 22 phone call, Pashinyan assured Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland that the reforms will conform to Armenia’s constitution and international commitments.

## President Sarkissian signs decrees on appointing ministers



President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian signed decrees on appointing ministers of new ministries which were formed as a result of the government’s structural changes.

According to the President’s decree, Erik Grigoryan has been relieved from the posi-

tion of nature protection minister and appointed minister of environment.

Tigran Khachatryan has been appointed minister of economy.

Arayik Harutyunyan has been appointed minister of education, science, culture and sport, being relieved from the position of minister of education and science.

Suren Papikyan has been appointed minister of territorial administration and infrastructures.

Hakob Arshakyan has been appointed minister of high technological industry,

being relieved from the position of minister of transport, communication and IT.

Following the legislative changes, the government of Armenia consists of the following ministries:

- Ministry of foreign affairs
- Ministry of defense
- Ministry of emergency situations
- Ministry of justice
- Ministry of labor and social affairs
- Ministry of education, science and culture
- Ministry of environment
- Ministry of healthcare
- Ministry of finance
- Ministry of economy
- Ministry of territorial administration and infrastructures
- Ministry of high technological industry

## Lawyer Vahe Grigoryan nominated for Constitutional Court



President Armen Sarkissian has nominated a prominent lawyer for the Constitutional Court after the current parliament twice rejected other candidates chosen by him.

The nominee, Vahe Grigoryan, has a long history of human rights advocacy. He has also cooperated with opposition groups that challenged former Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan.

In particular, Grigoryan represented Levon Ter-Petrosian and his Armenian National Congress party in Constitutional Court hearings on their appeals against official results of a 2008 presidential election and parliamentary elections held in 2012 and 2017. In addition, he has been representing the relatives of anti-government protesters killed by security forces in the

wake of the 2008 vote in the European Court of Human Rights.

Grigoryan is believed enjoying the backing of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the ruling My Step alliance.

President Sarkissian already nominated him for the vacant Constitutional Court seat last fall. The then Armenian parliament dominated by supporters of the former government refused to approve his candidacy.

Sarkissian went on to nominate two other candidates. They both were rejected, by the current National Assembly controlled by My Step.

The head of state announced his decision to pick Grigoryan on May 31. In a statement announcing the nomination, his office argued that the appointment of a new Constitutional Court judge “must not turn into an endless process and become a subject of political haggling or speculation.” It also complained that only several Armenian lawyers are deemed qualified enough to sit on the country’s highest court.

Parliament speaker Ararat Mirzoyan, who is a close associate of Pashinyan, hailed

Grigoryan’s nomination as “highly positive,” saying that he has long had a “close relationship” with the nominee. He said they have “a lot in common in terms of the value system and vision for country’s development.”

Mirzoyan cautioned at the same time that My Step’s parliamentary group has yet to discuss and formulate a position on Grigoryan’s candidacy.

By contrast, some opposition lawmakers voiced serious misgivings about Sarkisian’s latest Constitutional Court nomination.

Gevorg Petrosyan of the Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) said Grigoryan is widely “associated with the authorities” and that the latter “seem to be attempting to push him through.” He said the BHK believes that the new court justice must be “free from political influence, pressures, connections and constraints.”

For his part, Taron Simonyan, a senior deputy from the opposition Bright Armenia Party, claimed that Armenian law does not allow the president to nominate the same person for a second time

## Co-Chairs provide proposals for concrete steps in Karabakh settlement process

The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, Stéphane Visconti of France, and Andrew Schofer of the United States of America), together with the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Andrzej Kasprzyk, visited the region from 27 to 30 May.

The Co-Chairs met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Yerevan on 27 May and with President Ilham Aliyev in Baku on 30 May. In both capitals, they held consultations with the respective Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers. On May 28, the Co-Chairs met with the de facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh. In Baku, the Co-Chairs met with the Chairman of the Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno-Karabakh. While in Nagorno-Karabakh, the mediators were briefed on humanitarian issues by the local representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The main purpose of the visit was to assess the evolution of the situation on the line of contact and the international border, and to follow up on the discussions held by the Azerbaijani President and the Armenian Prime Minister in Vienna on 29 March and their respective Foreign Ministers in Moscow on 15 April.



As requested, the Co-Chairs provided proposals for concrete next steps in the settlement process, including on humanitarian and security measures. The Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan accepted the Co-Chairs’ proposal to meet soon under their auspices, and will announce details at the appropriate time.

The Co-Chairs expressed deep concern about recent casualties and called on the parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid escalation.



## German Lawmakers Visit Armenia, Karabakh

Federal and regional legislators representing Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party have visited Nagorno-Karabakh after meeting with senior officials in Armenia earlier this week.

The AfD is Germany's leading parliamentary opposition force, having finished third in the last German general elections held in 2017. The party is known for its Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant agenda.

The AfD delegation that arrived in Yerevan comprised four deputies of the German parliament, Bundestag, and three members of the regional assembly of the eastern German state of Brandenburg. They met with Armenia's Deputy Minister of Economic Development Mane Adamyan on May 27.

According to an official press release, Adamyan briefed the visiting parliamentarians on economic reforms implemented by the Armenian government. She also informed them that the government and the European Union are planning to jointly organize an investment forum on Armenia in Germany this fall.

The German politicians also met with parliament deputies from the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK). A statement



by the Armenian parliament said the two sides stressed the importance of "Germany's role in democratic, legal and economic reforms in our country."

Most members of the AfD delegation, including Bundestag deputies Steffen Kotre and Stefan Keuter, traveled to Stepanakert on Wednesday. Accompanied by an Armenian pro-government lawmaker, they laid flowers at a local memorial to Karabakh Armenian victims of the 1991-1994 war with Azerbaijan before meeting with members of the Karabakh parliament.

The parliament's deputy speaker, Vahram Balayan, congratulated the AfD on winning 11 seats in the European Parliament in the

May 26 elections. Balayan also praised its "friendly relations" with Karabakh, according to a parliament statement.

The statement quoted Kotre as saying that he and his AfD colleagues will use their political influence to "deepen ties between Germany and Karabakh."

While in Stepanakert, the German delegation also held a separate meeting with Arayik Harutiunyan, Karabakh's former prime minister and one of the main candidates in a presidential election that will be held in the Armenian-populated territory next year. They reportedly discussed the possibility of Karabakh-related initiatives by the European Parliament and humanitarian aid programs in Karabakh.

The AfD and Harutiunyan's Free Fatherland party have maintained contacts since 2015, prompting strong criticism from Azerbaijan.

## Presentation on Armenia's SMEs at the headquarters of the BSEC Organization



The delegation of Armenia delivered a presentation on the recent developments in the sector of Small and Medium Entrepreneurship (SME) of Armenia at the meeting of the BSEC Working Group on SMEs held at the headquarters of the BSEC Organization on May 29.

The first part of the presentation briefly

elaborated on the activities of the SME Development National Center of Armenia, a principal organization implementing the government SME programs and strategies, which are targeted at increasing efficiency and competitiveness of SMEs, ensuring availability of business development services and expanding financial opportunities for SMEs, promoting innovations and R&D activities of SMEs and supporting their internationalization.

In the second part of presentation, the Armenian delegation showcased the country's

new impact investment and social entrepreneurship platform, ImpactAim Venture Accelerator, which helps generate a new range of tools aimed at leveraging private investment for public good and sustainable development. Initiated by UNDP Armenia, ImpactAim Accelerator brings together the private sector and development agencies to exit solutions and startups/SMEs that both: are targeting the development of a specific sector and have a sustainable business model that can be further scaled.

At the end, the Armenian delegation highlighted the importance of collaboration between BSEC member states and their enterprises, particularly SMEs and startups in the area of social entrepreneurship and finding sustainable development solutions, which may have an impact across the BSEC region and beyond.

## New gambling restrictions spark protests in Armenia

Employees of a betting firm blocked a major street in Yerevan on May 29 to protest against severe restrictions on betting and gambling planned by the pro-government majority in Armenia's parliament.

A bill drafted late last year by the parliament's deputy speaker Alen Simonyan would close the vast majority of hundreds of betting shops that have sprung up across the country in the last few years. They would be allowed to operate only in four Armenian towns: Jermuk, Meghri, Sevan and Tsaghkadzor.

Simonian and his supporters argue that a rising number of Armenians are spending a disproportionate share of their incomes on betting as well as gambling. According to them, tens of thousands of people have already incurred major debts as a result.

Armenian betting firms have strongly objected to the proposed measures, clinching a



concession from the Armenian parliament committee on economic issues. Under an amended version of the bill drafted approved by the committee last week, the ban on betting shops would come into force on November 2020.

There would be no such delay for a ban on video slot machines also envisaged by the bill. Such machines can be found at most petrol and pressurized gas stations in the country. Virtually all of them belong to the GoodWin betting agency

that organized the protest near the parliament building in Yerevan.

GoodWin's director, Sargis Mikaelyan, and employees said the removal of the gambling machines should also be delayed until the end of next year. Mikaelyan argued that unlike other private firms GoodWin does not organize online gambling not covered by the bill.

The protesters unblocked a section of Marshal Bagramyan Avenue adjacent to the National Assembly building only after

the chairman of the parliament committee, Babken Tunyan, agreed to meet with their representatives.

"They promised to hold further discussions and take into consideration our comments and concerns," Mikaelyan said afterwards.

Meanwhile, Simonian dismissed arguments that the bill would cost the GoodWin workers their jobs. "The machines are not operated by human beings," he said. "So, they are exploiting the issue. I'm sure that it won't work."

Similar restrictions were already imposed on Armenian casinos in 2014. A law which took effect at the time stipulates that casinos can freely operate only in Armenia's three most popular resort towns, including Jermuk and Tsaghkadzor. Casino owners can do business in Yerevan and other parts of the country only if they invest at least \$100 million in their gambling sites.

## Economic development taking place with positive and optimistic dynamics: Pashinyan releases data

During Cabinet meeting on May 30 Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan touched upon the economic indicators, stating that according to the data of January-April 2019, the economic development in Armenia is taking place with a positive and optimistic dynamics. The PM informed that 9.2% economic activity growth has been registered in April.

"If we combine this figure with the data of the first quarter, we have 7.1% GDP growth. Our task, as we have outlined, is to promote this good logic via targeted, right capital expenditures and to be able to record better figures", he said.

The Armenian PM also informed that the



volume of industrial production increased by 13.2%, but the growth in the construction sector is less than expected.

"I am sure that these figures will improve, why, because the situation in the mortgage market will inevitably lead to this result",

Nikol Pashinyan said.

The Prime Minister said the trade turnover increased 9% and the volume of services rose by 16.2%.

"Frankly speaking, the happiest one in these figures is the growth of export volumes. A month ago, we had a working discussion over the situation with the export, there were some concerns, but I am happy that we have already recorded 9.9% growth in April", he said, adding that there is a certain positive dynamic in the increase of average monthly nominal salaries.

"I think this dynamic will become more positive in the context of the decisions announced", the PM added.



## Fitch affirms Armenia at 'B+', outlook positive

Mayor of Yerevan Hayk Marutyan on April 18 spoke about the situation around waste management in the capital city.

Marutyan told government officials at a Cabinet meeting that initially the waste management operator, Sanitek, was carrying out normal work in the initial period, however the company's "incorrect work" led to the existing situation.

Marutyan said Sanitek has been fined nearly 13,000,000 drams.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan weighed in, noting that there are numerous complaints over waste management in Yerevan.

"Is the situation critical?" he asked.

"It's not critical, 2012 in Naples was critical, I have made photos there, I will send you the photos after the session, you'll see

what's critical, we hope we won't reach critical," Marutyan responded, referring to the 2012 Naples waste management crisis.

Pashinyan said the Government must in all ways support the Yerevan City Hall in order for Sanitek to work duly.

"You said you've fined Sanitek with 13 million drams, but this won't improve the situation, on the contrary it will make it worse because next time they will say – you fined us 13 million, and we don't have money to renovate our vehicles", the PM said.

According to the PM the problem emerged when factually there was only one operator.

"Because if we had a second operator there would be a different competitive situation," he said.

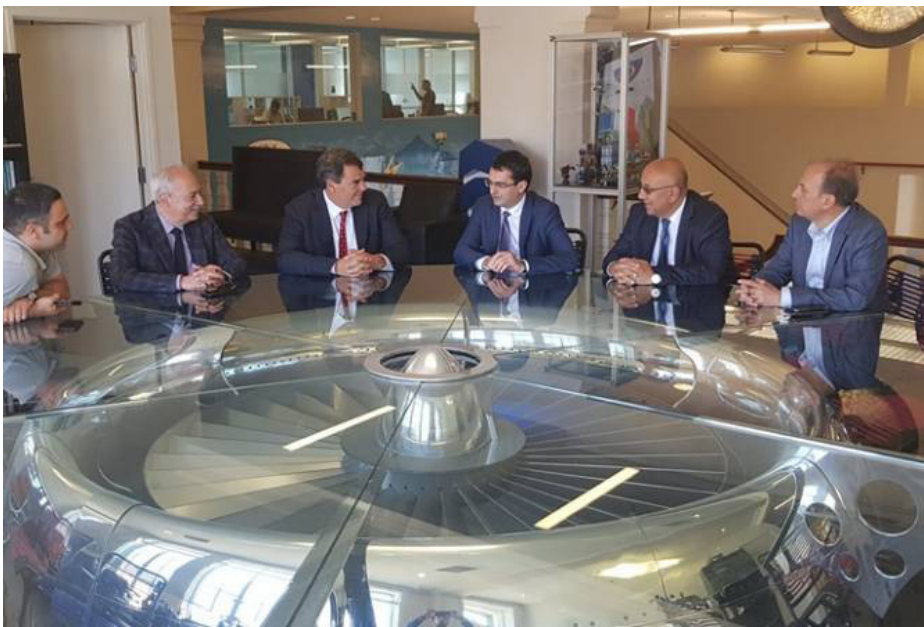
Mayor Marutyan said they studied international practice and today all European companies are returning to the model when the community and government are assuming management of transportation and waste management on themselves.

"Take all necessary measures in order for the problem not to get worse," Pashinyan told Marutyan.

Pashinyan also called on private companies who are willing to support to contact the City Hall.

Since a procurement process would take a lot of time, the government approved the Yerevan City Hall's proposal to buy 15 new garbage trucks without tender.

## Armenian minister meets founder of Draper & Association and Draper University in Silicon Valley



Armenia's minister of transport, communication and information technologies Hakob Arshakyan met with founder of Draper & Association venture capital company and Draper University Timothy Draper in the Silicon Valley on the side-

lines of his working visit to the United States.

The meeting was also attended by Armenia's Consul General in Los Angeles Armen Bayburdyan.

Currently students from 77 countries

study in the University.

During the meeting the sides discussed the possibilities to open Hero City at Draper University branch in Armenia. Minister Hakobyan introduced Tim Draper on the Armenian government's large-scale reforms carried out after the revolution in the fields of economy, business climate improvement and strengthening of democracy.

The minister also handed over the Armenian Prime Minister's invitation to Mr. Draper to take part in the World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT 2019) which will take place on October 6-9 in Yerevan.

Hakob Arshakyan said the visit to Armenia will enable Tim Draper to get acquainted with the country's investment opportunities, as well as scientific and technological potential.

## Armenian PM offers CoE to get involved in the process of judiciary reforms



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has offered the Council of Europe to get involved in the process of Armenia's judicial reforms.

The Prime Minister had a working lunch with a high-level delegation of the Council of Europe led by Christos Giakoumopoulos, Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law.

Nikol Pashinyan stressed the importance of the Council of Europe delegation's visit. The Prime Minister stressed that the implementation of fundamental changes in the judicial and legal spheres stands high on the Government's agenda; they are supposed to guarantee the existence of a full-fledged independent judiciary in our country.

The Head of Government emphasized that as a result of the democratic elections held in Armenia, the Government and the Parliament of Armenia won the citizens' full confidence and mandate.

"In political terms, a simple question arises, especially after the revolution: whom does the judiciary represent in the Republic of Armenia; who does this power come from, whose power is exercised in Armenia by the judiciary? I say this because the second and unchangeable article of the Constitution of Armenia states the following: In the Republic of Armenia, the power belongs to the people. The people shall exercise their power through free elections, referenda, as well as through state and local self-government bodies and officials provided for by the Constitution. In this series, the courts stand for the State bodies stipulated by the Constitution.

The problem is that by virtue of last year's political developments, the Armenian courts do not enjoy the people's trust, unlike the government and parliament. That is why courts' rulings keep causing specific concerns in society; people simply do not trust the judicial system, and this can be a source of crisis," Nikol Pashinyan said and went on to note that the time has come for the judiciary to earn the trust of our people. Nikol Pashinyan expressed confidence that in close cooperation with international partners, the Government will succeed in building a reliable judicial system.

Christos Giakoumopoulos reaffirmed the full support of the

Council of Europe to Armenia's judiciary reform agenda. He stressed that the CoE welcomes the steps taken by the Government of Armenia to implement radical reforms in the judicial-legal sphere and went on to note that they had arrived in Armenia to



discuss further steps and actions of bilateral cooperation. Christos Giakoumopoulos added that the Council of Europe is ready to cooperate closely with the Armenian government in order to complete the reform process mediating the full expertise of the Council of Europe.

Highlighting the fact of Armenia's membership in the Council of Europe, the Prime Minister suggested that the Council of Europe should be involved in the process of judiciary reforms instead of providing assistance.

Both sides noted that the fight against corruption and the reform of the judicial system should comply with the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, international standards and the obligations taken by Armenia as a member state of the Council of Europe.



## Armenia's Republic Day celebrated at Sardarapat Memorial



Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Karekin II, President Armen Sarkissian, representatives of legislative and executive authorities visited the Sardarapat Memorial on May 28 to participate in Republic Day events.

The Prime Minister laid a wreath at the memorial to the victims of the heroic battle of Sardarapat and paid tribute to their memory.

A memorial dedicated to the 140th birth anniversary of statesman and politician Aram Manukyan was unveiled within the framework of the celebrations.



The six-meter high monument of red tuff has been created by architect Hayk Asa-

tryan and sculptor Artak Hambartsumyan.

In an address to the attendees, PM Nikol



Pashinyan said "we are celebrating one of the most significant events in Armenia's millennia-long history."

"The first independent Republic of Armenia was proclaimed after the heroic battles of Gharakilisa, Bash-Aparan and Sardarapat. It happened in a period, when it seemed the history of the Armenian people had reached its final stage," the Prime Minister said.

"Exactly 500 years after the collapse of Cilician Armenia, the Armenian people with

no statehood were subjected to the heaviest disaster of genocide, 1.5 million Armenians were killed, thousands became refugees," PM Pashinyan added.

He added that "all conditions seemed to have been created for the Armenian people to surrender and accept its defeat, lose its identity, forget its history and refuse from any claims to the future."

"However, we witnessed the opposite. The Armenian people gained what they seemed to have lost forever, they gained statehood, state flag, coat of arms, state anthem that reflected the tragic,

but at the same time miraculous story of the Armenian nation that stood on the brink of death," Nikol Pashinyan stated.





## Unbelievable but True: Trump Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize!



By Harut Sassounian

While President Trump is visiting Japan this week, it is the appropriate time to comment about his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The nomination was announced by none other than Trump himself, who boasted that Abe had given him "the most beautiful copy of a five-page letter that he sent to the people who give out a thing called the Nobel Prize."

Japan's Asahi newspaper reported that Trump had asked Shinzo Abe to nominate him. Abe refused to confirm the nomination, citing a Nobel Committee policy of not disclosing nominees for 50 years after prizes are awarded. When Abe was asked in Parliament if the report was accurate, he responded: "I am not saying it is not true."

Two Norwegian lawmakers had already nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize in June 2018. Interestingly, in February 2018, the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced that two Nobel Peace Prize nominations for Trump were forgeries. In addition, 18 Republican Members of Congress sent a joint letter to the Nobel Committee last year nominating Trump for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize.

Japanese Prime Minister's nomination of Trump created a major political stir with domestic opposition leaders protesting Shinzo Abe's move. Junya Ogawa, a lawmaker representing the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, criticized Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate accord and the nuclear agreement with Iran, his decision to suspend the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and his relocation of the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. These actions, Ogawa said, should make it "not

possible to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize, and it's shameful for Japan."

The reason the Japanese Prime Minister nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize is that the leader of Japan had figured out that flattery is the best way to be on Trump's good side. Apparently, playing countless rounds of golf together was not sufficient. Japan has three requests from Trump:

1. To seek Trump's help in arranging for the Japanese Prime Minister to meet with the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to discuss "unconditional" denuclearization. This is an important request for Japan as recent North Korean missiles have either fallen in or near Japanese territorial waters, or have overflowed the Japanese territory panicking the population.
2. To dissuade Trump from his repeated threats to impose U.S. tariffs on Japanese imports, mostly cars, which would impact Japan's economy and undermine Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's re-election.
3. To get Trump's assistance in negotiating the return of Japanese citizens who were abducted by North Korea between 1977 and 1982.

Nevertheless, Shinzo Abe's nomination of Trump "was unexpected, given Trump's aggressive 'America first' foreign policy and disdain for multilateral international cooperation. After U.S. talks with North Korea collapsed... a Nobel nod seemed wholly unwarranted," according to the Washington Post.

While the Prime Minister of Japan may have good reasons for nominating Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel Committee has better reasons to reject the request in order not to dishonor its prestigious award by presenting it to such a charlatan, liar and cheater, both financially and morally. He has insulted other races and religions, abused minorities and immigrants, and refused to comply with U.S. laws and international treaties.

Just in case some may think that my antagonism to Trump's nomination stems from partisanship, I need to remind readers that when President Barack Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 for

"extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between people," I wrote an editorial expressing my opposition to his award. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Obama within the first year of his presidency, way too soon to judge his accomplishments. Trump had criticized Obama for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and some say that he wants the same award that Obama received out of jealousy. Trump was quoted saying: "They gave it to Obama. He didn't even know what he got it for. He was there for about 15 seconds, and he got the Nobel Prize." In addition to Obama, three other U.S. Presidents were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Jimmy Carter.

In Trump's case, he has already served over two years as President, and it is clear that he does not deserve any kind of an award, let alone the Nobel Peace Prize. In fact, he does not even deserve to be President of the United States. With each passing day, the actions and statements of the self-declared "extremely stable genius" further antagonize more people both in the United States and around the world. As Lord Acton had wisely written: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely!"

Not surprisingly, Trump continued his controversial behavior by sending a series of tweets during his first morning in Japan. In one of his tweets, Trump committed three errors or improprieties:

1. He agreed with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un that the leading Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden is "a low IQ individual," violating the long-held principle of not speaking about domestic divisions while overseas.
2. He misspelled Biden's name as "Bidan."
3. He contradicted the statements of his own National Security Adviser John Bolton and Japan's Prime Minister that North Korea's recent missile launches are a violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Finally, Trump admitted that he will probably never get the Nobel Peace Prize. For once, I agree with him!



## Azerbaijan supplying Georgian libraries with books containing hate speech against Armenians

Azerbaijan has been supplying Georgian libraries with books containing hate speech against Armenians, according to a report published by OC Media.

While the libraries see no problem here, some Azerbaijani Georgians fear they might help plant the seeds of ethnic tension.

When Imran Gafarov, an Azerbaijani Georgian, came across a book full of territorial claims and hate speech against Armenians at the public library in Marneuli, an Azerbaijani-majority city in southern Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region, he was in a state of disbelief, the article reads.

"When I visited the Marneuli library, I saw a book called Western Azerbaijan's



Monuments, written by Aziz Alakbarli. I thought the book was about the historical monuments located in the west of Azerbaijan. However, as I read the book, it became clear that the book was about monuments situated on the territory of Armenia. The book contained an element of hostility towards Armenians," Gafarov told OC Media.

There are two copies of the book in the library. On the 13th page of the 2006 edition, there are territorial claims made against Armenia. On the 21st page, the writer claims that Armenians committed genocide against Azerbaijanis on four occasions. The 2007 edition contains a map of 'Western Azerbaijan' in which locations in Armenia are written in their Azerbaijani versions.

According to the report, the library contains other propagandistic materials, which can be divided into three types: hate speech against Armenia and Armenians, support for separatist and territorial claims against Iran, and propaganda on behalf of the ruling Aliyev family.

## Photo-exhibition on Armenia's velvet revolution opened at UN

The Permanent Mission of Armenia to the United Nations hosted a reception and a photo exhibition on May 28 entitled "Armenia's Velvet revolution" at the UN headquarters. The event displayed photographs showcasing the progress of the peaceful civic movement, marches and demonstrations that took place in Armenia in spring 2018, Noyan Tapan was informed from the press service of the MFA Armenia.

Attended by a large number of ambassadors and delegates of the UN member states, representatives of the UN Secretariat, as well as members of the Armenian community, the event featured remarks by the Permanent Representative of Armenia



to the UN Mher Margaryan.

In his welcoming remarks, the Permanent Representative of Armenia pointed out that the events which took place last year marked a new chapter in the history of Armenia, highlighting the important symbolism of holding an exhibition dedicated to

the Velvet Revolution and celebrating the First Republic of Armenia at the United Nations on 28 May. Noting that democracy, promotion of human rights, empowerment of women and youth in the political and social life are important priorities for the Government of Armenia, Mher Margaryan recalled Armenia's candidacy for the membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2020-2022.

Ruben Rubinyan, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations of the National Assembly of Armenia, briefed the guests on the evolution of the events depicted in the exhibit as well as on the parliamentary activities in the field of foreign relations.

## Tufenkian Foundation Celebrates its 20th Anniversary



NEW YORK—It was a festive occasion as friends, colleagues and supporters gathered to celebrate the Tufenkian Foundation's 20th Anniversary. Held at the Tufenkian Carpets showroom in Manhattan on Sunday, May 19, the event featured presentations by James Tufenkian, Varant Meguerditchian, and special guest Serj Tankian, who addressed Armenia's numerous environmental concerns, focusing especially on mining.

The program opened with welcoming remarks by MC Marisa Mesropian-Fisher, who recounted the Foundation's accomplishments in promoting social protection, civic activism, and cultural enrichment



in Armenia, as well as borderland resettlement and economic development in Nagorno-Karabagh. She then introduced Foundation trustee Antranig Kasbarian,

who gave an overview of the afternoon program, as well as the Foundation's larger, overarching mission.

"From the outset, our goal has been not simply to provide assistance, but to help people help themselves," he noted. "We have also sought to pursue a venture role in our philanthropy. We often take on projects that others can't or won't—filling vacuums and planting seeds, helping various effective actors to grow, realize their potential, and hopefully take off for the benefit of the country," said Kasbarian.

Kasbarian then invited special guest Serj Tankian to the podium. Best known as front-man of the musical group "System

of a Down," Tankian has gained additional notoriety for his outspoken activism and social criticism on a range of Armenian issues. In a heartfelt presentation, Tankian pointed out that mining, when practiced irresponsibly, has brought severe environmental and public health consequences, often disrupting life in local communities throughout Armenia. He commended these communities for their growing activism in defending their environment and holding mining interests accountable.

Tankian was followed by Varant Meguerditchian, Executive Director of the Mining Legislation Reform Institute, based in Yerevan. In a detailed slide show, Meguerditchian explained the need to reform Armenia's mining laws, which are often weak or fail to conform to international best practices. As a result, mining companies have been encouraged to act irre-



sponsibly, whether in terms of abusing the natural environment, creating unsafe public health conditions, or failing to contribute sufficiently to state revenue.

The final speaker was Foundation President and Founder James Tufenkian. In a direct and personal appeal, Tufenkian argued that Armenia must value its mineral assets in a way that will truly benefit the country. To date, the state coffers have been enriched very little by mining activity, which creates an imbalance between the public costs borne by the country versus the material benefits the country can receive. He concluded by exhorting the crowd to join MLRI's upcoming lobbying efforts, which will require nearly \$400,000 during the next two years, "I can't imagine a better return on investment than spending a few hundred thousand dollars, and succeeding in developing a revenue stream that will bring tens of millions, perhaps hundreds of millions to the state budget," he argued. "If we accomplish this, we will immeasurably help Armenia to address the numerous social, defense, public health, and other challenges it urgently faces."

The program concluded with a lively and challenging question-and-answer period.



## Aznavour Foundation, Bouches-du-Rhône department and Buzine Castle sign Memorandum of Cooperation

The delegation of Bouches-du-Rhône Department of France, headed by Department Council President Mrs. Martine Vassal was hosted by Nicolas Aznavour, co-founder of the Aznavour Foundation and Kristina Sarkisyan, CEO of the Foundation on May 30, the Aznavour Foundation told ARMENPRESS.

The meeting took place in Yerevan, in the future Aznavour Centre, where this unique project was presented to the guests. The Aznavour Centre will open its doors in 2021, following a complete renovation of the building.

The monument will house an interactive tech museum focused on the life and career of Charles Aznavour, as well as a cultural and educational centre for youth, where programs will be implemented in three areas: cinema, music, and French language. The Aznavour Center will also host a French Institute that will be a real cultural platform for French culture with a

large media library and certified language courses.

During the meeting, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between Aznavour Foundation, the Bouches-du-Rhône department and the Buzine Castle (Château de la Buzine) located in Marseille. The sides expressed readiness to contribute to the further development of French-Armenian cultural ties through the implementation of joint projects.

The first project being implemented in the framework of cooperation is the Aznavour exhibition opened at Buzine Castle.

The unique collection presented at the castle includes precious materials - memorabilia, documents, manuscripts, correspondence, objects, photographs, videos, records, posters, outfits and various accessories that the legendary artist kept in his Mouriès house.

The Aznavour family wished that the roy-

alty fee is directed to the Aznavour Foundation, so a donation was made by the Castle to the Foundation. The Castle is also committed to use its experience and knowledge to develop cultural programs for the future Aznavour Center.

Thanks to the efforts of the Departmental Council of Bouches-du-Rhône, notably with the support of Didier Parakian, Deputy Mayor of Marseille, a tribute concert to Charles Aznavour was also organized in Marseille on April 30, 2019. Other local partners also contributed to the organization of this concert, the proceeds of which will be directed to the Aznavour Foundation for the implementation of cultural projects.

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The Aznavour Foundation thanks its partners and all dedicated persons around the world who share the values of Charles Aznavour and contribute to the mission of the Foundation.

## Number of Chinese tourists visiting Armenia significantly grows

Number of Chinese tourists visiting Armenia is significantly growing: in 2018 the number of Chinese tourists visiting Armenia increased 59.9% compared to 2017. The growth dynamics also exists in the first quarter of 2019. In January-March 2019, compared to the same period of 2018, the number of Chinese tourists increased 40%.

Spokesperson of the Armenian ministry of economic development and investments Anna Ohanyan told ARMENPRESS that China is a targeted market for Armenia.

"In this regard the elimination of visa regime between the two countries can boost tourism and the cooperation between Armenia and China in this sector. We attach great attention to China in digital marketing planning works aimed at forming special digital campaigns in this direction. We use all opportunities, both the digital platform, the screening of movies about Armenia and exhibitions. These days Armenia is taking part in an exhibition organized by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which is dedicated to wine tourism. The Armenian production and tourism opportunities created great interest among the Chinese visitors", she said.

According to Chairman of the Armenian Tourism Federation Mekhak Apresyan, considering China as a targeted market is not a coincidence. He says China is the first country in the world in terms of number of tourists in the field of outgoing tourism. Apresyan states that Armenia already has



a simple visa regime with China. Citizens can obtain visa on the border or online. Currently the elimination of visa requirements between the two countries, according to Apresyan, is a new level.

"The important is that it is mutual. In other words, the citizens of Armenia can visit China with the same conditions. In recent years Armenia's interest towards China is increasing: the visits from China to Armenia have increased by nearly 40% in the first quarter of this year. Although the figure is not so big, the growth rates are more promising. Only direct flights are lacking", Apresyan added.

As for the actions to be taken by the state structures and the private sector, Mekhak Apresyan said consistent works have been carried out in the direction of China for several years and currently they are also at an active stage. According to him, more targeted and effective marketing policy is needed, and also actions must be taken to launch direct flights.

"The private sector also should take actions, by presenting tour packages not only related to Armenia, but also the region, covering both Armenia, Georgia and Iran", he added.

The Chinese tourists are interested in regional tour packages, deputy director of TATEV-T.T.T. tour agency Sevak Davudyan told ARMENPRESS, adding that the agency has started actively working with the Chinese tourists since 2018.

"The visits from China are mainly in groups, choosing regional packages which also include Armenia. They usually stay in Armenia for two or three days. The tourists mainly prefer visiting historical-cultural sites, such as Garni, Geghard, Sevan, Etchmiadzin, Khor Virap, Dilijan, Haghpat and etc. The program depends on the number of days staying in Armenia", Sevak Davudyan said, adding that currently there is concrete activeness in the visits from China to Armenia.

"The two countries are going to eliminate the visa regime which is very important. It will contribute to boosting tourist visits not only with groups, but individuals as well will visit. And this process can be organized without online registrations or filling in other forms", he said.

*Armenia and China on May 26 signed an agreement on mutual visa exemption for ordinary passport holders. The agreement will enter into force after completion of its ratification procedures by the two states.*

## Zodiac Weekly Forecast



Aries (March 20–April 19)

This is a fine week to organize clutter as well as keepsakes in your home. You have a desire to prune away that which is not needed to create more order and symmetry. It will be a relief to your eyes and make it easier to find everything. Consider adding storage containers and other helpful items that can create more visual space.



Leo (July 22–August 21)

This is a time in which you and your efforts are on display. There is a sense of judgment about this. If you have been diligent and performed your required tasks well you will be rewarded. If you have been slack, that will be noted as well. This is Saturn, who gives us nothing for free, but rewards effort.



Sagittarius (November 22–December 20)

Sagittarius (November 22–December 20) You and your partner may be restless and want to do something different. This is a good weekend to take a day trip to somewhere you haven't been for a while. Go to a concert or a movie with an uplifting message.



Taurus (April 20 -- May 20)

Aspects of this week bring you good news from afar. Activities related to the law, education, publishing, the internet and travel are favored. Business in general will flow well and you will accomplish such things with ease.



Virgo (August 22–September 22)

Communications with significant others may be misunderstood, snarled, or lost altogether. Do not make assumptions about what others mean. Ask questions and clarify for best results. Don't leap to conclusions on any matter, particularly that which has to do with soul and heart.



Capricorn (December 21–January 19)

Work is a nuisance this week. It is as though you are being nibbled to death by ducks. You would far rather spend your time in the areas of romantic love, play, and creative pursuits. Time spent with children may be rewarding.



Gemini (May 20–June 20)

You may need to think out loud about whatever you are pondering. If there is no one to listen, satisfy that need by making outlines or lists. Your mind is flowing with good ideas. Perhaps you need to diagram how all these things fit together. Your mind is working fast. You will need to find a way to bring order out of apparent chaos.



Libra (Sep. 23–Oct. 22)

You have several aspects that favor romance, the arts, and things of beauty. You may be the happy recipient of small gifts, compliments or favors from others. Your mind wants to wander in the world of fantasy, daydreams, good books, and music. It is not a great week for getting things done, but you will enjoy the journey.



Aquarius (January 20–February 17)

Circumstances will work in your favor as you deal with home, hearth, family and property matters. In some situations it is a matter of good will from others, and in other situations, it may just be happenstance that the rule of the "Powers that Be" helps things flow in your direction.



Cancer (June 21–July 21)

Your romantic side is cooperating well with your nurturing side at this time. This is especially good for female friendships. Make a date for lunch and reconnect with people you like. Friendships of all kinds are available if you can overcome your innate shyness and respond.



Scorpio (October 23–November 21)

This week your willingness to serve and take care of others will be rewarding. Your relationship to partners and friends will be positive and supportive to your sense of well-being. Sunshine smiles upon you. It is a good time to let go of nagging resentments.



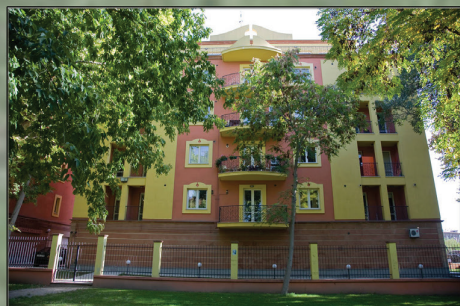
Pisces (February 18–March 19)

Early in the week your sense of balance may be tilted by something that occurs with your family or your partner. Discuss it with the person in question. It is likely you have misunderstood the intention of that action. Rebalance by reading a good book, listening to soothing music, or pursuing your art.



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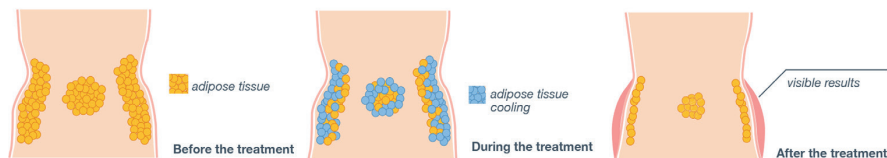
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